

The 2025 Annual Meeting, March 25 - Everything you need to know

What: Annual Meeting (hybrid online/in-person format) on the afternoon of Tuesday, March 25, with music, no-host bar, and live benefit auction to follow throughout the evening. Keynote and lunch provided at noon to 2:30 with the annual meeting beginning at 2:30 p.m. Keynote address will be rancher Glenn Elzinga of Alderspring Ranch with "What Beaver Taught Us". Board members will be elected via the online voting platform Election Runner. The election will end during the annual meeting, to ensure that everyone has a chance to vote.

Advanced Training is under development in collaboration with Regenerative Organic Alliance for Wed-Thurs March 26-27, with the focus on March 26 being environmental and soil health monitoring and other topics still under discussion. The theme of this training will be "The Future of Organic Inspecting- What will inspecting look like in 10 years?" The training on March 27 will be an Introduction to Social Compliance Auditing and a field trip. NOP does not address social compliance, but triple bottom line sustainability is becoming increasingly important for commerce, especially to European markets and many consumers. Organic operators find themselves needing add-on labels to satisfy markets. Social compliance is a key aspect of the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS). Those who wish to earn a Certificate for the Social Compliance auditing session should plan to stay through the morning of March 28.



Keynote Speaker Glenn Elzinga

This course will assist organic inspectors in learning how to navigate what is required for approval for social compliance auditing. The information covered will be also useful and applicable for organic inspectors conducting organic inspections. The agenda will be posted the IOIA website shortly. Training will be open to register for one or both days separately.

Where: Chico Hot Springs Resort & Day Spa, Pray, Montana, about 40 miles north of Yellowstone National Park, the first park in the extensive US national park

system. IOIA will have full run of the

Conference Center throughout the event for the annual meeting and training. The center has a stone fireplace, a cash bar, hardwood floors, and a stunning view of the mountains of the Paradise Valley. Not all roads will be open in the park, but roads with access to the northern part of the Park should be open. Horseback riding, dogsledding, yoga classes, spa treatments, and other activities can be booked through the Chico website.

When: March 25-28. You may register for a room reservation any time. You will pay the hotel directly when you check out. Advanced Training registration will be open by mid-January, with a deadline to apply by mid-February. You must call the hotel to book within the IOIA room block. IOIA anticipates that the room block will fill up, so members are encouraged to book early.

See AGM 2025, page 4

Notes from the Chair

by Janine Gibson

Happy New Year, colleagues! This final issue of 2024 is a bit delayed; we aren't often able to begin an issue with that greeting! Things have been very busy in the IOIA office and on the board of directors, with preparations for our AGM at Chico Hot Springs in Montana, preparation of the budget and board ballot for 2025, and lots of training and conference activity. This is my final "Notes from the Chair" as I will be leaving the board at the AGM. If you think you might have energy and attributes to contribute to the board, please reach out to our Membership Committee Chair, Terrance Layhew, t.organicsinspector@gmail.com or the IOIA office. I've served twice on the board of directors – from 1995 through 2003 – and this time since 2019. Both times it has been a rich and rewarding experience. If you'd like to visit with me about what it is like to serve on the board, I'd love to chat. Don't hesitate to reach out. The last time I was at Chico Hot Springs was in 2015, 10 years ago, when we had our AGM at the same location.

See Notes, page 4

Welcome New Members!**New Inspectors**

Reagan Hulbert, Sheldon, WI

Returning inspectors

JJ Mack, Eugene, OR

Upgrading to Inspector

Patricia Logan, Fort Steele, BC

Supporting Individuals

Sheridan Banta, Oceanside, CA

Brian Coffman, Colusa, CA

Chris Coutour, Pasa Robles, CA

Lucas Hill, Forestville, CA

Pat Malo, Santa Cruz, CA

Jayden Mikkonen, Frederick, SD

Nicole Nichelini, Ely, NV

Mark Ricker, Schenectady, NY

Marlene Silveira, Orland, CA

Sarah Thorp, Asheville, NC

Katharina Ullman, Davis, CA

Alexander Young, Reedsville, WI

Webinar Discount Reminder

All inspector members are entitled to take 50% off any one webinar during 2025

IOIA - Working for You!**IOIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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— EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AT LARGE —
MARGARITO CAL

The Inspectors' Report is the newsletter of International Organic Inspectors Association. IOIA is a 501 (c)(3) educational organization. Our mission is to address issues and concerns relevant to organic inspectors, to provide quality inspector training and to promote integrity and consistency in the organic certification process.

Editor: [Diane Cooner](#)

2025 Webinar Training Schedule

for details & to register go to our [website](#)

January 14 & 17 100 Level NOP Processing Standards

Webinar will prepare participants to verify compliance with the NOP Crop Standards.

9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. (Pacific). Two 3 hour sessions.

Trainer: Garry Lean

[Register and Pay Here](#)

February 4 & 7 100 Level NOP Crop Standards

Webinar will prepare participants to verify compliance with the NOP Crop Standards.

9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. (Pacific). Two 3 hour sessions.

Trainer: Nate Powell-Palm

[Register and Pay Here](#)

March 11 & 14 100 Level NOP Livestock Standards

9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. (Pacific). Two 3 hour sessions.

Trainer: Nate Powell-Palm

[Register and Pay Here](#)

April 22 & 25 100 Level NOP Crop Standards

9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. (Pacific). Two 3 hour sessions.

Trainer: Garry Lean

[Register and Pay Here](#)

IOIA seeks Webinar Developers and Presenters

IOIA's webinar program is now 25 years old. We have continued to provide relevant and timely content by collaborating with IOIA's trainers and other organizations, such as the Organic Materials Review Institute. New in 2024 was a highly successful collaboration with Strengthening Organic Systems - offering Fraud Prevention Plans in August and Organic Livestock & Poultry Standards in November.

Collaborate with us! IOIA is flexible and works with trainers to develop content where IOIA retains the intellectual property and then pays for each session presented.

Other trainers and presenters have proposed unique content where they share in the revenue and retain their own intellectual property. Examples are Organic Maple Syrup Production and Organic Apiculture Inspection, presented in the past by Monique Scholz, and Organic Winery Inspection by Pam Sullivan. In 2023, Luis Brenes developed training on post-SOE 205.101. IOIA collaborated with Oh Oh Organics on 300-level Organic Cosmetics training. Presenters usually receive a payment to deliver the training with the option for higher payments based on enrollment.

Help us expand our webinar program and keep the content fresh and relevant. The possibilities are endless! IOIA is especially seeking webinar developers or presenters on the following topics:

- **Organic Apiculture Inspection**
- **Organic Maple Syrup Inspection**
- **Organic Mushroom Inspection**
- **Organic Pet Food Inspection**
- **Organic Winery Inspection**

Interested? Please reach out to IOIA's Webinar Coordinator DrewAnne Wenzel at webinars@ioia.net to explore how you can contribute and what model might work best for you.

Online Basic Courses 2025 - [see the IOIA website for full details](#)

NOP - Basic Processing Inspection Training - February 3 - 7, 2025

The 4 ½ -day Basic Inspection Training follows IOIA's curriculum requirements which include: applying the organic standards (focus on the USDA National Organic Rule); role of the inspector; working with organic system plans; how to inspect organic processing plants; audit trail requirements; risk assessment and organic control points; investigative skills; report writing; approved input materials; sanitation and pest control; inspector conduct, confidentiality, and ethics; understanding the difference between inspecting and consulting; and effective communication.

Trainer is Garry Lean.

Deadline to Register and Apply has passed but there is still space for late registrants.

NOP - Basic Crop Inspection Training, February 24 - 28, 2025

The 4 ½ -day Basic Inspection Training follows IOIA's curriculum requirements, including: applying the the organic standards (focus on the USDA National Organic Rule); working with organic system plans; how to inspect organic farms; audit trail requirements; risk assessment and organic control points; investigative skills; report writing; approved input materials; assessing natural resource management; inspector conduct, confidentiality, and ethics; understanding the difference between inspecting and consulting; and effective communication.

