



*2017 ANNUAL REPORT*

## Organic research emerged as a bright note in 2017!

We were thrilled to gain strong bipartisan support for the Organic Agriculture Research Act (H.R. 2436). If passed in the upcoming Farm Bill, this important legislation will renew and provide \$50 million in funding for USDA's flagship research program, the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI).

OREI represents a long-term investment that needs to be sustained with increased funding in order to ensure the continued growth of the organic sector. OFRF has been working to educate members of congress on the importance of this program, bringing organic farmers, researchers, and other stakeholders to testify in Washington, DC and across the country. Hearing directly from their constituents helps elected officials better understand the positive impacts of organic farming and the importance of investing in organic agriculture.

The fact is, while sales of organic products continue to grow by double digits (up 23% in 2016 according to the USDA Organic Production Survey), U.S. organic production is growing at a relatively slower pace. We strongly believe increased investment in organic research will help organic and transitioning farmers meet the challenges inherent in organic systems by providing the tools, education and resources we need to take advantage of the environmental and economic opportunities of organic agriculture.

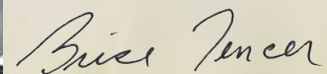
Please take a few minutes to read about OFRF's accomplishments in 2017. We continue to make all of our resources and all OFRF-funded research projects freely available on our web site, where they have been shared thousands of times over. There clearly is a need for credible, science-backed information that advances organic farming.

**We are deeply grateful for your support and look forward to continuing this vital work in 2018 and beyond.**

**Thank you.**



Mary Fund  
Board Chair, OFRF



Brise Tencer  
Executive Director, OFRF





## Kathleen Merrigan Delivers Keynote at OFRF Annual Luncheon

OFRF was thrilled to have Kathleen Merrigan, an early OFRF Board member currently serving on OFRF's Advisory Committee, as the keynote at our luncheon at Expo West. Kathleen is the Executive Director of Sustainability at George Washington University and was formerly the U.S. Deputy Secretary and Chief Operating Officer of the USDA. Kathleen began her talk by looking back on the history of organic advocacy, giving a nod to early leaders in the organic movement and rallying guests to work together to protect organic.

## OFRF 2017 RESEARCH PROGRAM

*\$100,000/5 grants*

## OFRF RESEARCH PROGRAM AWARDS TO DATE

*Over \$3M/337 grants*



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7,000+

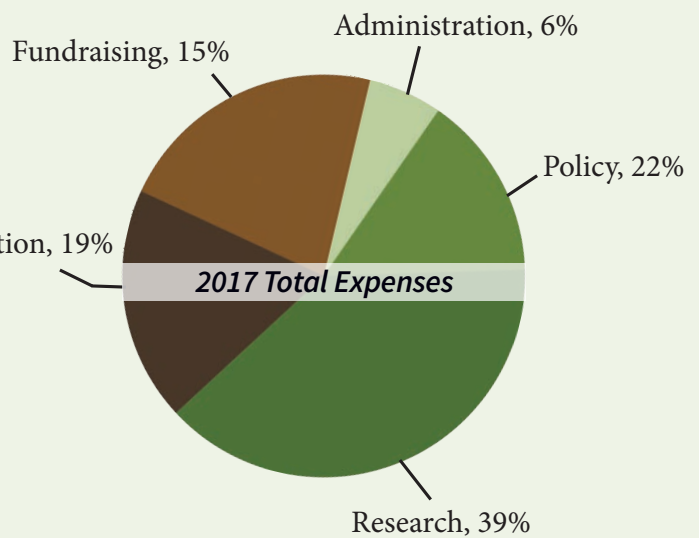
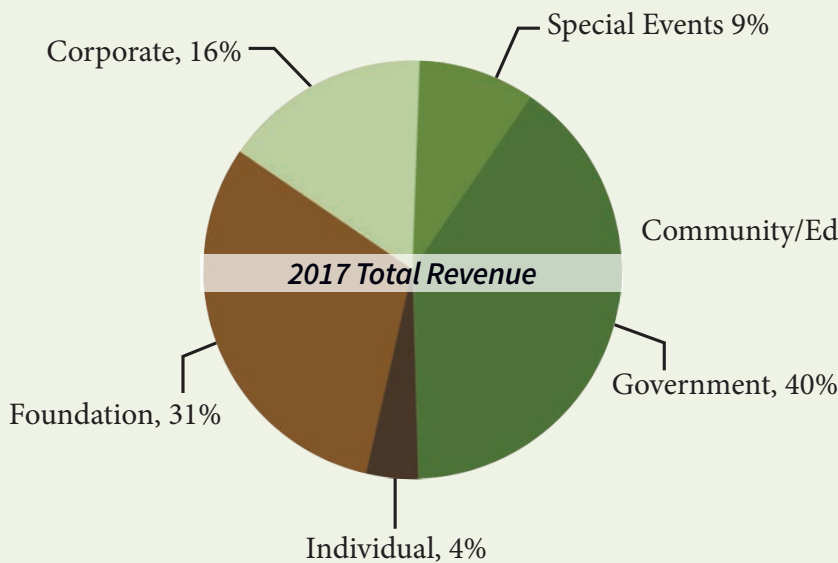


