

Middle Path

Exploring Methodology and Examples



Presenters

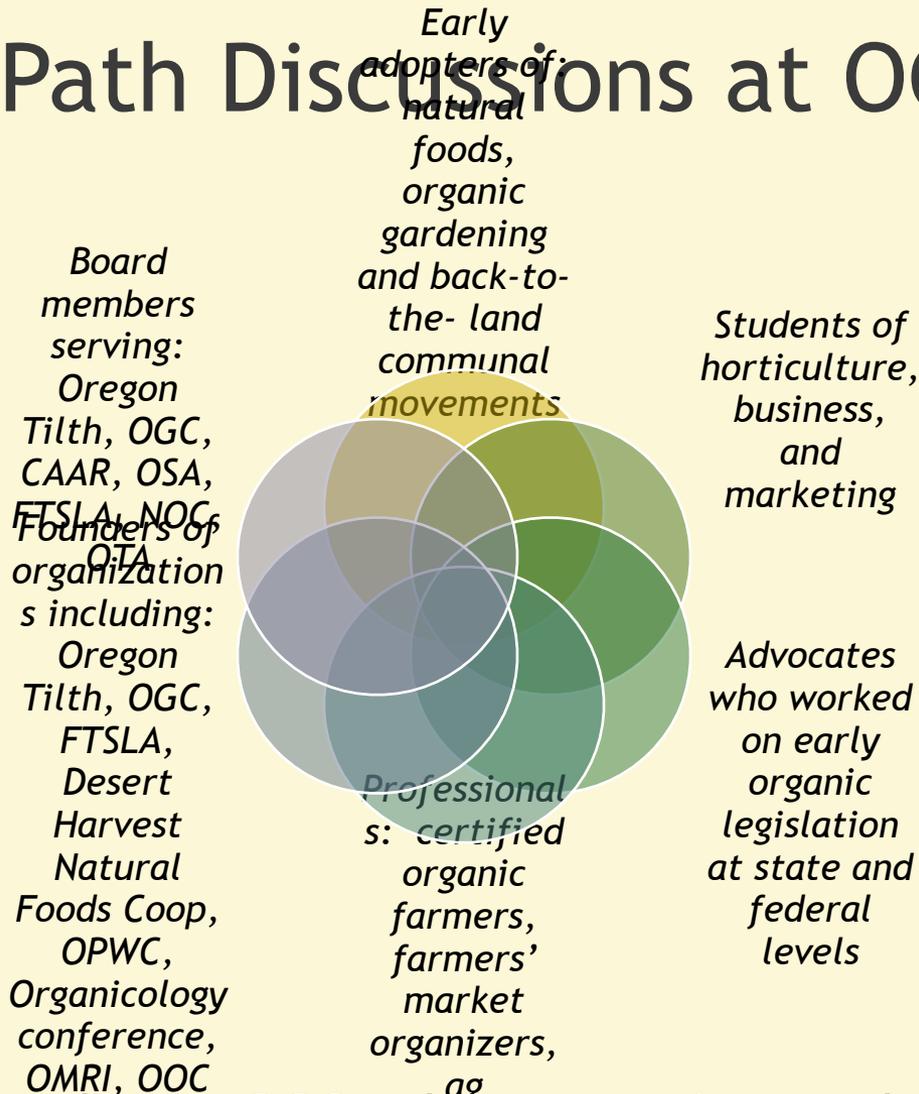
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Middle Path Discussions at OGC