Trainer - Nate Powell-Palm

Deadline to Register and Apply is Friday, January 3, 2025

Onsite Basic Courses 2025 - [See the IOIA website for full details](#)

Basic Organic Farm Inspection Training - Tokyo, Japan, January 2025

IOIA and JOIA will cosponsor a 5-day Basic Organic Farm Inspection Training using JAS Standards as a reference. The course will be held **online January 17 & 24 and in-person January 27-29, 2025**, at Utsumi, Kandamisakicho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, Japan. The training language will be Japanese. The course includes a field trip to a farm with a mock inspection, as well as a written exam. The IOIA trainer will be Mutsumi Sakuyoshi and other Japanese trainer(s). Please contact JOIA for more information about this training and to register directly with JOIA.
E-Mail: info@joia-organic.com

Experience the value of learning in-person in small groups with guidance from experienced inspectors.

Not finding a training you are looking for or all trainings full?
[Please register here](#) to be contacted by IOIA when that training is available.

Self-Paced Learning Courses

Canadian Organic Regime - COR Series Courses 1 & 2 each take approximately 3 hours to complete. Inspector members price: US\$150 each.

#1 Our Organic Certification System - The Regulation

#2 COR Crop Production Standards

#3 COR Livestock Production Standards Note: This is a 10-12 hour course, Member Price US\$275

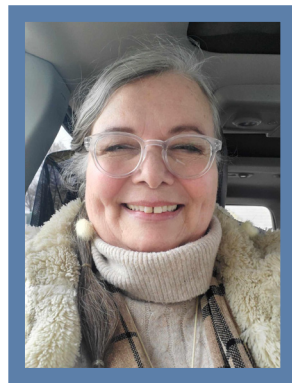
200 level IOIA/American Grassfed Association Grassfed Dairy

Member cost \$325 - \$375 all others.

Notes from the Chair, from page 1

(It was amazing – Margaret told us to be prepared for blizzards in late March and it was so nice that we were able to wear short sleeves.) Stuart McMillan of Manitoba was Chair of the board then. One of the benefits of the venue is that it is an attractive ‘southern’ destination for Canadian members, just a few hours drive south from Alberta or Saskatchewan. Montana seems to have a lot of cachet right now, so book your rooms early. The room block will likely fill up, and it is a long way to other lodging! We are striving to make the agenda and annual meeting content truly INTERNATIONAL in relevance, to make it worth it for members around the world to make the trip. We have members calling to ask how to register who haven’t been at an AGM for many years, and others who’ve never attended. These are good signs!

One of the more technical activities of my fall was advocating to finally get recycled struvite on the Canadian 32:311 permitted substance list. Struvite is a phosphorus-rich soil amendment which can be derived from wastewater. It is a synthetic that is used to balance soils. I have been listening to prairie farmers ask for this amendment for over 12 years. I have been sharing research with the CGSB Organic Committee proving it’s recovered from the water stream not sludge and is tested to verify no contaminants. An allowance for struvite from recycled sources would likely have the positive environmental impact of reduced watershed pollution. It still needs to go through the comment period so it wouldn’t be on the list until published December 2025. I’ve been advocating for allowing struvite, as has the EU, only from sources producing contaminant free “pearls” from the wastewater stream, only the liquid fraction, after it has received 3 levels of purification and is ready for watershed release as tertiary treated water, distinct from sewage sludge.



Please – Let’s Climb outta the muck - Join us in Montana for a landmark AGM – the first training since 2019 (Mexico) where we will meet both in-person and separate from ACA.

2025 AGM, from page 1

Who – The advanced training team currently includes Kathe Purvis, Western Australia, social compliance auditor and organic inspector; Ryan Sitler, the GOTS representative in North America; Elizabeth Whitlow, Regenerative Organic Alliance; and Nate Powell-Palm, who farms and ranches in the area. Sitler and Whitlow are former organic inspectors and Sitler served on the IOIA board of directors. Purvis is currently serving on the board and will lead the social compliance training. Powell-Palm was the recent chair of the USDA’s National Organic Standards Board. Glenn Elzinga of Alderspring Ranch, May, Idaho, will be the keynote speaker at the AGM. For more information about Glenn, his wife Caryl, and their fascinating partnership with the wild, see www.alderspring.com. Glenn, a stellar storyteller, has a background in Forestry. Caryl has MS and PhD degrees in Environmental Studies with an emphasis on community plant ecology in wetland and riparian systems. She is the lead author of Monitoring Plant and Animal Populations: a Handbooks for Field Biologists, a book for students and practitioners in managing wild landscapes. They started Alderspring Ranch near Salmon, Idaho, in 1992 with the purchase of 147 acres and 7 cows. They began marketing grass-fed and finished beef in 1993 with 2 head. From these humble beginnings, their enterprise grew to a 7-figure direct marketing enterprise and a 1700-acre ranch with a 46,000-acre wild rangeland permit. The entire operation is certified organic. They are working on innovative approaches to restoring their wild mountain rangelands, working in partnership with agencies and The Nature Conservancy.

Travel: Nearest airport is Bozeman (BZN) about an hour away, the largest and busiest airport in Montana. Billings (about 2.5 hours) is also an option and avoids mountain passes. Rental cars and carpooling are recommended as the best way to get to Chico. There is no shuttle to the airport, although there are some local transportation services. Silverback Transportation (406-551-0721) can be booked with 24 hours advance notice for pickup or departure.

Lodging: Reservations may be made by calling Chico at (406) 333-4933 to book within the **International Organic Inspectors Association** room block. It is not possible to book online in the IOIA room block. The block is available Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. You can add Sunday night or Friday night at the same rate, but it is important to book early, as rooms will be limited for those extra nights. The rooms vary from rustic with sink/no bathroom and shared bathrooms in the hall in the historic main lodge for \$130, to similar rooms with private bathrooms for \$160, to fully modern rooms in the newer structures for \$255/night. Taxes are additional. Note: there are no TVs in any rooms on the property.

Meals: The Chico Dining Room - one of the best restaurants in Montana - offers fine dining at its Montana best. Dinner reservations must be booked early. Other eating options are available in the Poolside Grille and the Saloon. IOIA will provide lunch on-site each day during the Annual Meeting and the Advanced Training.

Visit our [AGM page at for more complete details and Agendas for the AGM and Advanced Training](#) as they are finalized.

Notes from the Executive Director

by Margaret Scoles

2024 – What a Year! In my last “Notes” in the summer issue, I wrote about the completion of our part in the three-year project with National Center for Appropriate Technology to assist producers in making the transition to organic (10 workshops!). Not inspector training, but certainly within our mission. In this issue, I’ve written about the Kentucky State University cosponsored basic crop inspection training, a key part of “*Addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Kentucky organic sector*” (see page 13). In the spring issue, Drew and I reported on the trip to Washington DC to take part in organic advocacy at OTA’s event. And all year long, we continue to celebrate training happening around the world in many ways (Fiji, Hong Kong, Mexico, Canada). This fall, as I juggled between scoring exams for the Minnesota crop course and board meetings, I sought a proxy to vote for IOIA at the IFOAM General Assembly in Taiwan. Looking back to the first issue of the year, we were grappling with SOE implementation, the Annual Meeting, and Advanced Training in Texas. IOIA participated in an Equity Learning Exchange and drafted a Diversity statement based on the IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture. Watch in our upcoming first issue of 2025 for a recap of the Annual Report.



After traveling very little since 2020, I went on an intense tour with 5 trips in 2 months. Drew Gourdie and I attended the Montana Nonprofit Association annual conference, followed by the NOC/NOSB Meetings in Portland. A highlight there was a discussion with **Bob Durst**, past board chair, who has endowed a processing inspector apprenticeship via a significant annual donation! Then a 10-day road trip to/from Kentucky with my husband and our dog Uno. On the way, we stopped for about an hour in Iowa for a great coffee and catch-up with Terrance Layhew. On the way back, a week later, we called to check in with Patricia Hagsten as we were driving through Kansas City. Kentucky was wonderful. Bryan Petersen of KDA was a volunteer group leader for the training, so IOIA enjoyed taking him out for dinner in downtown Frankfort. Brett McQueary was literally in his first week on the job as program manager for the KDA’s organic certification program. Both Brett and Bryan were graduates of IOIA courses within the last two years. Then it was off to Minnesota for the basic crop inspection training, and finally in early December the Montana Organic Association, where I first heard Glenn Elzinga speak a year ago. I guarantee you will never hear a better story. And speaking of stories – here’s a challenge. If you haven’t written a story yet for “IOIA Inspector Tails”, the fundraising project initiated by Al Johnson, Janine Gibson, and Silke Fuchshofen, please do and send to [Janine](#). We will have a sampling read at the Montana event.