**MONTHLY NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTION**  
14,000+



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## FINANCIALS



OFRF's complete Financial Reports are available at [ofrf.org](http://ofrf.org)

# 2017 Grant Awards

## Evaluation of Organic Strawberry Transplants for Organic Strawberry Production

Stefanie Boucier, Farm Fuel Inc. and Lisa Bunin, Organic Advocacy, Watsonville, California

**Impact: Adoption of organically grown strawberry transplants and phasing out of conventional transplants.**

While many organic strawberry growers have expressed dissatisfaction with having to use conventional transplants, organic transplants are not commercially available. In part, commercial availability of organic transplants has been limited due to a lack of tested varieties as well as a lack of supply during the traditional planting season.



Steve Culman, Ohio State University

## Evaluating Soil Protein as a New Soil Health Indicator

Steve Culman, Tunsisa Harisso, Anthony Fulford, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

**Impact: Availability of soil testing tools to account for nutrient mineralization from organic amendments.**

Predicting the capacity of soil to supply nitrogen is an ongoing challenge in organic farming. Organic farmers rely on the breakdown of organic matter through a microbially-driven process for crop nutrition instead of the application of synthetic fertilizers. One of the most frequent requests of organic farmers is to have access to better information about what is happening in their soil.

## Developing a Cover Crop-Based, No-Till System for Small-Scale Vegetable Producers: Effects on Soil Health, Weeds, Anthropod Communities, and Yield

Justin Keay, Jaime Pinero, Lincoln University, Jefferson City, Missouri

**Impact: New knowledge on effective methods for cover crop termination that can be followed by small- and mid-scale producers.**

One limitation faced by small- and mid-scale organic producers is the expense of equipment such as roller crimpers to terminate cover crops for spring planting. This project is investigating an effective no-till system that doesn't require the use of expensive equipment.

## Corn Earworm Management: A Survey of Organic Sweet Corn Growers

William Tracy, University of Wisconsin, Madison Wisconsin

**Impact: Information and recommendations for managing corn earworm, and more specific research and breeding objectives for corn earworm resistance breeding.**

The objectives of this project are to attain and share information about the corn earworm management strategies of organic sweet corn growers.

## Examination of Organic Grain Productivity to Support the Upper Peninsula Organic Livestock Industry

Ashley McFarland, Colin Thompson, Monica Jean, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan

**Impact: Increased knowledge of grain performance in an organic system, leading to the expansion of certified organic grain production in the Upper Peninsula.**

As consumers continue to drive preferences within the marketplace, the demand for natural or organically produced meat has greatly increased, but no such grain market exists within the region to support this expanding industry. Organic grain production is virtually non-existent in the U.P., and sourcing outside of the region is quite costly and limits the growth potential for these operations – especially those wanting to market as certified organic.