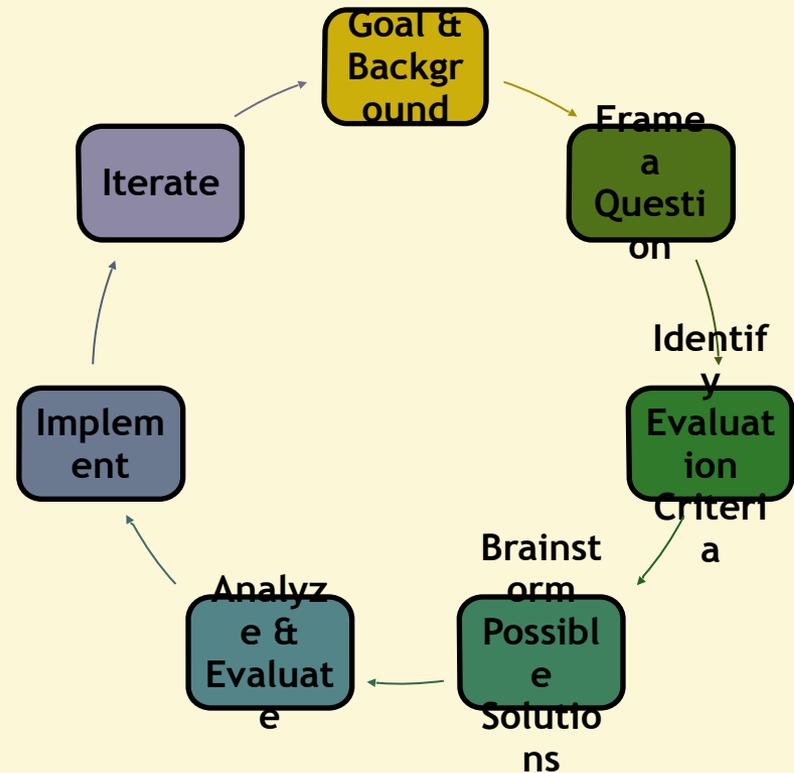
We came together at OGC, where at various and overlapping times, we have been responsible for work in operations, grower consulting, sales, marketing, sustainability, human relations, compliance and food safety