One of the best (oddly so) parts of the end of a year is that I take a hard look at Accounts Receivable and see a lot of unpaid membership dues. So, I pick up the phone and start calling. I find out who has retired, who is still inspecting, who loves it, and who is feeling a little burned out. For most unpaid members, it is just an oversight. You might be surprised at how many people pick up the phone on New Year’s Eve. And now that we have the new Inspector Emeritus category for retiring inspectors, it is so rewarding to have members who would otherwise drop off our membership roles express delight that there is a category that fits them better. For just \$100/year, they can stay connected and continue to support IOIA. People like Eric Feutz and Dag Falck and Jim Fullmer. Attempting any increase in membership has been quite challenging over the past few years, as so many inspectors taking our training are staff inspectors of an agency. These staff inspectors are unlikely to join as IOIA inspector members, even though we have a less costly category for them, too. Here’s a sample of what I learn in these conversations -- From a long-time member for whom it wasn’t just an oversight that the dues weren’t paid, *“I turned 70 in October and have decided to spend my few remaining years on our own organic farm where this all started. It has been a fantastic experience- nearly 20 years. I have inspected in 29 states, for 7 different certifiers,... I have also served as a mentor for nearly 30 young inspector wannabes and am quite proud that some have turned out to be excellent inspectors..., it’s been quite an adventure.”* And from what I would call a “medium-length inspector” about 10 years, *“Still a full time+ inspector and enjoying it. I’ve settled into working for 3 certifiers.. I do crop and handling for all 3 and then a little non GMO and gluten free.”*

After visiting with so many members on December 31, I’m looking forward to seeing everyone at Chico Hot Springs!

Richmond, Virginia - IOIA Inspector Social and Networking

January 27

What’s happening in Richmond, Virginia? The Annual NOP Certifier Training is scheduled for January 28. It will be free and will also be available via livestreaming. IOIA will host a meet & greet social at the hotel lobby on Monday afternoon/evening January 27. The ACA will offer 2.5 days of conference programming over January 29-31. All events will be at the Richmond Downtown Marriott. Registration is open to mid-January, with the ACA/IOIA price of \$349. A reception is planned on the evening of January 29. [Link to register here.](#)

Sector News

US Farm Bill - current status

As of December 28, 2024, the **U.S. Farm Bill** has been extended through a **yearlong extension** as part of a stopgap funding bill passed by Congress to avert a government shutdown.¹ This extension, known as the **American Relief Act**, includes **\$10 billion in one-time emergency payments** to farmers dealing with low commodity prices and high input costs, as well as **billions in relief funding** for those affected by natural disasters.¹

President Biden signed the package into law, providing temporary relief while lawmakers continue to negotiate a new Farm Bill. 1 The extension aims to maintain stability in the agricultural sector and support farmers until a more permanent solution is reached².

[Arrington celebrates passage of yearlong Farm Bill extension](#) (1)

[Farm bill extended in last minute funding deal: What to know | Agriculture Dive](#) (2)

The extension of the U.S. Farm Bill on December 28, 2024, has several ramifications for organic agriculture programs:

1. Organic Certification Cost-Share Program (OCCSP): The extension does not include funding for this program, which helps organic farmers offset certification costs. Without this support, certification costs will rise, potentially forcing some operations to forgo certification.
2. Organic Data Initiative (ODI): This program, essential for collecting and analyzing data to support organic agriculture, is also unfunded. Without it, producers will lack critical insights needed to run competitive operations.
3. Organic Certification Trade and Tracking Program (OCTT): The lack of funding for this program will hinder the USDA's efforts to enforce organic regulations and prevent fraud.
4. Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI): While this program has mandatory funding, its authority ends after 2024, potentially disrupting the next grant cycle and critical research efforts.

[House Fails to Fund Critical Organic Programs in Farm Bill Extension | DRGNews](#)

Organic Final Rule Published for Mushrooms and Pet Food

On December 23, the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) published the final rule on Market Development for Mushrooms and Pet Food. This change to the USDA organic regulations will promote a fairer market for all mushroom and pet food producers and encourage growth in these sectors by ensuring that USDA-certified organic products are produced to the same consistent standard. The rule will provide increased certainty to support conditions necessary for growth in the organic mushroom and pet food markets and markets for related inputs (e.g., organic production by-products).

What does the rule do?

The rule adds consistent standards for organic mushroom production and pet food handling. It clarifies the requirements for these products to ensure the standards are consistently applied and enforced. In general, the rule will:

- Clarify which crop production standards mushroom producers should use, and which new requirements should be followed for mushroom substrate and spawn used in mushroom production.
- Standardize existing practices in organic pet food handling by applying the regulations for organic processed products to pet food.
- Allow the synthetic amino acid taurine to be used in organic pet food.

Read the
Final Rule
here

When must organic operations comply with the rule? The final rule goes into effect on February 21, 2025. AMS is allowing an additional two (2) years for organic operations to comply with the requirements of the final rule. All organic mushroom and pet food operations must comply with the rule by February 22, 2027. However, organic operations may choose to comply with the final rule prior to the compliance date.

Jon Tester, US Senator and Certified Organic Farmer, gives farewell address

IOIA was saddened to see Sen. Jon Tester, D-Montana, the only organic farmer in the U.S. Senate, lose his seat in the recent election. In his farewell address, the outgoing senator criticized campaign finance laws and highlighted his committee chairmanships. He credited his agricultural roots for making him the person he is, a grandson of immigrants who still lives on the family farm.

<https://montanafreepress.org/2024/12/09/tester-makes-farewell-address-to-senate-colleagues/>

Sector News

Montana Supreme Court Backs Youth in Climate Lawsuit

The Montana Supreme Court upheld a lower court's decision in the landmark climate lawsuit, *Held vs. Montana*, filed by 16 young Montanans. The court ruled that the "clean and healthful environment" guaranteed by the Montana Constitution includes a right to a "stable climate system." Chief Justice Mike McGrath, writing for the five-justice majority, dismissed the state's argument that climate policy is the domain of legislative branches.

The ruling was celebrated by climate advocates as a significant victory, while Montana's Department of Justice expressed disappointment. Governor Greg Gianforte warned of "perpetual litigation" and potential challenges to the state's energy policies.

During the trial, plaintiffs argued that state-approved energy projects have harmed their health, economic security, cultural traditions, and recreational interests. The court dismissed the state's contention that Montana's impact on global climate change is negligible, affirming that climate change significantly affects Montana's environment.

Former constitutional convention delegate Mae Nan Ellingson praised the decision, emphasizing the need for legislators who prioritize environmental protection. Attorney Roger Sullivan noted that the ruling mandates thorough environmental reviews of fossil fuel projects by state agencies.

Plaintiff Eva Lighthiser, who was 14 when the lawsuit was filed, called the ruling a powerful validation. The Montana Environmental Information Center highlighted the ruling's importance for present and future generations, pointing to the health and economic impacts of climate change.

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality adjusted its review processes in response to the decision, positioning itself to comply with the ruling. However, Republican lawmakers and Attorney General Austin Knudsen criticized the decision, accusing the court of overstepping its constitutional boundaries.

Justice Dirk Sandefur, in a concurring opinion, acknowledged the plaintiffs' standing but argued that global climate change issues should be addressed by federal and international policies. Dissenting Justice Jim Rice warned against the judiciary acting as a legislative body.

Despite these criticisms, the ruling is expected to influence climate litigation beyond Montana, reinforcing the importance of recognizing climate change's impact on health in legal contexts.

By Amanda Eggert, as seen in *Montana Free Press*, 12/18/2024

Summarized with assistance from CoPilot. Rikki Held, the named plaintiff, was IOIA's 2024 AGM keynote speaker.

[Full article here](#)

[Read the Opinion here](#)

IFOAM OWC/GA

World Board Election: IFOAM Organics International welcomed a newly elected World Board, representing a diverse and dynamic leadership to guide the organization forward.

