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EcoFARM NEWSLETTER

an annual publication from the Ecological Farming Association — 2015
www.eco-farm.org



ECO FARM - CULTIVATING SUSTAINABLE FARMING FOR 36 YEARS!
Check inside for program updates and upcoming events!

FROM OUR FELLOW FARMER

Kelly Bradford of Old House Farm introduces the Ecological Farmers and Ranchers Alliance

In February 2014, the Ecological Farming Association working with the EcoFarm Farmer Fellows initiated a new farmers' association, now formally known as the Ecological Farmers and Ranchers Alliance (EFRA), as renamed by the farmers. We are an alliance of diverse operations from the broader ecological agriculture community with the mission to further the success of Triple Bottom Line ecological farmers and ranchers through member-led collaborative programs.

As a new organic farmer approaching my fifth season, I immediately saw the benefit and embraced the potential of a true farmer-led association. I joined the steering and organizational committees to work with fellow farmers—with the support of the Ecological Farming Association—to shape a scope and direction that best serves the practical needs of beginners and the more experienced alike. During this past year we have continued to work on our high priority projects, define our membership, set tangible goals for the near and long term, and foster sensible and fruitful collaborations with organizations that share common goals and vision with our Triple Bottom Line: people, planet and profit.

One of the first projects, the Central Coast Meat Producers Coop, continues laying the groundwork for a processing and cut-and-wrap facility for livestock producers in the region. After receiving

funding for an initial feasibility study, the Coop is working to further refine the findings to fully consider the nuances, challenges and benefits of a local facility for small producers.

The Central California Seed Growers Coop is another project with exciting developments like co-organizing the Cultivating Organic Seed Stewardship Pre-Conference at EcoFarm 2015 and launching the first round of on-farm trials for vegetables chosen by EFRA members, including beans and carrots. The Coop is working closely with the Organic Seed Alliance and Steve Peters' Seed Revolution Now! to create and protect a diverse and strong seed system, including local seed banks and an organized network of seed growers.

One of our close collaborations is with the Agricultural Justice Project, which meets the social justice aspect of EFRA. Together we are working to integrate the values and practices of AJP into guidelines for EFRA members that can be adopted by farmers and ranchers of any size, while supporting a transition into a fully AJP certified operation when possible. Fair treatment for workers and for farmers themselves is a fundamental principle.

The momentum EFRA is building is truly inspiring; farmers and ranchers are the best people to define and guide what we need to be successful because we share the common goal of producing food with ecological and social responsibility. To learn more and get involved, please email fellows@eco-farm.org.

REGENERATING OUR LANDS AND WATER

“Someday we shall look back on this dark era of agriculture and shake our heads. How could we have ever believed that it was a good idea to grow our food with poisons?”

-Jane Goodall, Harvest for Hope:
A Guide to Mindful Eating

Last year, my article in this annual newsletter was a call to action. “Farmers, Let’s Organize!”

And that they did!

The EcoFarm Fellows took the Farmers’ Association program and organized the Ecological Farmers and Ranchers Alliance (EFRA). This new and burgeoning farmer-led entity is laying the groundwork to address shared challenges among farmers and ranchers operating businesses seeking a Triple Bottom Line - people, planet, and profit. These farmers and ranchers are developing the infrastructure to support their mission-driven success by addressing bottlenecks and cooperatively crafting solutions. Several projects are in the works. You can read about them in the article by Kelly Bradford, farmer and EFRA founding member, on the back page of this publication.

The theme and beautiful artwork representing the 36th annual EcoFarm Conference, has been set. “Regenerating our Lands and Water”, is inspired by our recognition of the urgent need for a widespread, mainstream shift to holistic, ecological management of the land and water. Biologically active, living soils built through ecological farming can reverse climate change by sequestering carbon from the atmosphere back into the ground. Healthy, living soils can also mitigate the effects of drought. These needs can be addressed with the knowledge and experience of our EcoFarm community, equipped with many decades of practice. Our collective ecological literacy can guide us practically in the field. The question remains - how do we expand our regenerative work into the mainstream?

Working together and coordinating our efforts is how we will get there. EcoFarmers don’t let fear of competition keep them from teaching one another. Conference attendees are regularly amazed to hear successful farmers and businesses share their insights and inside information. It’s this dedication to the common goal of a safe, healthy, and just food and farming system that identifies us as a movement and not just another sector of the economy. As the saying goes, “A rising tide lifts all boats,” which is what it will take to overcome the incredible challenges and regenerate our lands, waters, farms, and communities.

We are at a tipping point for a whole systems shift, with organic farming holding a larger share of the food system than ever before. The moment is ripe for change. We do not have to rely on a system that is dependent on poisons, →



5 Questions for an International Organics Expert

IFOAM’s Andre Leu speaks with Anna Lappé for Civil Eats - November 2014

Andre Leu has been an organic farmer in Australia for 40 years. He is also the newly re-elected President of the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM). In addition to traveling the world advocating for organic farming, Leu has spent the last few years thinking and writing about pesticides for his new book, *The Myth of Safe Pesticides*.