A Familiar Approach to Finding a Way Forward

Scientific Method



Middle Path

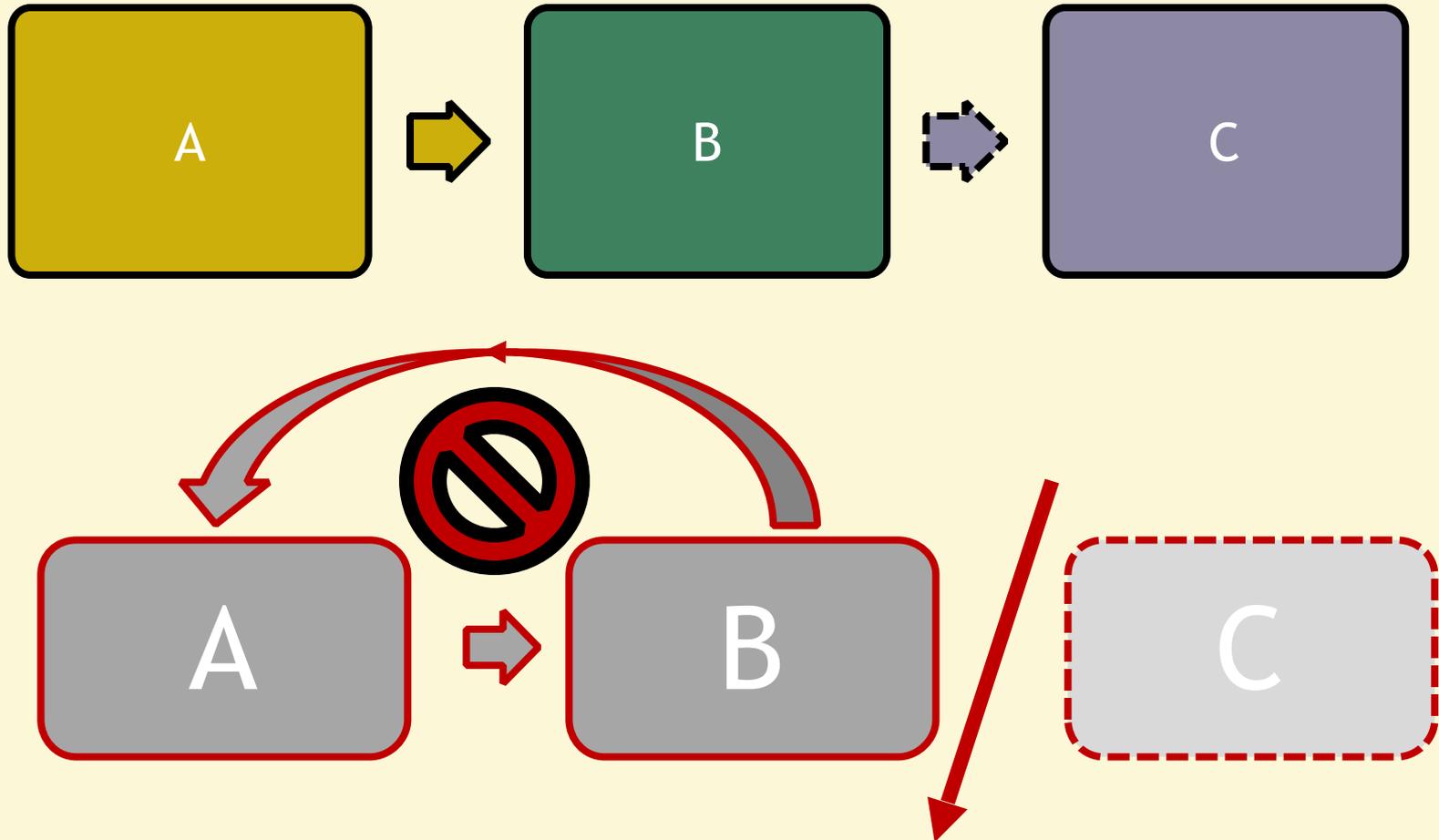


Current *and* Future Improvements

- The evolution of Organic Agriculture requires:
 - Relentless yet patient efforts at improvement of practices and standards
 - Accomplished with a view not only of the problem at hand...
 - But also to the requirement that current solutions must *also* provide a pathway to further improvement in the future



Current *and* Future Improvements



Promoting Middle Path

- Create a community of organizations and individuals that accept the Middle Path as best practice and who sign on to support this approach to deliberation.
- During deliberations on trade issues, members of the Middle Path Community inform their fellow participants that they will use Middle Path methodology in developing their own positions
- When deliberations include participants who are not part of the Community, question options that take us backward or forestall further progress and inquire about the assumptions and motivations behind these options.



Current Status

Process

- Introduced at Organicology in Jan 2016
- Refined model through discussions at OGC
- Wrote methodology
- Presented Methodology to trusted colleagues for review
- Open for suggestions, revisions and ideas!

Participants

- OGC: Board of Directors has passed a motion to use Middle Path as the primary tool in our advocacy and policy work
- Supporters
 - Oregon Tilth
 - Clif
 - Doug Crabtree of Vilicus Farm
- Interested
 - Organic Seed Alliance
 - Nature's Path

Introduction to Middle Path Methodology



Why do we need the Middle Path?

- **Complexity**: A central tenet of both organic production and organic policy is “embracing complexity”.
- **Integration**: The organic community is experiencing internal strife because stakeholders are advocating solutions that address only some of the elements of the complexity related to a particular issue.
- **Balance**: We have been developing and testing a process for moving past dissent through identification and evaluation of solutions that balance the multiple complexities inherent to organic systems.

When would Middle Path be used?

- **To address situations that have:**

- Multiple facets
- Stakeholders advocating for conflicting positions
- No immediately apparent solution

- **Middle Path looks at:**

- An immediate solution
- Future implications of choosing a particular solution,
- Continued forward motion toward the participants' goal

Middle Path: Step-by-Step



The Steps of the Middle Path Process

1. **Goal**: Determine whether participants support the Middle Path Goal
2. **Background**: Describe the most important elements of the situation
3. **Problem**: Frame the problem
4. **Criteria**: Agree on criteria for judging forward motion toward the Middle Path Goal
5. **Solutions**: Brainstorm as many solutions as possible
6. **Analyze and Evaluate**: Think things through together
7. **Implement**: Jump in and try out the solution
8. **Iterate**: Repeat in “patient but relentless” fashion

Step 1. Goal: Determine whether participants support the Middle Path Goal

The Middle Path Goal:

“Strengthen organic regulatory systems as much as possible while mitigating negative impacts on the trade”