Karen Mapusua
Marco Schlüter
Sarah Compson
Shamika Mone
Edgardo Boyet Uychiat
Huei-Wen (Mag) Chin
Paul Holmbeck
Amber Sciligo
Julia Lernoud
Choitresh Ganguly

Strategic Decisions: Members approved critical motions that align with and strengthen the future direction of organic agriculture. (More information in the upcoming weeks)

OWC 2027 Host: The General Assembly selected the next host for the Organic World Congress, ensuring this cornerstone event continues to inspire the global organic community. Watch their message here. the province of Negros Occidental in The Philippines has been selected as the host for the Organic World Congress 2027.

[Full article here.](#)



International Training News

Mexico - In recognition of the challenges of price barriers around the globe, IOIA continually strives to work with co-sponsors to improve training access. After exploring different existing models for training, IOIA and OCIA tried a new model. AgriVita (IOIA trainer, Luis Brenes) cosponsored training with OCIA in Oaxaca de Juarez, Mexico, October 21-25. The course was not the standard basic IOIA course with a field trip. It was instead an *Introductory Course on Organic Inspection for Crops and Simple Process*. OCIA International managed logistical details and chose the applicants for acceptance. Training content was delivered by Luis Brenes in Spanish language. IOIA endorsed the 36-hour training and the IOIA logo appeared on the certificate. IOIA's endorsement likely assisted the team in filling the training. IOIA received a modest fee for supporting the training. The training was completed with 18 participants, and all earned a Certificate of Completion. Some participants were already experienced inspectors or consultants, but others were new to inspection.



IOIA and Japan Organic Inspectors Association cosponsored a 5-day Basic Organic Farm Inspection Training on-line September 11 & 18 and in-person September 24-26, 2024, at Utsumi, Kandamisakicho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo Japan. There were 19 participants. Trainers were Mutsumi Sakuyoshi, Mika Itashiki, and Yuko Tomioka.

South Korea - IOIA and the Isidor Sustainability Research Institute (ISRI) are drafting a Memo of Understanding which could authorize ISRI as an official representative of IOIA in South Korea. Our training has diminished in the last several years as certification agencies were treated differently as training organizations. Official recognition of IOIA could restore a more level playing field for our training. IOIA and Isidor Yu first worked together on organic inspector training in 2006 and have delivered many trainings over the years since. Yu brought representatives of the South Korean government to visit the US in 2012 and 2017 and as an IOIA board member, he was instrumental in bringing IOIA to Jeju Island in 2016 for IOIA's first Annual Meeting in Asia.

Asia Pacific Committee

- Watch for more news regarding this committee's next annual free webinar, likely to occur in March/April 2025.



JOIA's end of the year party, 2024

Canada News

Youth Group Victorious in Historic Climate Case

Seven young climate change activists in Ontario are celebrating a landmark victory handed down by the province's top court. The Court of Appeal ruled in favour of their youth-led climate lawsuit (Mathur v. Ontario) against the government; the ruling confirms that Ontario's weak climate targets are risking the lives and well-being of Ontarians. The young woman leading the charge is Sofia Mathur. More information about Sofia's work and these inspiring young people can be found [here](#).



The Province of Ontario argued that its climate actions were not subject to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This false assertion was summarily rejected by the Court. The Court of Appeal has simplified the issues, shining a light directly on Ontario's inadequate targets and confirming that Ontario must conduct its climate response in accordance with the high standards of the Charter. A new hearing has been ordered, and Ontario will have to answer for its record as a climate laggard. The seven youth are optimistic and will push forward with the new hearing, with all the urgency that our climate crisis demands. More information about the case can be found [here](#).

This landmark case is similar to the groundbreaking Held vs Montana case, where a youth group successfully challenged the State of Montana in its actions which contravened the State's Constitution (which confers the right to a clean and healthful environment). More information about that case can be found [here](#).

Canada Organic Summit

The Canada Organic Trade Association's (COTA's) annual Organic Summit and Parliament Day brought together sector members and policymakers to discuss strategies for propelling Canada's organic sector forward. This year's event featured world-class speakers and empowered attendees to take impactful steps toward sector development. Participants heard insights on the affordability of organic products, opportunities within the organic marketplace, nutrient density of organic foods, and the resilience of organic farming systems.

The Summit highlighted the importance of strong public-private partnerships to unlock Canada's organic sector potential. The most critical priorities identified during COTA's Parliament Day are a comprehensive organic data strategy, production and market supports. This message was brought to Parliamentarians during 20 meetings by organic leaders. The momentum from these events highlights the need for strategic government support to secure Canada's position as a leader in sustainable, competitive, and innovative organic products.

Canada submission to CUSMA consultation

COTA submitted a response to a consultation from Global Affairs Canada that will inform Canada's position going into the joint review of the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) in 2026. In addition to general comments about ensuring continued access and trade for organic businesses, COTA submitted points regarding the agricultural biotechnology clause, which in encouraging approvals of products of biotechnology across all three countries, may put organic companies at higher risk. The submission is posted online [here](#).

New Organic Consumer Advocate Group

The Responsible Organic Customer Association (ROCA) is a newly formed organization fully dedicated to supporting consumers of organic food, and championing a mission to build awareness and understanding of what organic really means. ROCA recognizes that informed and empowered customers are essential to transforming our food system. Given the common confusion surrounding "certified organic," they provide clear information, research, and educational resources to help consumers make informed choices and see the true benefits of organic products. More information can be found at <https://www.responsibleorganic.ca/>



Guelph Organic Conference

The Organic Council of Ontario (OCO) is proud to host the longest running organic conference, now in its 44th year. The Guelph Organic Conference will run from January 22nd to 25th, on the University of Guelph campus. This year's unparalleled roster of speakers is set to impress with insights for all organic avenues. Don't miss this opportunity to immerse yourself in the world of organic practices! More information on attending or sponsoring this conference can be found on the event website, <https://guelphorganicconf.ca/>

Minnesota Basic Crop Inspection Training, Farmington November 18-22, 2024



Mount Olivet Conference & Retreat Center in rural Farmington, Minnesota, has been hosting IOIA trainings for more than a decade, always in the fall of the year. Taking group photos in front of this red bush is an IOIA tradition. This year's training was in mid-November, a little later than in the past, but the bush held out for us. Pictured here is the intrepid Crop Inspection Training group of 5 individuals dressed for the chilly weather just prior to the arrival of the snow, with their intrepid trainer, Margaret Scoles. Left to right: Scoles, Jayden Mikkonen (SD); Alex Young (WI), Stacy Sangsland (MI), De'Anthony Price (GA), and Maddie Barkholtz (MN).

"I believe in-person trainings are more beneficial than virtual ones. Attendees are able to connect with each other more effectively in person."

- De'Anthony Price, Rodale Institute, course participant.

Practicing audit trail inspection with Kevin Chamberlain, field trip host extraordinaire at Century Hills Farm. IOIA appreciates our field trip hosts.



What does IOIA deliver that no one else does?

Experiential learning in week-long intensive courses that include a field trip to a certified organic operation and a practice inspection, led by an experienced organic inspector trainer.

The real-life experience of the field trip is often rated the most valuable part of the course. On Day 1, the group learns how certification works, reviews/applies the standards that they learned through preparatory webinar, expands on their understanding of inputs and risk-assessment, and starts practicing an Organic System Plan review, using a fictional OSP. They draft an inspection plan based on that OSP.

Day 2 begins with a comprehensive debrief of that organic system plan and developing an inspection plan, all in small groups, and includes math calculation practice, ethics/conduct, inspection protocols, and exercises in traceback and mass balance. Participants practice writing an exit interview document. And finally, they receive a real inspection file for the field trip the next day.

Day 3 completes the lecture part of the course with report writing and communication styles, followed by developing an inspection plan for the field trip, which takes place that afternoon. As close as possible to a real inspection, it is a learning exercise with no impact on the operator's certification. Day 4 is guided report writing and Day 5 is the exam. The course is intense! Relationships developed during

this intense work contribute to a high success rate and ongoing relationships.



Mt. Olivet provided a perfect setting for this intensity, with great food, a homey dining room, and for those rare moments of downtime - a pool, sauna, and whirlpool.

Due to low enrollment in both the Crop and Processing courses, the Crop course was moved to run concurrently with the Processing course. This facilitated better networking, more engagement with certifiers who attended the ACA/IOIA course, and the opportunity to participate in an optional session "Operating an Organic Inspection Business" led by the processing training team.

