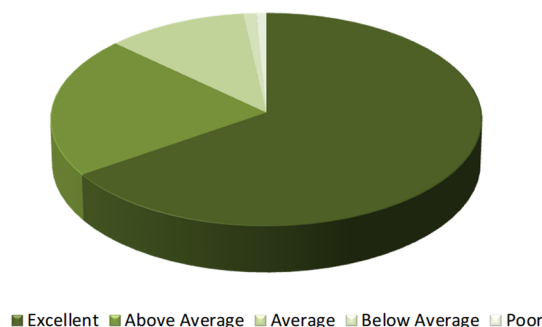




## MOFFA Organic Intensives 2018 Final Report and Participant Evaluations

On January 6<sup>th</sup> MOFFA held its fourth annual Organic Intensives. This year we changed both the date and the venue—rather than convening at Brody Hall during Agriculture and Natural Resources Week at MSU, we moved the date earlier in the year and the location to the Plant and Soil Sciences Building where there were facilities for hands-on demonstrations and an opportunity for everyone to eat lunch and take breaks together, which seems to have facilitated networking among participants. A January date may increase the chances of adverse weather, and we did have some weather-related cancellations, but just under 90 people attended and participated in in-depth educational sessions on one of three topics: Diverse Grain Options for Farm and Homestead (26), Organic Transplant Production: Secure a Stellar Season with Successful Starts (31), and Small to Medium Scale Livestock for the Integrated Farm (28). We think participants were happy to get together in January rather than early March when some of us are already getting started with farming and gardening if the weather cooperates.

**MOFFA Organic Intensives 2018  
Participant Evaluations - All Aspects**



34% of those returning evaluations said they were MOFFA members, and an additional 18% were not, but said that they plan to join. Just under half of the participants are farmers, 15% represented a food or farm related business or non-profit organization, 13% identified as organic gardeners, 9% were educators (including MSUE and Conservation District personnel), and 7% were students.

Participants were asked to evaluate their experience at the end of the day, and 82% responded—68% of those in the small grains session, 85% in the transplants session, and 91% of those attending livestock. Once again, participants overwhelmingly felt that their time was well spent. The chart at left shows ratings for various aspects of the program, across all three sessions. The most gratifying comment was “One of the most valuable educational experiences of my life.” But there were multiple comments along the lines of “Very informative,” “Awesome class!” “Liked the hands-on,” “Like the

Rating “Excellent” or “Above Average” Across All Sessions	
Content / Information	93%
Presentation / Presenters	93%
Handouts	89%
Venue / Facilities / Location	78%
Registration Process	83%
Lunch	86%
Value (return on investment)	86%

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'in-depth' program," "Loved the lunch in the Atrium," and lots of people just said "Thank You!"

There were some complaints about signage—it was a bit confusing to find the right door in, and we plan to do better with that next year. And there were complaints about lack of vegan options at lunch—we had been careful to provide vegan dishes for lunch but neglected to label them clearly. Some people would have preferred to have the option to attend two less in-depth workshops rather than just one full-day offering.

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### **Small-Scale Livestock for the Integrated Farm**

This session provided its attendees with four very informed speakers on the topic. Aaron Brower, of Bluestem Farm, shared the experiences he and his wife Mary have had at their farm in northern Michigan. With a plan for making whole farm decisions, they have added to their farm's output over the years until now they are providing vegetables, and pastured hogs, broilers, and eggs to their subscribers. Jeff Mattocks of the Fertrell Co., drawing on his deep background of experience in animal nutrition, addressed feeding and housing requirements and ration compositions for pastured poultry and hogs. In an in depth presentation on corn and soy alternative diets, he also shared extensive information on the feeding values of many grains and detailed supplement formulations. At the end of the day Leah and Jessie Smith of Nodding Thistle Farm in central Michigan shared their perspective on the integration of animals into a farm based on the homestead model, discussing the dairy products, beef, broilers, and eggs they raise for their own use and for sale, and the advantage of an integrated farm to their own diet and the farm's health and income.



### **Organic Transplant Production: Secure a Stellar Season with Successful Starts**

The new time and location for Organic Intensives worked perfectly for the Transplant Production session. January is a great time to get started thinking about sowing seeds and growing transplants. Having the classroom adjacent to a head house work area and greenhouses provided the opportunity for hands on demonstrations. Collin Thompson, Manager of the UPREC North Farm, an experienced transplant grower and a new MOFFA Board member, demonstrated a variety of production and seeding methods. He also brought some microgreens from the UP and demonstrated microgreen sowing and harvesting. Growing microgreens is another way to benefit from the investment made in transplant facilities. The Transplants topic also gave the opportunity to share class



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materials from the on-line organic transplants class Dr. Biernbaum teaches for MSU; participants will get the opportunity to try out the online course in the coming weeks.

### **Diverse Grain Options for Farms and Homesteads**

The Small Grains Organic Intensive facilitated many conversations about how a more cooperative system of grains production could be developed in our state. John Sherck of Sherck Seeds led off the morning discussion by demonstrating a homestead model for growing heritage grains. His trialing of small plots of these grains has provided important cultural information such as which grains might be best adapted for our bioregion. John's model could help encourage backyard gardeners and small farmers to replicate these trials. This would provide even more information and help increase limited seed stocks. After his delightful presentation, John encouraged attendees to take samples of seeds from many of the small grains he has raised.



In the afternoon, Tom and Vicki Zilke of Zilke Vegetable Farm and Megan Goldenberg of New Growth Associates and Macon Creek Malt House led participants through their organic oat project. Tom and Vicki covered the planting through harvesting continuum to ensure food grade oats; Megan spoke to the processing and marketing of these oats and other grains. This grower/marketer/processor relationship is an important link. Farmers need a dependable market

and processors and marketers need a quality, food grade product.

Ashley McFarland, coordinator of Upper Peninsula Research and Extension Center, finished off the afternoon. Ashley spoke about organic grain trials in the Upper Peninsula, especially focusing on barley. We all owe Ashley a huge debt, as she has helped to encourage and promote grain trials across the state. This year, she and Megan will host an organic oat trial at the Kellogg Biological Station.

The Small Grains Intensive was instrumental in helping all of us better understand how we might encourage this movement. The tremendous growth in craft beer brewing has created demand in Michigan for many types of small grains. Other parts of the country have developed some excellent models of cooperation between breeders, farmers, millers, and artisan bakers. It would be great to see an adaptation of these models here in Michigan so we can see more delicious artisan breads, beers, and other food products made from organic grains.

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We asked participants to identify knowledge or techniques they learned that they plan to put into practice, and over 75% of the respondents took the time to do that. The information they provided will help us improve our future offerings.

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We received many, many suggestions for future Intensives. Those mentioned most often include: various types of production systems, aspects of soil improvement, marketing, more on livestock, and permaculture.

In addition to participant fees, the program was made possible by our Sponsors for 2018:

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George & Anne Bird  
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MSU Center for Regional Food Systems  
Growth Products  
Grice Farms  
The Fertrell Co.  
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Organic Valley



Fifteen of the participants (19%) attended on full-coverage scholarships made possible by a SARE mini-grant, and 13 (17%) received registration fee subsidies of \$55 to \$80 thanks to a generous donation by George and Anne Bird.

The Organic Intensives planning committee is gratified and encouraged to see the continued positive feedback expressed by the participants, and will begin planning soon for Organic Intensives 2019. If you have suggestions for next year's event, or would

like to participate in the planning, please let us know. The date currently selected is Saturday, January 12, 2019.