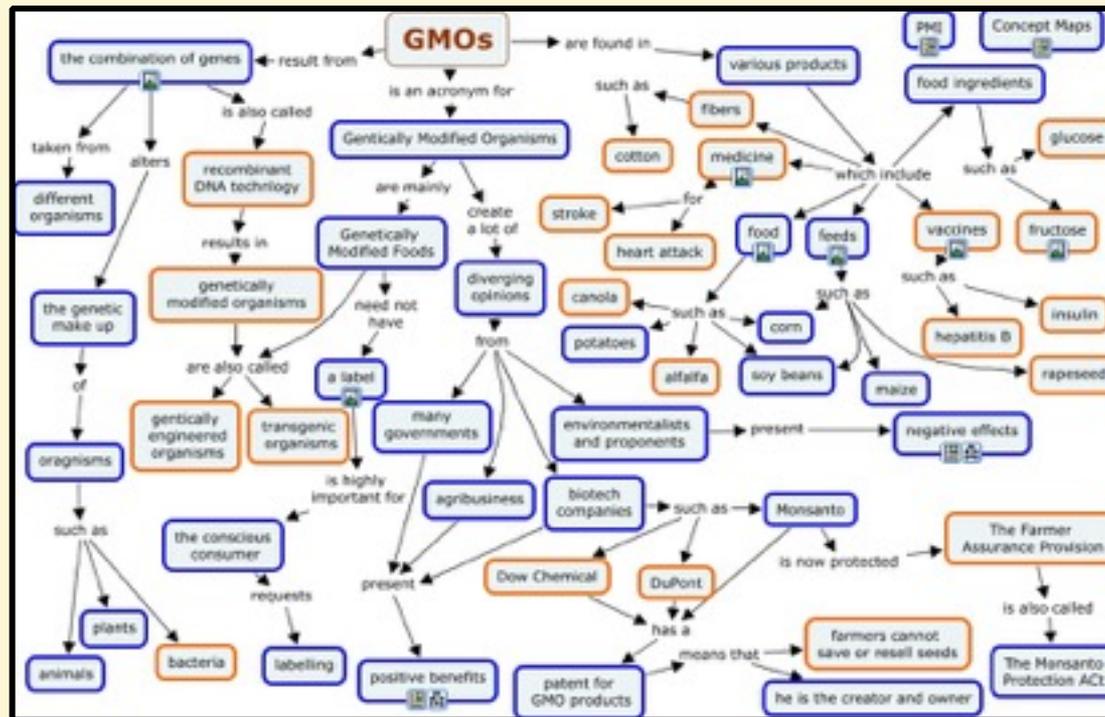


Uncover Hidden Agendas:

- Ask participants to articulate their assumptions and motivations related to the topic
- Assess the range of opinions to see whether the additional information about assumptions can bring participants to agree on implementing the Middle Path Goal
- Manage the process for a constructive and productive outcome

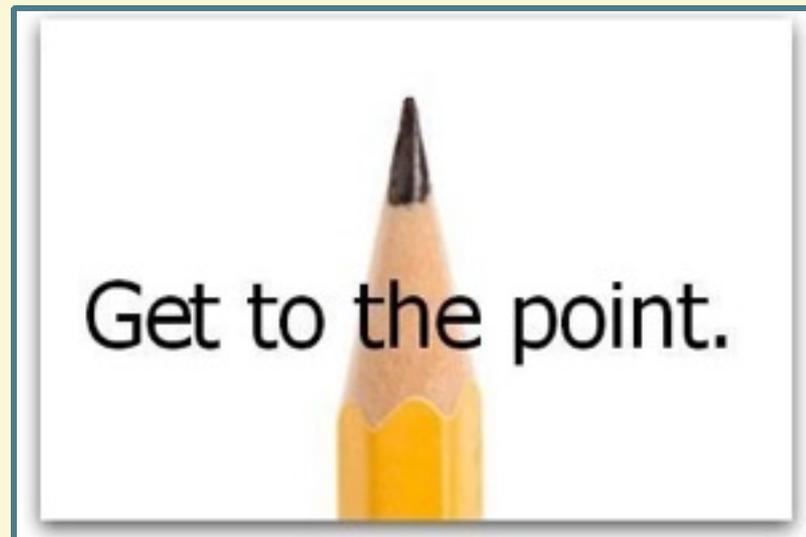
Step 2. Background: Describe the most important elements of the situation

- Develop bullet points to explain each element of the situation making sure to consider the situation from all stakeholder viewpoints.
- For complex situations, use a mind map to make a graphic summary of the problem.



Step 3. Problem: Frame the problem

- State the problem in the form of a question
- Do not bias the question toward a particular solution—leave room for multiple ideas and ways to answer the question
- Phrase the question as succinctly as possible



Step 4. Criteria: Agree on criteria for judging forward motion toward the Middle Path Goal

- Set criteria to use for evaluating proposed solutions to the problem
- Include mechanisms for deciding whether the solution provides forward motion toward meeting the Middle Path Goal
- Ensure that all participants agree on the decision-making criteria