Field trip day to Century Hills Farms, in a yet-to-be-harvested corn field. If you look closely, those white streaks are snow! In spite of the cold, there was unanimous agreement among the group that they were glad they took the training in-person.

Minnesota Basic Processing Inspection and ACA/IOIA Collaborative Training November 18-22, 2024



Eight participants from the Basic Processing Training group on a chilly, windy day in Minnesota. Paul Werner, Werner Seeds field trip host, upper right. We appreciate our hosts! It had been a long time since the company had processed an organic lot, but that didn't deter the trainer team. Nate Powell-Palm asked for copies of the blank forms used to track organic lots and developed sample traceback and mass balance documents for participants to use.

Nate Powell-Palm of Montana, IOIA lead trainer, led the basic Processing Inspection Training at Mount Olivet Conference & Retreat Center, assisted by PJ Wiebusch of Washington. PJ has served previously as an assistant for live online basic training and as a field trip group leader for in-person training.

The first 2 days of the training were also a pilot - a first-time collaboration between ACA and IOIA. Certifier staff, primarily reviewers, had the opportunity to join the training for the first two days, which focused on labelling standards, permitted processing input materials, sanitation and pest control, ingredients, traceback and mass balance, reviewing organic system plans, drafting inspection plans, and the exit interview process. They could leave after Day 2, or they could join a third day of ACA training - with a half day on Mass Balance Audits with PJ Wiebusch and a half-day with Laila Ghambari on De-Escalation for Organic Certifiers. Four different certifiers were represented in the ACA/IOIA training.

The venue provided ample and attractive smaller meeting spaces to accommodate concurrent sessions. The venue sits in the midst of 150 acres of outdoor space including a lake and walking paths.

The mix of 3 different groups - the basic crop group of 5, the basic processing group of 8, the 5 ACA/IOIA participants in the first 2 days of the course, and a certifier representative who joined only for the ACA Day made for enthusiastic networking in the common dining area. The venue was oddly quiet after the certifier participants left mid-week, as the basic training groups settled in for intense course completion with field trip practice inspection reports to write and exams to pass. Perhaps a factor was that many of the certifier staff are certification specialists who work remotely with fewer in-person opportunities. Noted from course evaluations that many of the basic processing course participants intentionally selected the in-person format as their preferred learning format. The mix of reviewers and inspectors made for rich small group discussions.

Although this was a small test, it shows promise to further explore the possibilities. Since 2020, IOIA has only sponsored two in-person processing trainings, primarily because the lower cost of taking the course live online makes it challenging to compete with the in-person model, even though it is generally a preferred learning format that can better accommodate different learning styles. Finding field trip hosts for processing is generally more challenging than farm hosts.

What did participants say?

"This was a really intense week of learning! One week felt like a lot for all the information but I can't imagine the course being any longer... I definitely appreciated the webinars that took place before the in-person training. They were extremely helpful." - from an anonymous course participant evaluation.

"I wanted to be sure to express what an invaluable experience this training (In-person Processing Inspection Training) and the former Crop inspection training in Saco, Maine in 2022 have been for me. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to interact with, and ask questions of, such experienced industry leaders in-person. I find that I am able to learn so much more by this format than an on-line course. I chose to wait and travel to this course in Minnesota because of the exceptional experience I had at the Crop Training Course in Maine. I very much hope that IOIA continues to offer more in-person trainings as I will certainly be willing to participate in these high value opportunities. Those moments, in class, at meals or short walks outside with the instructors and classmates too are also invaluable." - Daniel Grace, Tennessee

Online Training Events

Basic Online Processing Training, September 23 - 27, 2024

Trainer was Garry Lean, with 6 people participating. We regret there is no Zoom photo to share!



Basic Online Crop Inspection course, December 9 - 13, 2024

Trainers Luis Brenes, top center, and Garry Lean, 3rd row left.

IOIA and Tuskegee University cosponsored Basic Crop Inspection Training in a hybrid live online format with students in a classroom at the university and trainer Garry Lean online. The course was completed in April with 9 participants completing the full course.

"I wish to commend IOIA and the Policy Committee for the comments submitted to the NOP in regards to Residue Testing. As mentioned in the article, they were indeed stellar. I have always been an advocate for residue testing on all levels of the organic industry. It is such a useful tool that all too often seems to remain in the certifier/inspectors tool box gathering dust. The document submitted was so right on in regards to the matrix and process flow presented. No question that there is a need for the development of clear protocol and detailed training for a more diversified approach to sample selection, sample handling, sample testing and ability to make the decision to sample more flexible."

S. Brian Magaro, Pennsylvania. Past Board Chair.

IOIA and Kentucky State University - Addressing lack of diversity in the organic sector Project Complete!



IOIA and Kentucky State University (KSU) co-sponsored basic Organic Crop Inspection Training at the KSU Harold R. Benson Research and Demonstration Farm, Frankfort, Kentucky on November 4-8. The Organic Association of Kentucky (OAK) assisted with outreach. And reach out they did! Brett McQueary of Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA), when he heard about the number of participants, exclaimed, "Where did you find these people?! 16 people from Kentucky?!"

The training was part of a 5-year project funded by a USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant, "*Addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Kentucky organic sector*", administered by KDA. IOIA is proud to have delivered the key training component for KSU in year 4 of the project. KSU, OAK, and IOIA formed a scholarship committee to review applications for tuition waivers, which were funded by the grant. Scholarships were awarded to socially dis-

advantaged and minority stakeholders, a broad category as defined by the USDA and including limited resource women farmers and technical advisors to those groups (i.e. extension, education, and grantmaking). In the end, 11 scholarship participants came from Kentucky, with 2 additional scholarship recipients from North Carolina. An additional two paying participants from Kentucky and two from California rounded out the cohort. Course size was set at a maximum of 20.

Participants included several from KSU extension; other KSU staff; graduate students from both KSU and University of Kentucky; and many small-scale farmers. It was a delightfully diverse group in a warm (70 degree weather!) and hospitable setting. KDA staff member and program manager Brett McQueary, local inspectors Tony Silvernail and Angela Caporelli, and Kenya Abraham of OAK all stopped in to welcome and encourage the group. Bryan Petersen of KDA joined Garth Kahl (Oregon) and Margaret Scoles (Montana) as the third group leader.

Host farms were the U of KY's Student-run CSA farm certified by KDA; Salad Days Farm (Maggie Dungan, pictured below left, has hosted a previous field trip and a promotional video produced by IOIA) also certified by KDA; and Tony Silvernail's farm. Tony is an IOIA trained inspector, currently working as an independent contractor, and his farm is certified by OneCert. He threw himself into the field trip assignment with enthusiasm, including "planting" a few noncompliance items for the group to find and being a great role-play host.



This was the same venue for the trainings delivered by IOIA and funded by NOP's Human Capital initiative in 2022. Garth and Margaret were back for this encore, a second crop inspection training at the same location. The conference center sits amid the research farm with 3 large conference rooms.

The only catch was that the room was too cold from excessive air conditioning. Trainers learned that the temperature control was from the main campus, and the main campus was closed on Tuesday, national election day. In Kentucky, where voter participation is encouraged, KSU treats election day as a holiday. So, the group had to put on extra layers to stay warm

enough. The trainers, being acclimated to northern autumn, didn't suffer as much. Not atypical for an IOIA training, the election was barely mentioned, with everyone fully focused on the IOIA basic crop curriculum.



Ethics Committee Survey Report

by Dr. Brian Baker, IOIA Ethics Committee Chair

Because organic inspectors perform an essential service to protect organic integrity, our own conduct and ethics need to be impeccable. In a classic case of a “few bad apples”, even a small number of corrupt or incompetent organic inspectors can cause operators to become cynical about organic principles and standards. While IOIA has received few formal complaints—and has no pending complaints as of the filing of this article—IOIA staff routinely receives informal complaints about breaches in conduct or possible ethical violations by inspectors, without regard to the inspector’s IOIA membership status or lack thereof. According to IOIA staff, most complaints are based on the operator’s misunderstanding of the role of the inspector and IOIA’s policies. However, a few have merit and deserve a pro-active approach before a serious complaint comes before IOIA. With that in mind, IOIA has reactivated the Ethics Committee and seeks to update its Code of Conduct, Code of Ethic, and Complaint Procedures.