We’ve come a long way since advertisements in the 1950s were telling us “DDT is good for me!” We banned DDT in the U.S. in 1972. Are there other toxic chemicals we should be worrying about?

Most people don’t realize that the number of pesticides and the total tons used in farming have actually increased exponentially since [1972]. At the same time there have been increases in huge impacts on pollinators and cancers, degenerative diseases, reproductive problems, behavioral disorders, and numerous other diseases in humans. Hundreds of scientific studies show that these are linked to pesticide and other chemical residues. Many of the new pesticides are just as pervasive as the few pesticides that have been banned; hundreds of chemical and pesticide residues can be found in the tissues of all living species, including humans. The Environmental Working Group has found as many as 232 chemicals, including pesticides, in the placental cord blood of newborn babies in the U.S.

In the U.S., many articles have come out recently reporting that studies show organic food isn’t any healthier than food →



Closing circle at the 35th EcoFarm Conference
- Trav Williams, Broken Banjo Photography

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grown using chemical pesticides. What's your response?

Consider the latest study by Newcastle University, based on a systemic review and analysis of 343 scientific papers, which found that organic foods do have significantly higher levels of beneficial antioxidants as well as lower levels of heavy metals—especially cadmium—and significantly lower residue levels of synthetic toxic pesticides.

The problem is the mainstream media doesn't question the mantra that the current residue levels of the cocktails of chemicals and pesticides in our food are safe. They're ignoring hundreds of published scientific studies that show that they are linked to many of the diseases and behavioral problems that are increasing today.

By 2050, we're told we will need to feed 9 billion people and some say we'll need high-yielding, industrial techniques to meet that global demand. [Does] organic agriculture have the potential to feed the world?

A critical area where research is showing higher yields for organic systems is in traditional smallholder farming systems. The majority of the world's undernourished people are farmers or landless laborers who do not produce enough food or income to feed their families. Given that, the only logical way to feed the world is by increasing the production of the smallholders who produce vast majority of the world's food. Significant yield increases can be achieved by teaching smallholder to do things like recycling organic matter, using water efficiently, and promoting biodiversity as a way to improve pest and disease control without chemicals.

All this works. In one study of 114 agricultural projects in 24 African countries covering 2 million hectares and 1.9 million farmers, organic practices increased yields from 54 to 176 percent. Meanwhile, despite the introduction of chemical agriculture in Africa, food production per person is 10 percent lower now than it was in the 1960s.

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exposing ourselves to endocrine disrupting and cancer-causing chemicals that accumulate in our bodies and in the environment. We have proven that we can have a productive biological and ecological food and farming system. We can feed the planet using these methods which also build soil, sequester carbon, protect the air and water, use resources efficiently, value workers, conserve native flora and fauna, and produce the most nourishing foods. By working together, we will reach that "someday" when we look back at growing our food using poisons as a thing of the past.

Please join us. Get involved! Check out our programs and events, such as the Hoes Down Harvest Festival and the Organic Stone Fruit Jubilee. Support our efforts by donating to the Ecological Farming Association. I hope to see you at EcoFarm 2016!

Ken Dickerson
Executive Director

This all sounds so exciting, so possible, and yet certified organic agriculture was only practiced on 0.87 percent of the world's farmland in 2012. Why don't we see organic practices embraced by more farmers?

Organic is the fastest growing agricultural production system in the world, despite the fact that most governments, research universities, and institutions ignore it. One of the main reasons for the slow uptake is that research in organic systems has been largely ignored. Fifty-two billion dollars is spent annually on agriculture research worldwide, but less than 0.4 percent is spent on organic farming systems.

Compare the small yield difference achieved with trillions of dollars and thousands of researchers to what organic farmers have achieved when left largely to their own devices and I'd argue that conventional agriculture has been a very poor use of valuable funds.

Is there one place in the world that you think they're getting organic farming right? What can the rest of us can learn from them?

In Tigray, Ethiopia, the Institute of Sustainable Development has been working with farmers to restore local ecology and learn practices like composting and using biogas digesters. Farmers in this network are re-vegetating marginal areas—like gullies, slopes, and field borders—and sustainably harvesting the biomass. This has provided a steady source of nutrients helping build soil fertility and replacing nutrients lost when crops are taken off the farm. Farmers are also learning how to plant deep-rooted legumes for nitrogen production, taller species for windbreaks, and a variety of crops to attract beneficial pests.

The farmers have also been encouraged to use seeds of their own landraces, developed over millennia to be adapted to the local climate, soils, and pests. In just a few years, they've seen more than 100 percent increases in yields and higher income for farmers. #

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Art by Kim Hamblin

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Andre Leu will be a Plenary Speaker at the upcoming 2016 EcoFarm Conference. Visit www.eco-farm.org for details coming soon.