



Hi folks,

This is the new issue of our Farmer Programs newsletter for the new year, published on January 8, 2021. Here we introduce a new section to our newsletter, what we're calling "The Farmer Programs Roundup" (yes, we're taking back *that* word!), highlighting the current work and efforts of MOFGA's Farmer Programs staff on behalf of our certified organic growers and processors – we hope you find this new section illuminating and informative. If you're looking for information that you may have seen in the past, check our back issues from 2020, which are archived on the MOFGA website [here](#). Please send inquiries, suggestions, corrections or advice regarding this newsletter to [nlindholm@mofga.org](mailto:nlindholm@mofga.org).

## The Farmer Programs Roundup

- Our Technical Assistance Grant awards have been announced with 10 farms receiving funds, while our Produce Safety Improvement Grant applications are currently being reviewed.
- We have seven farms participating in the current cohort of our Maine Farm Resilience Program workshops and are accepting applications for the next cohort.
- We have 19 farms enrolled in our Farm Beginnings Program this spring and are currently accepting applications for our Journeyperson Program.
- This January we began a new series of Producer Meetings built on peer-to-peer education and connection, which will be held virtually and will replace the Regional Grower Meetings of the past. We will also host our monthly Farmer to Farmer in the Field webinar as well as several other MOFGA webinars and presentations; contribute to articles in The MOF&G; help create the MOFGA "booth" for the Ag Trades Show; and showcase some of our organic growers at MOFGA's Annual Meeting!
- Collaborative work with other farm, food and environmental organizations continues, including planning a second season of our Maine Local Market Reports, a grant-funded assessment of Maine's local food markets, and a statewide employer-based wellness program to provide gift vouchers to local farmers' markets.
- As always, please feel free to reach out to any Farmer Programs staff with questions about our work or suggestions for future projects or workshops. Visit this informational [handout](#) for staff contacts and to see what is in store for 2021!

## Events

- [MOFGA's Annual Meeting](#) online this year! January 14, 2021. 7 p.m. Join us for our annual meeting to hear about MOFGA's impact in 2020 and ambitious goals for 2021. Several farmers will reflect on their past year's experience.

Everyone is welcome to attend, and MOFGA members are invited to vote on our slate of nominees for the board of directors as well as an amendment to our bylaws. Registration is required. Free of charge.

- [Maine Agricultural Trades Show](#) online event. January 19-23, 2021. Hosted by Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. There are online exhibits (virtual "booths") from farming associations, suppliers, producers, service providers, USDA, University of Maine Cooperative Extension and others (including MOFGA). There are five days of scheduled online events, including speakers, presentations, panels, videos and more. Check out the listings and attend!
- [Women in Livestock Business: Marketing for Profit](#) online conference. February 2-4, 2021. Hosted by University of New Hampshire. This three-day program will focus on fine-tuning marketing and financial management skills to build a more resilient livestock farm business. Learn, network and share ideas with regional specialists and fellow women livestock farmers. This conference is intended for New England women livestock producers of all experience levels. Breaks and opportunities to network will be provided throughout the day and sessions will be recorded and shared. Registration is required. Free of charge.
- [Livestock Producers: Profitable Meat Pricing Program](#) online workshops. January 19 & March 18, 2021. Hosted by Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA), this two-part workshop series is aimed to help farmers selling meat by-the-cut with marketing technique, pricing and increasing gross sales. Topics include a basic financial record - keeping class for livestock producers and one-on-one assistance from Matt LaRoux in gathering cost-of-production data and determining price adjustments. Registration is required. Free of charge.
- [Wild Blueberry Conference](#) online event. January 27 through March 17, 2021. Hosted by University of Maine Extension, this year's conference will be a series of workshops covering such topics as irrigation, insect pests, fresh-pack line improvements, climate change impacts, pollination, marketing, value-added production and lots more. Separate workshops are scheduled for separate Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the series. Registration is required. Free of charge.
- [Winter Greens Diseases & Variety Trials](#) online workshop. January 28, 2021. Hosted by University of Massachusetts Extension, this intensive workshop will focus on winter spinach production and cover pathogen biology, crop management and spinach growing tips. UMass Extension has been conducting winter spinach variety trials for several seasons and will present a summary of their findings on growth, productivity, and downy mildew resistance, as well as other diseases that are popping up more frequently in winter greens – including damping off, Cladosporium and lettuce downy mildew. Registration is required. Free of charge.
- [Maine Food Convergence](#) online conference. February 15 through March 11, 2021. Organized by Maine Farm to Institution, Maine Gleaning Network, Maine Food Strategy, Maine Climate Action Now and Maine Network of Community Food Councils, this new conference will be a series of virtual networking events, centering around interactive group work. Pulling from a wide variety of Maine food system sector organizations, individuals and colleagues, the event will focus on top priorities in the Maine food system, identify specific actions that are needed to work on collectively, and develop systems to support ongoing collaboration. The convergence will take place over three weeks in February and March and will be organized into three main topic tracks: food access, food production and food marketing in Maine.