IOIA created the current policies and procedures regarding inspector ethics, conduct, and complaints shortly before the implementation of the USDA’s National Organic Program. Since then, much has changed. Various countries adopted organic standards that required regular inspections of organic operations. The number of inspectors grew, many of whom were recruited by their employers with little or no experience in organic agriculture or training. Various operators committed fraud in the organic market on a massive scale that led to the revocation of their organic certification or—in some extreme cases—their criminal convictions.

In response, IOIA’s Ethics Committee reached out to inspector members to ask basic questions about inspector ethics and IOIA’s role in maintaining them. IOIA sent out a survey to its members in the Spring of 2024 and closed it in late summer. While not the ideal time for inspectors to respond, we still received a 17% response from all active members.

Those who responded overwhelmingly supported IOIA’s continuing to maintain a Code of Ethics and a Code of Conduct. Over 80% believed that IOIA should maintain a Code of Ethics and nearly 90% supported IOIA maintaining a Code of Conduct. However, the respondents were split on the question of whether IOIA should update those Codes, with about half saying they should be reviewed and revised, and the other half saying they should not or were undecided. Some members wondered why the two Codes are separate and how they are related to one another. Both Codes have out-of-date references to various bodies, laws, and regulations that require updating or changing to make them more universal to cover inspectors operating in all parts of the world.

IOIA also received comments from its members about the revisions proposed by the Ethics Committee. Specifically, we received a comment that inspectors agree to abide by the Code of Ethics and that inspectors maintain a clear separation from final certification decision-making. We also received comments that suggested certifiers that hire inspectors should also conduct themselves in an ethical manner. With respect to the Code of Conduct, one respondent suggested that the certification bodies should be responsible for establishing and enforcing proper conduct by their inspectors. A couple of responses indicated that inspectors do not have a similar avenue to file complaints or grievances when a certification body commits misconduct or an ethics violation.

Three-quarters of the members that took the survey thought that IOIA should also maintain a complaint procedure, with one-quarter opposed to having such a procedure or undecided at this time. The Ethics Committee and IOIA Staff recognize that even if IOIA ends the complaints procedure, the organization is still likely to receive complaints. Having a complaints procedure may discourage frivolous or baseless complaints by operators who disagree with the results of the inspection even when the inspector has not breached ethics, had a conflict of interest, or engaged in misconduct. One member stated that the complaint procedure provides “a forum where inspectors who are targeted by organizations or individuals who seek punitive actions for reasonable work completed by the inspector which results the inspected party does not agree with.” Less than half those who responded thought that the process should be revised. On the other hand, two members offered specific requests revisions. One commenter thought that the complaint procedure should include accepting complaints about certification body procedures that present a conflict of interest to the certification body, the inspector and the client. Another commenter suggested clarification of the timelines.

Finally, the members were asked about whether IOIA should retain the \$50 filing fee for a complaint. The members showed no clear consensus between the status quo, raising the fee, requiring a bond to be posted by both parties, or doing away with the fee completely. IOIA Staff believes the \$50 fee has been an effective deterrent for frivolous complaints.

The Ethics Committee sees the complaint procedure as proactive and not punitive. The purpose is to ensure that inspectors conduct themselves professionally in an ethical, responsible, and accountable manner. When inspectors fall short, they are given an opportunity to improve, or to acknowledge that they may not be able to continue as an organic inspector. IOIA has little in the way of sanctions if a complaint is found valid. IOIA will reach out to those who rely on our services as inspectors to see how we can do better, both ethically and professionally. We acknowledge that we are a membership organization, and our priority is to serve our members. That said, we need to serve our clients and the organic community if we are to remain relevant. We welcome your input.

IOIA Publishes Statement on Independent Contractor Classification Following Department of Labor Rulemaking

Interested in learning more about the recent update to the US Department of Labor's updated Employee or Independent Contractor Classification (EICC) rule? The EICC Final Rule is leading to questions among the organic certification community, especially in regard to the role and classification of independent organic inspectors for purposes of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

This Employee or Independent Contractor Classification Under the Fair Labor Standards Act (EICC Final Rule) was published in January 10, 2024 and took effect on March 11, 2024. The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) was enacted by the 75th Congress and signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1938. Congress has amended the FLSA several times since 1938 to further improve working conditions for employees. The FLSA's protections do not apply to independent contractors. The United States Department of Labor (DOL) is responsible for administering the FLSA.

IOIA's Policy Comment Committee analyzed the EICC Final Rule and prepared a clarification statement for our membership with the help of legal counsel specializing in contract and labor law. The development of the comprehensive 22-page statement was spearheaded by Rachel Cherry Myers, IOIA Policy Comment Committee Facilitator, and was written from the perspective of independent contract inspectors and reviewers and of certifiers who rely on the services of independent contract inspectors. The statement is posted publicly on the IOIA website.

From the inception of organic certification, the work of organic inspection has been performed by both employees and independent contractors. How best to classify organic inspectors continues to be an ongoing discussion in our industry, starting even before the passage of the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) in 1990. The topic was highlighted more recently when California legislation redefined the criteria for classification of a worker as an independent contractor under the state's Labor Code, and it continued to be a focus issue in Human Capital Resource Management in the organic regulatory industry. The publication of Strengthening Organic Enforcement implemented regulations surrounding inspector qualifications that has also highlighted the relationship between independent contract inspectors and certifiers. Inspector classification is at the forefront again with the EICC Final Rule.

Rachel Myers and Margaret Scoles, IOIA Executive Director, co-presented on IOIA's statement on October 29 at one of ACA's monthly Lunch & Learn sessions with about 60 participants attending. The presentation only covers the EICC final rule. It does not go beyond to address advice on how to establish and maintain independent contractor status or delve into IRS interpretations. Inspectors and certifiers need to understand the additional requirements that apply to the state where they reside and operate.



Rachel Myers

The regulations and legal precedent distinguish an employee from an independent contractor based on economic dependency. The Final Rule, according to the DOL, aims to better define and clarify the economic reality test. The test focuses on six factors, all of which are required to be considered, but none of which solely determines the worker's status. These six factors are:

- 1. § 795.110(b)(1) Opportunity for profit or loss depending on managerial skill.
- 2. § 795.110(b)(2) Investments by the worker and the potential employer. This factor considers whether any investments by a worker are capital or entrepreneurial in nature
- 3. § 795.110(b)(3) Degree of permanence of the work relationship This factor weighs in favor of the worker being an employee when the work relationship is indefinite in duration, continuous, or exclusive of work for other employers.
- 4. § 795.110(b)(4) Nature and degree of control. This factor considers the potential employer's control, including reserved control, over the performance of the work and the economic aspects of the working relationship.
- 5. § 795.110(b)(5) Extent to which the work performed is an integral part of the potential employer's business. This factor considers whether the work performed is an integral part of the potential employer's business.
- 6. § 795.110(b)(6) Skill and initiative. This factor considers whether the worker uses specialized skills to perform the work and whether those skills contribute to business-like initiative.

IOIA's Statement and the recording (for those not able to attend in person) will be helpful resources to independent inspectors and certifier staff who are interested to know more about how they might be affected.

Courtesy of ACA - [link to the recording of the October 29 session including Q&A.](#)

[Link to IOIA Statement on Independent Contractor Classification Following Dept of Labor Rulemaking](#)

Board of Directors Minutes Highlights - *(full minutes available to inspector members on the IOIA website)*

August 15, 2024 – 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. EDT by Zoom

Attendance: Board members: Janine Gibson (Chair); Joe Ward (Vice-Chair), Kathe Purvis (Secretary), Allan Benjamin (Treasurer); Margarito Cal (Executive Committee at Large); Rhea Epp; Justin Hurley All board members in attendance. Janine chaired the meeting. Others: Margaret Scoles, ED, and Drew Gourdie, Business Development Director.

Follow-up on ACA/IOIA BOD Call: Noting a demand for training on how independent inspectors can set up their own business and get insurance.