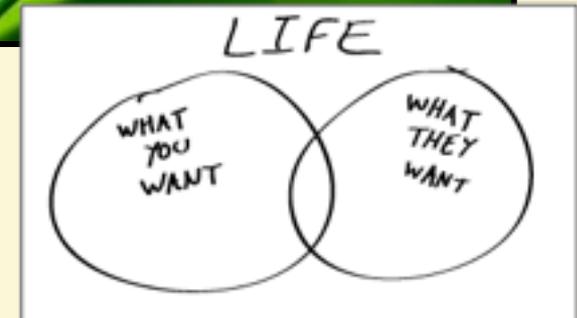
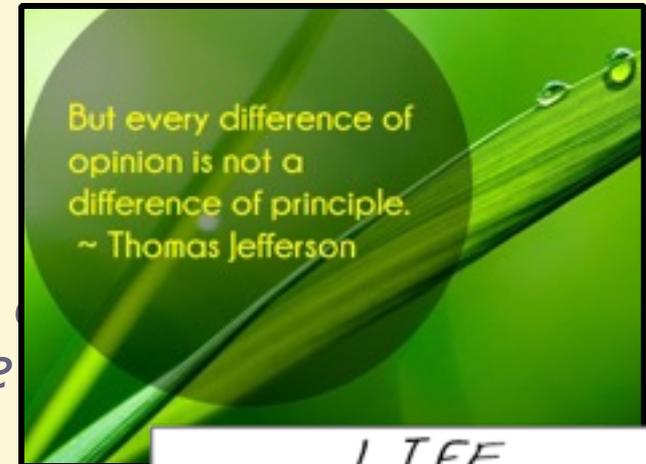
Step 5. Solutions: Brainstorm as many solutions as possible

- Look at the problem from different perspectives
 - Match the solution to the specific situation
 - For production problems be sure to consider both practices & materials
- Explore different methods for moving forward:
 - Research projects to test new ideas
 - Phase-ins and grandfather clauses to ease implementation
 - Subsidies to mitigate financial costs
 - Regulatory vs. trade-based initiatives to spread responsibility
- Look for possibilities for teamwork between stakeholders, to take advantage of different:
 - Skills
 - Contacts
 - Experience
 - Capacities



Step 6. Analyze and Evaluate: Think things through together

- Look at impacts from as many perspectives as possible using:
 - Environmental impacts
 - Consumer surveys
 - Trade impact analysis
- Keep an open mind: *“Every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle”*
- Evaluate the solutions to find the best possible option available under current circumstances by deciding whether the solution results in:
 - No change in meeting the Middle Path Goal
 - Moving away from meeting the Middle Path Goal
 - Moving toward meeting the Middle Path Goal

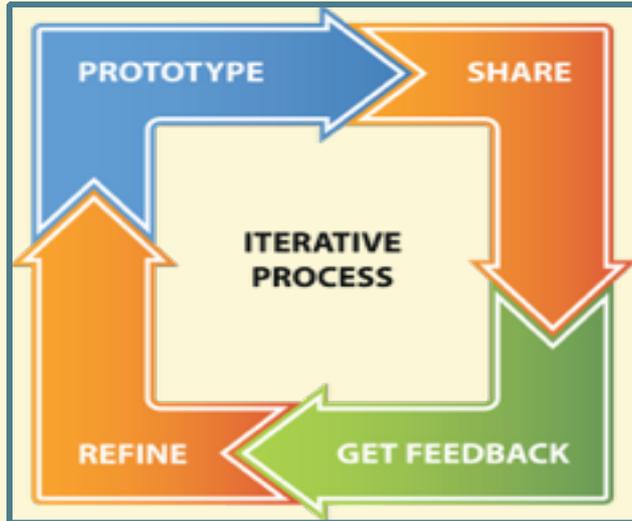


Step 7. Implement: Jump in and try out the solution

- Split big missions into projects with realistic scopes
- Develop work plans that include time benchmarks for each step
- Use the resources of multiple Middle Path Partners



Step 8. *Iterate*: Repeat the Middle Path process in a “**patient but relentless**” fashion



- Track progress on each element of the chosen solution
- Rethink the situation using information learned through trialing the initial solution
- Consider new information as it becomes available in the evolving working environment

Middle Path: Example

Using Copper to Control Crop Diseases

Fixed Copper Spray Apples & Pears for Fire Blight

- Combine in dormant oil spray up to $\frac{1}{4}$ " green stage
- Kills fire blight bacteria on surface of trees

Fixed Copper Spray for Apple, Pear and Other Tree Species for Fire Blight

	Apple	Pear	Peach	Tart Cherry	Plum and Prune
1					
2					
3					
4					

Step 1: Goal

Determine whether participants support the Middle Path Goal

“Strengthen organic regulatory systems as much as possible while mitigating negative impacts on the trade”

“We think organic farmers should not use any synthetic materials—our goal is to eliminate the entire National List over time”

We really need copper in order to produce potatoes and tomatoes! These are important crops and they are very susceptible to blight—especially now that summers are warmer and more humid. Let’s consider fewer restrictions on copper!”