Colin Thompson, Michigan State University



## OFRF 2016 Grantee Receives USDA Grants to Continue Work

OFRF funded a research team at Clemson University in South Carolina, led by Assistant Professor Juan Carlos Melgar, to test the use of paper bags to physically protect the fruit from pests and diseases and reduce reliance on spray applications. Fruits are individually bagged by hand at early stages of development, and paper bags protect the fruit during the rest of the season from diseases, insects, and sunburn. Results showed an increase in marketable yield in the bagged treatment. The team's preliminary data suggests the increase in yield due to disease suppression alone would cover the labor cost of bagging individual fruit. Nevertheless, one year of results was not enough to make solid conclusions and the investigators have secured a \$1M grant from USDA NIFA OREI grant to continue the study.



*“By funding graduate student projects, we hope to encourage and assist young scientists in engaging in organic research and continuing to work in the organic industry.”*

*Diana Jerkins, Research Program Director, OFRF*

## Conference Highlights

*“As a beginner farmer my desire is to gain skills, obtain information, meet other farmers, gain networking opportunities—all important elements for long term farm sustainability! Without the scholarship I would not have been able to attend. This day and a half symposium provided very practical information that can be applied immediately.”*

*Jim Embry, Farmer, Madison County, Kentucky*

### **Organic Agriculture Research Symposium**

OFRF welcomed 90 farmers, researchers, and students from around the world to the Organic Agriculture Research Symposium in Kentucky on January 25-26, for presentations and discussion on organic agriculture topics ranging from soil health and pest management to social science and organic transition. A poster session and discussion following the symposium provided time for participants to network and share ideas. OFRF provided twenty scholarships to help with travel costs.

### **Tri-Societies Annual Meeting**

The American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, Soil Science Society of America (Tri-Societies) held an International Annual Meeting in Tampa, Florida to discuss Managing Global Resources for a Secure Future. OFRF, along with many organic researchers from around the world, attended the meeting to showcase how organic agriculture can play a key role in managing global resources for a secure future.

Dr. Diana Jerkins, Research Director at OFRF led a special session on organic systems and soil health, which brought together scientists, extension agents, farmers, and other organic agriculture stakeholders to provide current information on research results applicable to organic and conventional production systems to improve sustainability and profit. The special session was broadcast live and is archived at eXtension.org and on the eOrganic YouTube channel. OFRF's Policy Associate, Michael Stein presented on organic research and the Farm Bill.







# New Farmer Resources

OFRF introduced a new series of educational guides to help organic farmers and ranchers enhance the soil health and overall resilience of their operations. Each guide begins with tools and practices set in the context of the challenges and opportunities identified by organic producers in OFRF’s 2016 National Organic Research Agenda. For those interested in taking a deeper dive, the guides also include reviews of USDA funded organic research, future research priorities, and scientific literature references. The guides, which are available free of charge at ofrf.org, have been downloaded over 7,000 times. A live webinar on the overview guide was attended by 192 people, mostly US based organic farmers. Webinars on the other guides will be offered throughout 2018.

## The complete series includes:



### **Building Organic Matter for Healthy Soils: An Overview**

A discussion of the attributes of healthy soil, the central role of organic matter, and how to monitor and enhance soil organic matter and soil health in organic production.



### **Practical Conservation Tillage**

The impacts of tillage on soil health, including practical, soil-friendly tillage practices for organic systems.



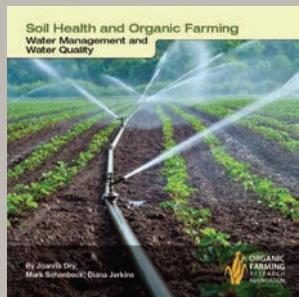
### **Cover Crops: Selection and Management**

Selecting the best cover crops, mixes, and management methods for soil health, including crop rotations and cropping system biodiversity.



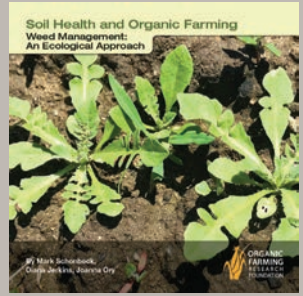
### **Plant Genetics: Plant Breeding and Variety Selection**

Plant breeding and variety selection for performance in sustainable organic systems, including potential benefits to soil biology and soil health.



### **Water Management and Water Quality**

The role of soil health and organic soil management in water conservation and water quality.



### **Weed Management: An Ecological Approach**

An ecological approach to integrated weed management tools that reduce the need for soil disturbance.



### **Nutrient Management for Crops, Soil, and the Environment**

The role of soil health and the soil food web, including practical guidelines for adapting soil test-based nutrient recommendations (especially N) for organic systems.





### **Impacts of Organic Berry Research**

As the demand for organic berries continues to grow, OFRF-funded research on the berry industry has had long lasting and widespread impacts—especially in California. This new report includes a review of OFRF-funded berry research, along with recommendations for future investment. It is available to download at [ofrf.org](http://ofrf.org).



### **Avoiding Pesticide Drift Impacts on Organic Farms**

This report is an introduction to the topic of spray drift and organic farming, with recommendations for how both organic and conventional growers can reduce pesticide drift impacts. It is available to download at [ofrf.org](http://ofrf.org).



Darryl Wong, Farm Site & Lands Manager, UCSC CASFS and Environmental Studies Department; Tom Broz, organic farmer, Live Earth Farm & Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau President; Congressman Jimmy Panetta, Mark Lipson, OFRF; Jeff Larkey, Route 1 Farms; Brise Tencer, OFRF

OFRF's policy program is focused on bringing the voices of organic farmers into the legislative process. We've had 20+ years of success making organic research and organic farmers matter in Congress. Many gains have been made with this farmer-forward approach, but much is at stake in the upcoming 2018 Farm Bill.

***The 2018 Farm Bill will be a do-or-die moment for several organic programs. It could be a retreat from the high-water point we are at now, or it could be a breakthrough to the strongest support yet.***

OFRF's top priority is renewed funding for organic research. USDA-funded organic research since 2008 has cumulatively passed the \$250M mark. OFRF led the way for this programming 20 years ago and it has been incredibly successful, enabling a national capacity for organic research at universities and on farms across the U.S. However, it will disappear after 2018 unless it is explicitly renewed. Our goal is to ensure this program continues and grows to meet farmers' needs.

Working with members of Congress, both Republican and Democrat, OFRF's staff and board are championing the Organic Agriculture Research Act (H.R. 2436), a bipartisan bill to ensure organic research and extension programs around the country have the funding necessary to support all farmers with sound science, outreach, and education programs. Specifically, this bill reauthorizes the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) and increases the annual funding from \$20M to \$50M. Given the dramatic growth of the organic industry, this overdue increase in research funding will be instrumental in providing the support organic farmers need.

Based on our analysis of USDA organic research grants as well as our 2015 nationwide survey of organic farmers, we are in a strong position to take the lead in ensuring continued support for organic research programs, as well as developing organic research priorities for the upcoming Farm Bill. We have shared our research findings with thousands of farmers, researchers, and educators, and throughout the USDA. These outreach efforts are informing the public and policymakers about the importance of organic farming research at both regional and national levels.

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*Organic Farming Research Foundation works to foster the improvement and widespread adoption of organic farming systems. OFRF cultivates organic research, education and federal policies that bring more farmers and acreage into organic production.*

All OFRF-funded research results are shared freely at [ofrf.org](http://ofrf.org).



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