2nd Qtr Financial Reports: Detail provided for -\$40,000 in projected annual revenue 2024. Major item is in over-optimistic net income projections for the in-person trainings (NY and MN). Montana Nonprofit Association is in early October - approved for Margaret and Drew to participate. The NOSB meeting and pre-NOSB NOC meeting in October in Portland. The BOD notes that Margaret should attend both events. 2nd Qtr Financial Reports accepted.

Organic Professionals Qualifications Database/Organic Career Network: Drew notes two options - option A simple database and a more complex multifunctional system as Option B. The BOD is favoring the more dynamic option which would provide better service and potential income. **Action: Joe and Drew will develop a plan for next steps.**

Membership Dues requests: SPC requests to extend the \$60 IOIA membership rate to supporting individuals from 2024 organic inspector introductory course in Fiji. BOD discussion supported this and the suggestion to extend the offer to Asia Pacific and Latin America as a trial.

Ethics Committee Survey outcomes: Survey completed regarding IOIA Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct. The Ethics Committee provided a report to the BOD. Ethics Committee to meet as the next step. BOD confirms that Ethics committee members are appointed by BOD. Approach to stakeholders to be after BOD approves drafts of both documents. Final approval at 2025 AGM. **Action: KP to communicate BOD direction to Brian Baker as ethics committee chair.**

September 19, 2024 – 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. EDT by Zoom

Attendance: Six board members in attendance. Absent: Joe Ward. Janine chaired the meeting. Others: Margaret Scoles, ED. Rachel Myers and Kate Newkirk for Policy Committee agenda item.

End-of-year 2024 Financial Projection, Internal Financial Review: Margaret/Drew are making efforts to increase membership and grant-writing. Internal financial review will be a hybrid with bulk of the work completed remotely then work completed on site. The review timeline is not finalized but may be pushed into the new year due to other work commitments. **Action: Allan to continue to organize the Internal Financial review, aiming to complete the onsite work in March 2025 in collaboration with Margarito.**

Set 2025 Membership Dues: Allan raised a Motion to maintain dues at current rates for 2025. No comment to the negative. Motion passed. Monthly payment option to continue. Margarito suggested developing incentives to encourage members to join/renew. The drop in inspector members relates to the increase in staff inspectors.

Policy Committee: Review of Draft Comments

- EICC Draft Comment – Facilitated by Rachel Myers. Rachel joined the meeting to check on questions for draft comment. Rachel will incorporate most of the attorney's comments. Final draft will be provided to the BOD before the October meeting. It will be featured at the next ACA Lunch & Learn October 29.
- NOSB Seed Comment – Facilitated by Kate Newkirk, Policy Committee Chair. Kate has reviewed the Organic Seed Alliance perspective. Discussion included the current situation where Handlers contracting for an organic crop supply a letter noting required seed type is not available in organic form. Margaret notes that encouragement by guidance has not worked to increase use of organic seed in the last ten years. Margarito notes that the non-compliance burden is falling on the wrong shoulders, the farmer not the supplier. BOD members agree. Kate/Margarito propose that third-party buyers/handler should have responsibility for the seed search. **Action: BOD members send comments to Kate.**

Board of Directors Minutes Highlights - *(full minutes available to inspector members on the IOIA website)*

Equity Learning Exchange: Output from the Equity Learning Cohort reviewed, a POP (Purpose-Outcome-Process) for IOIA scholarship program delivery was presented to the Board. **Actions: BOD members to read the POP again and provide comment for final draft. Thanks to Drew for his efforts in drafting the initial POP.**

October 17, 2024 – 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. EDT by Zoom

Attendance: Six board members in attendance. Absent: Joe Ward. Janine chaired the meeting. Others: Margaret Scoles, ED; Drew Gourdie, Business Development Director. Rachel Myers and Kate Newkirk for Policy Committee agenda item.

Treasurer's Report (3rd Qtr Financials, End-of-year 2024 Financial Projection, 990 IRS Return): AB spoke to the financial statements; the long-term trends are not good. IOIA has time to defer expenses and accelerate income; this is already underway. Financial report, Balance sheet and Treasurer's Report accepted. IRS return to be provided before it is submitted (deadline November 15).

EICC - Statement from Policy Committee, Lunch & Learn 10/29: Rachel Myers has supplied a final draft for the IOIA Position Statement on Employee and Independent Contractor Classification (EICC). The wording has been reviewed extensively by IOIA Policy Committee and independent expert legal advice. The BOD commends Rachel for work completed, commending the quality, depth and content of the document. BOD agrees to and endorses the IOIA Position Statement document on the EICC policy. **ACTION: Send the policy statement out to members.**

Fundraising/ Grant Seeking: Drew reported that 25 grant options have been identified, ~\$100,000 potential; we may not change the fiscal bottom line by Dec. 2024. The aim is to set the initiative in motion to gain income over time. His main focus at present is fundraising. Janine enquired and Margaret confirmed that IOIA has a (draft) Donor policy. The Donor policy may need to be refreshed to reflect current IOIA/BOD values and direction.

Training Advisory Committee: Post-training Evaluation Reports, Continue Incentive? IOIA has two years of data from surveys. Margaret suggests we put the evaluation incentive on hold. MS shared the report summary evaluating training from Oct 2021 to Sept 2024. 418 trainees with the greatest percentage responding to the end-of-year survey. The BOD agreed to put the survey on hold until the data could be reviewed.

Ethics Committee update: Kathe provided an update on Ethics committee progress requesting BOD direction on their outreach initiative. The Ethics Committee is ready to reach out to stakeholders in the Organic Industry and collect feedback on the draft Code of Conduct and the need for a Complaints process. Kathe also noted that the Ethics Committee is an IOIA resource by which other IOIA policy may be reviewed and improved. The outdated Donor policy, currently being updated for another IOIA initiative, for example. **Actions: BOD to review documents, "Questions for Interested parties and "Ethics Contacts". If the BOD has any issues with the contact list or questions that will be asked OR if the BOD would like to add contacts - contact Kathe prior to Close of Business Oct 25. Drew & Margaret to review and update a draft Donor policy to present to BOD then Ethics Committee for review.**

Equity Learning Exchange POP: Reviewed the POP – Barriers include lack of participation in our scholarship program, low rate of sustained success for recipients. Outcomes - more applicants, improved success rate, better accommodation of English as second language. MS says that KY training will help us progress the POP. Need the board to own the POP. JG proposes that our DEI Statement should go into our Policy Manual. It is still in draft form. Nov and Dec are the last 2 months of the ELE cohort meetings. **Actions: MS & RE to take the name change idea to the Scholarship Committee. BOD to review POP: Does the BOD endorse the POP? Should the Diversity Statement be added to the POP? Should the DEI statement be added to Policy Manual?**

ED Report: Brief oral report, in lieu of the usual written report. **Action: Margaret & Kathe to progress partnerships for the March 2025 Inspector training.**

Reschedule next meeting (November) to December 3.

See Minutes, page 19

IOIA NEEDS BOARD CANDIDATES! DEADLINE IS JANUARY 24.

CONTACT TERRANCE LAYHEW, IOIA NOMINATIONS CHAIR,
AT T.ORGANICINSPECTOR@GMAIL.COM

Committee News - Scholarship Recipients Announced

The Scholarship Committee is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2024-2025 round. There were 29 applicants in total, most of them very qualified which made the decisions tougher for the committee!

Rutherford Scholarship - Elizabeth Rutila, U.S.

Elizabeth holds a veterinary degree from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. She has extensive experience in large animal production, including sheep, dairy cows, and dairy goats in Mexico, New Zealand, and the United States. Additionally, she worked as a Federal Inspector for Natural Resources in Mexico, ensuring compliance with national laws.

"I believe organic inspectors have a crucial role in ensuring that agricultural operations comply with NOP standards, contributing to the sustainability of food production. Now that my daughter is 5, I am seeking an entry-level remote job that aligns with my background and family needs. I aspire to become an organic inspector and am currently looking for work as a reviewer to gain experience in organic certification and compliance.

"I am eager to return to a career related to my professional background, particularly as a certification file reviewer. The IOIA certification would enhance my credentials and attract prospective employers. I feel so honoured to be the recipient of the scholarship, it really means a lot to me."