Step 2: Background

Describe the most important elements of the situation

HINTS:

- Use bullet points or mind map*
- Cover all stakeholder viewpoints*

- Farmers have used copper for controlling a wide range of plant diseases on a extensive list of fruit and vegetable crops for centuries
- Copper materials were widely accepted for use in organic systems prior to the NOP regulations
- Copper materials are currently listed for disease control on the National List, with restrictions
- Stakeholders have become increasingly concerned about the use of copper: accumulation in the soil, non-target effects, residues on food
- Some stakeholders stated that they would advocate for delisting copper
- Farmers objected to delisting, saying that there is a continued need to use copper to control many plant diseases that can destroy crops, as there is no alternative once plants are affected

Step 3: Problem

**State the problem
as a question,
phrasing it as
succinctly as
possible**

How can we control the many fungal and bacterial diseases that affect crops when there are concerns about farmers' current use of copper?



Step 4: Criteria

**Agree on
criteria for
judging
forward motion
toward the
Middle Path
Goal**

HINT:

•Think about practical

- Organic practices can prevent crop diseases but once established, farmers need practical, effective ways to control fungal and bacterial phytopathogens
- Consumers want to reduce use of synthetic materials by organic producers
- Reduce accumulation of copper in soils
- Reduce effects of copper on non-target species
- Reduce residues of copper on foods



Step 5: Solutions

Brainstorm as many solutions as possible

HINTS:

- *Look at problem from all vantage points*
- *Explore different methods for moving forward*

- Allow increased use of more types of copper products to make disease control more effective
- Allow continued use of copper products with current restrictions
- Restrict types of copper products allowed
- Restrict uses of allowed copper products to specific diseases or crops
- Restrict amount of copper allowed
- Restrict visible residues on harvested crops
- Delist all copper products



Step 6: Analyze and Evaluate

Think things through together

Solution	Possibility for Implementation	Potential as Middle Path Idea
<i>Allow increased use of more types of copper products to make disease control more efficient</i>	<i>Petition more types of copper for inclusion on the National List</i>	Does not meet criteria related to decreasing negative effects of copper
<i>Allow continued use of copper products with current restrictions</i>	<i>Status Quo—No change</i>	Not a Middle Path option because it does not move us forward.
<i>Restrict types of copper products allowed</i>	Require use of newly developed formulations that use smaller sized particles of copper, thus reducing the total amount of copper needed for effective control.	Has potential as a Middle Path—develop idea further
<i>Restrict types of inert ingredients allowed in copper products</i>	Require use of inert ingredients that support full coating and longer retention of copper, reducing the number of sprays needed.	Has potential as a Middle Path—develop idea further
<i>Restrict uses of allowed copper products to specific diseases or crops</i>	Identify the crop/disease combinations for which the need for copper is the greatest and prioritize these for researching other methods of control	Has potential as a Middle Path—develop idea further
<i>Restrict visible residues on harvested crops</i>	Require post harvest treatments that eliminate visible residues of copper products on harvested crops Restrict applications close to harvest	Has potential as a Middle Path—develop idea further
<i>Restrict amount of copper allowed</i>	<i>Regulate the pounds/acres allowed each year</i> <i>Regulate # sprays</i>	Does not meet criterion for providing practical, effective ways for controlling plant diseases--not specific to crop and growing conditions
<i>Delist all copper products</i>	<i>Petition for removal of all copper products from the National List or take action during Sunset Review</i>	Does not meet criterion for providing practical, effective ways for controlling plant diseases.

Step 7: Implement

Jump in and try out the solution

HINTS:

- *Split big missions*
- *Share the load through partnerships*

- **Regulatory/Policy**: Are there brand name materials approved yet that use smaller sized particles. If not, what are the barriers?
- **Research**: What types of inerts can improve the coating and longer retention of copper on plants? Are these inerts suitable for use in organic systems?
- **Trade Impact Analysis**: What organic crops commonly require use of copper for disease control? What diseases require the most use? Is copper a keystone material for any of these crops? Can we estimate the market share differential between current regulations on copper and prohibition of copper?
- **Poll Farmers**: What post harvest treatments might be effective in reducing visible residues of copper products on various crops?

Step 8: Iterate

**Repeat in
“patient but
relentless”
fashion**

HINTS:

- *Track progress*
- *Rethink the situation*
- *Consider new information*

- Implement new concept(s) first through research in order to minimize impacts on farmers.
- Move to field trials and then to extension and education
- Once the costs and benefits to all stakeholders are better understood, craft proposed changes to the listings for copper products on the National List.
- Petition the NOSB to revise the National List.
- Advocate for support of the change to all organic stakeholders.
- Present written and oral public comments to NOSB .
- Support implementation of the change during

Middle Path: Practicum

Hydroponics and Container Production

What's in a name?

TL;DR The USDA recently ruled that certain soil-less farming methods can continue to be certified organic.

<p>SOIL FARMING</p> <p>When the federal government first began to codify organic standards into law, soil was an important focus of their efforts. Some—who feel it was <i>the</i> focus—had petitioned the government to limit organic certification to traditional, soil-based agriculture.</p> <p>✓ CAN BE CERTIFIED</p> 	<p>AEROPONICS Crops grown from a nutrient-rich mist.</p> <p>X CAN'T BE CERTIFIED</p> <p>HYDROPONICS Crops inside soilless greenhouses in trays of nutrient solution.</p> <p>✓ CAN BE CERTIFIED</p> <p>AQUAPONICS Crops grown from nutrient-rich water that serves as a fish farm.</p> <p>✓ CAN BE CERTIFIED</p> 
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Step 1: Goal

Determine whether participants support the Middle Path

“Strengthen organic regulatory systems as much as possible while mitigating negative impacts on the trade”



Step 2: Background

Describe the most important elements of the situation

HINTS:

- *Use bullet points or mind map*
- *Cover all stakeholder viewpoints*

- NOSB has made multiple recommendations without coming to a conclusion
- Certifiers interpreted NOP Guidance as allowing certification of fruits and veggies grown in systems that are not based in soil
- NOP asked NOSB for guidance on specific issues prior to setting a regulation
- Scores of operations already certified
- Product fills an important niche in the marketplace but competes with soil-grown products
- NOP asked NOSB for guidance on specific issues prior to setting a regulation
- Stakeholders have different opinions about whether hydroponic and container production should be eligible for certification
- ?

Step 3: Problem

State the problem as a question, phrasing it as succinctly as possible

Should aeroponic, hydroponic, aquaponic and/or container production be included within the NOP's scope of organic certification?



Step 4: Criteria

**Agree on
criteria for
judging
forward motion
toward the
Middle Path
Goal**

HINT:

*•Think about practical
verification methods*

- Organic principles
- Prior regulatory positions by NOSB and NOP
- Impact on equivalency agreements for import/export
- Fair treatment of operations already certified
- Acceptability to consumers
- ?
- ?
- ?



Step 6: Analyze and Evaluate

Think things through together

<i>Solution</i>	<i>Possibility for Implementation</i>	<i>Potential as Middle Path Idea</i>
Only soil-based operations may be certified		
?		
?		
?		
?		
?		
?		
?		
Aeroponic, aquaponic, hydroponic and container operations may all be		

Step 7: Implement

Jump in and try out the solution

HINTS:

- Split big missions
- Share the load through partnerships

- Research: What attitudes do organic consumers have toward ponics and container products? Appreciate availability in the off-season? Would avoid them if they could? Not important?
- Trade Impact Analysis: Impacts to operations losing organic certification? Downstream impacts to distributors and retailers?
- Research—Elements of Compromise : Labeling? Definition of terms? Grandfathering existing certifications?
- Research—Other Impacts: Changes to OFPA? Will certifiers take action?
- ?
- ?



Step 8: Iterate

**Repeat in
“patient but
relentless”
fashion**

HINTS:

- *Track progress*
- *Rethink the situation*
- *Consider new information*

- Keep abreast of NOSB positions and submit comments for every meeting
- Discuss with peers
- Engage in discussion with other stakeholders
- Develop and propose new concepts
- ?
- ?
- ?
- ?



Thank you for your interest in the
Middle Path!