Registration information yet to be announced.

- [Harvest New England Agricultural Marketing Conference & Trade Show](#) online event. February 24-25, 2021. Sponsored by six New England State Departments of Agriculture, this is New England's largest agricultural conference solely dedicated to agricultural marketing. Farmers of all types and sizes, new and established, from throughout New England should attend to enhance their marketing and business skills. This year, each of the two days of the conference feature presentations from farmers (including several MOFGA farmers) on timely topics including pivoting markets, diversifying products, and effective marketing solutions since the pandemic hit. Registration is required. Free of charge.
- [Real Organic Project Symposium](#) virtual conference. Sundays in January (January 10, 17, 21 & 28). The Real Organic Project is a farmer-led movement created to distinguish soil-grown and pasture-raised products under USDA organic. At the heart of the Real Organic Project's work is the organic tenet: "feed the soil, not the plant." This winter's symposium is a virtual series of interviews and live panels with more than 60 prominent organic farmers, scientists and climate activists, including MOFGA's organic crop specialist emeritus, Eric Sideman. Fee: \$50 for live events for students and farmers; free for some pre-recorded interviews.

## Educational Opportunities

- [MOFGA's Maine Farm Resilience Program](#) now accepting applications. This educational and skill-building program provides individualized support to advanced-beginning farmers (5-9 years experience) grappling with critical questions of scaling up, accessing and adapting to new markets, managing risk, innovation and diversification, and re-strategizing business plans to achieve long-term farm viability. Participation includes: matching with experienced mentors and service providers; six-part seminar series to support goals and delve into risk management strategies addressing financial risk, human risk, marketing risk and climate risk; business development, financial analysis and creation of a farm action plan; and stipends to access advanced educational opportunities, as well as technical, professional and pivot point services. Application deadline: January 30, 2021.
- [MOFGA's Journey person Program](#) now accepting applications. This is a two-year support program for farmers in their first few years of a farm business. The program provides mentorship, technical assistance, connections to a wider network of farmers in Maine, whole farm planning and business planning education, and educational stipends. MOFGA will be hosting an information session on January 20 from 4-5 p.m. Join us to learn more and see if now is the right time for you to apply! Application deadline: January 31, 2021.
- [Creating a Sales Forecast for Your Ag Business](#) online course. January 14 and 21, 2021. Hosted by UNH Extension, this two-day course is intended for farmers with at least 2-3 years of experience selling an agricultural product who want to explore a new idea for a product or market. Designed to be a small class with much farmer-to-farmer discussion, you will get help to gather information, make observations and analyze what you learned to create a sales forecast. Topics covered will include: how to define your product, market area, understand your target market and potential customers. Registration required. Free of charge.

## Marketing Opportunities

- [Become a vendor at the 2021 Common Ground Country Fair](#) Applications for different areas of the Fair are becoming available, with various deadlines for submission. Check the schedule and vendor resources, and plan for this year's event (which at this time is being planned for both in-person and online, with a final determination of possibly being online-only to be made in early May 2021). Note: Application deadlines are coming up for food, crafts and Maine Marketplace vendors.

## Resources

- [USDA Value-Added Producer Grant Program](#) now accepting applications. This national program helps agricultural producers enter into value-added activities related to the processing and marketing of new products. The goals of the program are to generate new products, create and expand marketing opportunities, and increase producer income. Grant (and required matching funds) can be used for planning activities or for working capital expenses related to producing and marketing a value-added agricultural product. Awards can be up to \$75,000 for Planning Grants and \$250,000 for Working Capital Grants. Use the link above to access information and application materials made available from USDA Rural Development. Here in Maine, address inquires to Ivana Hernandez Clukey, Loan Specialist, Rural Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 967 Illinois Ave., Suite 4, Bangor, ME 0440. Ivana Hernandez Clukey can be reached by phone at 207-990-9127, or via email at [ivana.hernandezclukey@usda.gov](mailto:ivana.hernandezclukey@usda.gov).
- [Young Farmer Grant Program](#) now open. Administered by the National Young Farmers Coalition, these grants are to help young and beginning farmers and ranchers start up and grow their businesses. There will be 50 awards of \$5,000 each: 45 awards will go to businesses already in operation, and five to projects starting in 2021. These grants are designed to provide a flexible financial boost to young farmers building long-term careers in agriculture, and funds can be used for anything that will further the goals of the farm, even if it's just getting started. Applicants must be young farmers and ranchers between 18 and 40 years of age. A minimum of 50% of grants are committed to Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, and 50% of grants to female-identifying, non-binary, and trans farmers, not mutually exclusively. Application deadline: January 15, 2021.
- [Emergency Drought Assistance from the USDA Farm Service Agency](#) now available for most farms in Maine. There are several emergency assistance programs and low-interest loans, including Emergency Livestock Assistance, Non-Insurable Crop Assistance, the Disaster Set-Aside program (for farms with current FSA outstanding loans) and the FSA [Emergency Loans](#) (available in some but not all Maine counties) which can be used to restore or replace essential property, pay all or part of production costs associated with the drought, pay essential family living expenses, reorganize the farming operation, and/or refinance certain debts. Contact your local FSA office for more information.
- [New Free Legal Resources for Farmers on FSMA and Food Safety](#). Created by Vermont Law School and UVM Extension, this new website features fact sheets that answer legal questions about FSMA and on-farm food safety compliance. It also includes an interactive map illustrating the specifics of

each U.S. state's produce safety program.

- [Small Bites](#) – Practical Tips for Farm Resiliency. Four new posts are available: "The Four G's: A Tool for Family Meetings, too" (authored by Polly Shyka); "Is 2021 Your Year for Farm Coaching? Clarity Shows Care" (authored by Polly Shyka); "Welcome the New Year and Learn Something for You" (authored by Polly Shyka); and "What's Important Now?" (authored by Abby Sadauckas). These are short, informational articles offering practical ideas about stress reduction, improved communication and family well-being written by coaches from UMaine Cooperative Extension's farm coaching team. Farm coaches are available at no cost to work remotely with farmers and farm families.
- [MOFGA's COVID-19 Resource Document for Farmers](#), compiled by MOFGA's Farmer Programs staff, is a clearinghouse of almost every topic and issue related to farming during the COVID-19 crisis, with links, information and resources about insurance, employees, farmers' markets, online marketing, loans and grants, etc. We update it regularly – the newest updates are highlighted in yellow. Resources that may be of particular interest to farmworkers are highlighted in green.

## Opportunities for Farmer Input

- [Maine Drought and Agriculture Survey](#) Please complete before the deadline of January 11, 2021! A group, including the University of Maine School of Food and Agriculture, UMaine Cooperative Extension, the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, and MOFGA, is working together to assess, through this survey, the direct and indirect effects that drought has had on agricultural production in Maine over the past five years. The purpose of the research is to understand farmers' perspectives on how drought and water resources affected farming operations over the past five years. The survey includes general questions and then requests that you identify your primary crop (plant or animal) which will connect you to more specific questions related to your crop. To participate, you must be a farmer in Maine who is at least 18 years of age; the survey is confidential and anonymous, and should take about 30 minutes to complete. As noted above, the survey should be completed by January 11, 2021. Preliminary results will be presented during a session at the virtual Ag Trades Show on January 21, 2021. A final report will be made publicly available in spring 2021.
- [Draft Animal Power Network's Geo-Directory](#) online map and resource directory. The Draft Animal Power Network has created an online directory of draft animal powered businesses and resources for farmers, foresters and other businesses utilizing draft power, and any businesses or organizations providing resources related to draft animals (education, equipment, clubs, etc.). Add yourself to the map, or search for relevant resources, businesses, events and more.
- [Protecting the Integrity of Seed](#) listening session on GMO contamination. January 19, 2021. Hosted by Organic Seed Alliance, OSU Extension, NCAT, and others, this online open forum is being held to hear from farmers, seed growers, seed companies, plant breeders, and other food and farming stakeholders about issues they face with GMO contamination. The unwanted presence of genetically engineered (GE) traits in organic and other non-GMO varieties of seed stands out as a major challenge in some crops that have a GE counterpart in the marketplace. Input gathered will directly inform future educational events and policy recommendations in 2021 and beyond.

Registration is required. Free of charge.

## Good News Department

- [A Farm Family's Business Caved In. Then the Neighbors Showed Up.](#) New York Times article featuring Lisa and Ralph Turner of Laughing Stock Farm, and how they were able to successfully navigate the dramatic and disastrous changes that the pandemic wrought for their farm business. Written by Ellen Barry. Photo-video by Mohamed Sadek.