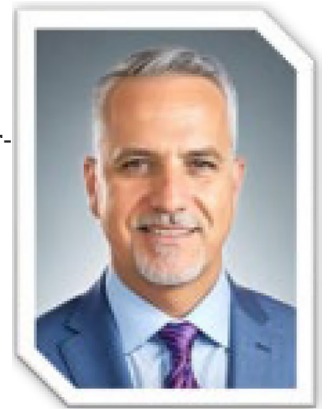


Nasser Amer, Germany

I am passionate about sustainable agriculture and organic farming, a journey that began during my M.Sc. in Mediterranean organic farming at IAMB, Italy. I've held several positions, including Head of the Research Department for Organic Agriculture in Syria, and at Naturland – Verband für ökologischen Landbau e.V., gaining extensive experience in certification and compliance. These experiences motivate me to pursue Organic Inspection Training to contribute to the organic sector globally.

Over the next five years, my goal is to become a certified organic inspector, providing expert services to organic farms, especially in developing regions. I aim to support small-holder farmers, guiding them in adopting sustainable practices and ensuring the organic integrity of their products. This aligns with my vision of supporting the growth of organic farming in underserved regions, such as parts of Africa and Asia.

The IOIA training will equip me with the expertise to conduct organic inspections and ensure compliance with global standards. I also hope to contribute to policy discussions and certification processes in international projects. With my flexible schedule and commitment, I plan to focus on both local and international projects, leveraging my multilingual skills to assist farmers in achieving organic certification.



Gisela Esmeralda Ascencio Zárate, Chiapas Mexico

I am an Engineer in Agroecology from the Autonomous University of Chapingo, Mexico. This education has kept me engaged with various organic production processes and allowed me to work closely with producers. For the past 4 years, I have enthusiastically dedicated myself to organic certification as an Organic Inspector, knowledgeable in the Organic Products Law of Mexico and the USDA's National Organic Program (NOP).

In my role, I have learned the importance of respect and honesty towards organic operators and maintaining compliance with regulations. I believe in conducting audits with integrity and safeguarding the confidentiality of information to ensure trust in the final results. Inspectors play a crucial role in promoting sustainable agriculture, benefiting producers, consumers, ecosystems, and communities.

I am committed to ongoing learning through courses and workshops to improve my inspection services. The Reynaldo De La Rosa scholarship would enable me to enhance my work and share knowledge with other inspectors and certification bodies.

Additionally, I support rural development projects in Oaxaca, promoting sustainable agriculture among small producers aiming for organic certification as a group. My perseverance, adaptability, and continuous improvement drive me to achieve life goals and help others reach theirs.



Meet IOIA Board Member Kathe Purvis



Kathe has been a Board member since 2023 and an active participant in the IOIA Asia Pacific Committee.

IOIA Trainer Kathe Purvis of Western Australia - certification auditor of organic, ethical, and regenerative; facilitator; and trainer. Over the past thirty years, Kathe has specialized in Organic, Fairtrade, and Regenerative certification audits. She is an APSCA accredited auditor for Ethical & Sustainability programs. Kathe serves as a consultant in the field of Environment Social Governance (ESG). She holds tertiary qualifications in Training Design, Development & Delivery, and holds a bachelor's degree in Sociology and Philosophy. For the past several years she has worked in most Australian states and across the Asia Pacific region as a contractor for various organizations delivering training programs and audit services including both internal and external audit.

Previously a farmer, she now cultivates her own food using a sustainable urban farming system. Her lifetime of practice includes expertise in organic and sustainable farming as well as nature regeneration.

"In the next five years I would like to see IOIA expand connections with aligned environmental and ethical standards and inspectors working in these areas." – from Kathe's BOD candidate statement

Board of Directors Minutes Highlights - from page 17 (full minutes available to inspector members on the IOIA website)

December 3, 2024 – 6:00 to 8:15 p.m. EST by Zoom

Attendance: All board members in attendance. Janine chaired the meeting. Others: Margaret Scoles, ED, and Drew Gourdie, Business Development Director.

AOAC testing for synthetic Nitrogen - Request for letter of support by SOS: Presentation by Kim Dietz (KD) of SOS - advocacy project to utilize AOAC (<https://www.aoac.org/>) for testing method validation for organic N fertilizer authenticity in both soil and water. JG & AB asked about cost of testing for farmers. KD noted that the preferred testing methods are not yet finalized. Joe asked what test types will differentiate nitrogen types, noting difficulties, in his experience, in detecting different types of nitrogen. BOD discussion included systems approach vs testing. Acknowledgment that additional testing may be a useful tool balanced against concerns raised for over reliance on testing. **Discussion tabled acknowledging the need to investigate and consider this project further before support is approved.**

Isidor Sustainability Institute & IOIA relationship in Korea: Isidor Yu requested recognition of Isidor Sustainability Institute as an IOIA branch. The primary reason for the request is Isidor requires support to obtain South Korea (SK) government funding to conduct IOIA training for South Korea organic inspectors. Kathe suggested exploring other benefits of a relationship with an entity in the Asia Pacific., the BOD will explore the potential for setting up a relationship with Isidor Sustainability Institute rather than a legal entity such as an office. **Action: MS to communicate further with IY.**

Fundraising/Grant Seeking: DG presented a report on IOIA fundraising/grant seeking strategies for IOIA. DG notes some big strategic issues at IOIA systems level to be considered. In 2025 potential grant revenue has been identified and time will be allocated. IOIA has a plan to underpin and support grant/funding applications. BOD discussion broadly approved the vision presented by Drew. Kathe proposed a subcommittee to review and articulate IOIA vision for training topics and delivery in future. Margaret identified the need to identify training recruits more specifically and raised concerns for revenue trends and identifies the need for DGs plan for quarterly monitoring points. **ACTION: BOD to reflect on current training strategies and articulate future strategy in a document which IOIA in general, and Drew for funding applications, can apply.**

2025 Annual Meeting: MS confirms a contract is signed and hot water pools will be available at Chico Hot Springs. Tentative schedule is Tuesday March 25th BOD Meeting and AGM meeting (4 hours) and informal reception/opening event. Keynote with lunch. KP presented on draft program for 2.5 day training including soil health, environment and ethical topics, delivered by IOIA and supported by ROC and GOTS. KP, MS and Elizabeth Whitlow (ROC) and Ryan Sitler (GOTS) are currently developing content. The aim is to trial materials that might be approved as initial training recognized by ROC and GOTS (and potentially other organizations delivering environment and ethical standard certifications).

Draft 2025 AGM Agenda reviewed.



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2025 Calendar

January 7 - February 25 [Farm Business Lab](#), Keene, New Hampshire

January 10-11 [Practical Farmers of Iowa](#), Des Moines, IA

January 13 [The Wild Side of Farming](#): Managing Habitats for Farm-Friendly Wildlife

January 22-25 44th Annual [Guelph Organic Conference](#), Guelph, Ontario

January 23-25 [ASAN Food & Farm Forum](#), Nauvoo, Alabama

January 23-25 Organic Association of Kentucky (OAK) [Annual Organic Farming Conference](#), Frankfort, KY

January 23-25 [Northern Plains Food and Farming Conference](#), Aberdeen, South Dakota

January 26-28 [Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association Annual Conference](#), Pflugerville, Texas

January 27 Inspector Social and Networking at ACA Conference, Richmond, VA. See page 5 for more info.

January 28 - 31, 2025 [Accredited Certifiers Association Conference](#), Richmond, VA. See page 4 for more info.

February 1 [NOFA/MASS Winter Conference](#), UMASS, Amherst, MA

February 11 - 14 [Biofach Organic Trade Fair](#): Nuremberg, Germany

February 13 - 15 [OEFFA Farm Show](#), Newark, OH

February 20 - 22 [Marbleseed Conference](#), La Crosse, WI

March 4 - 7 [Natural Products Expo West](#), Anaheim, CA

March 12 - 14 [Organicology](#), Portland, OR

March 25 [IOIA AGM and Advanced Training](#), Chico Hot Springs, Montana. See page 1 for info.

April 25 - 27 [CHFA NOW Natural Organic Wellness conference & trade show](#), Vancouver, B.C.

June 2 - 4 [Biofach America](#) - Atlanta, GA.

*PLEASE SEE PAGES 2 & 3 FOR THE CURRENT LIST OF
IOIA LIVE ONLINE, ONSITE, WEBINAR AND SELF-PACED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES*