



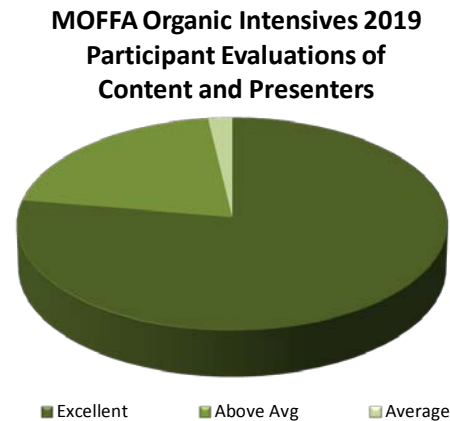
## MOFFA Organic Intensives 2019 Final Report and Participant Evaluations

On January 12<sup>th</sup> MOFFA held its fifth annual Organic Intensives. This year for the first time we offered four separate sessions rather than three. More than 100 people attended and participated in in-depth educational sessions on one of four topics: Healthy Organic Livestock (with an emphasis on small ruminants (18), Organic Mushroom Production (31), Emerging Technology in Organic Row Crop Production (15), and Advanced Organic Soil Management (37).

Participants were asked to evaluate their experience at the end of the day, and 84% responded—78% of those in the livestock session, 84% in the mushrooms session, 80% in technology, and 89% of those attending the soils session.

Close to 40% of those returning evaluations said they were MOFFA members, and an additional 13% were not, but said that they plan to join. Just under half of the participants were farmers, 19% represented a food or farm related business or non-profit organization, 13% identified as organic gardeners, 6% were educators (including MSUE and Conservation District personnel), and 10% were students.

Rating “Excellent” or “Above Average” Across All Sessions	
Content / Information	97%
Presentation / Presenters	99%
Handouts	88%
Venue / Facilities / Location	95%
Registration Process	91%
Lunch	86%
Value (return on investment)	97%



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 four sessions.

The most gratifying comment was “This was the most educational experience of my life.” But there were multiple comments along the lines of “Absolutely phenomenal presenter,” “Amazing day! Surprised & delighted with expertise level of speaker & attendees,” “Exceeded my expectations,” “Both present-

ers were excellent in depth of knowledge and ability to share it,” and lots of people just said “Thank You!”

There were some concerns about not being able to hear the speaker well in one session, and presenters occasionally getting off track, and there were concerns about lack of gluten-free and dairy-free options at lunch—but a couple people thanked us for the vegan dishes which made for a full lunch. In prior years some attendees expressed a desire to attend two less in-

depth workshops rather than one full-day offering, but that wasn't the case this year—many people said they appreciated the depth of knowledge acquired from the full day.

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## Healthy Organic Livestock

This session provided its attendees with four very informed speakers on the topic. Matt Shane, an organic sheep farmer and currently Director of District 12 of the MSU Extension Service, took the lead and spoke on considerations and recordkeeping for certified organic livestock, and parasite management. Karry Trickey of the NRCS addressed pasture management. Mike Metzger, an Extension Educator in small ruminants (among other areas) spoke on keeping meat and dairy goats healthy and productive, and Aimee Swenson Buckley talked about issues for small scale sheep producers, from breed selection to market access. Most of the participants were new or relatively new to small ruminants, and their comments indicated that they felt they learned a lot about the considerations involved in small ruminant production. One participant said, “Encourages me to consider small scale goat/sheep production,” and another expressed appreciation of the extensive materials provided—“Lots of important info included in the book. Very helpful. I will keep this for future reference.”



## Organic Mushroom Production

The enigmatic world of mushrooms and the ease of their organic production piqued the curiosity of 31 participants at this year's Organic Intensives. Our attendees, who ranged from novice to experienced hobbyist, heard from two presenters whose combined experience and knowledge encompassed lab grown to yard grown, the scientific to the practical, and everything in between. Chris Wright began the session with an overview of fungal biology, mushroom growing, and the species most commonly grown. Chris, who conducts post-doctorate mycological research at MSU, has also established the Easygrow Mushrooms and Composting company selling spawn for mushroom production. This section alone generated enough questions and interest from the audience to constitute another OI topic.

The next section presented by Mike Levine of Nature and Nurture covered gourmet mushroom production on logs, and dove into practical application. Mike has been producing mushrooms on logs since 2000 and currently produces shiitakes for sale to local restaurants and stores. Again, the intense interest of the audience had to be kept on track. They next presented more practical knowledge on outdoor cultivation of mushrooms in beds and the preparation of the substrates used. Finally, the hands on demonstra-



tions, when the participants saw Mike wield an angle grinder and Chris's 55 gallon drum setup used to pasteurize straw, really capped off this worthwhile session; to say nothing of the opportunity for the "hands-on-learners" to hammer plugs into logs and plunge their hands into soggy straw. Each participant went home with a bag of straw inoculated with oyster mushroom spawn and an oak log plugged with Shitake spawn. At least one participant was harvesting oyster mushrooms at home three weeks later.

## Technology in Organic Field Crops

Our first presenter (Brent Shettler) talked about a fairly new tool that will be available in Michigan this year that actually shoots electricity through the weed's stem, boiling the water within the stem causing the cell walls to burst. He also talked about the use of tillage with a purpose. Mike Houghtaling, our main presenter, discussed precision planting, downforce pressure, auto steer, and return on investment, speaking from knowledge gained and studies he conducted on his own farm. Participants seemed pleasantly surprised with how these advancements in technology might relate to their organic farms. Finally, Ben Sattelberg discussed the latest cultivation tools including camera guided cultivation. We had very positive feedback from those who attended the session, with comments like "great speakers" and "exceeded my expectations."



## Advanced Organic Soil Management

Dan Kittredge, the founder and executive director of the Bionutrient Food Association, was the presenter for this intensive. Dan is a seminal thinker who spoke both passionately and practically about the interweaving dance of soil biology, fully photosynthesizing plants, and human health. For those who might wish to go into greater depth with these principles, Dan will be back in Michigan on the 2nd and 3rd of March in Howell, Michigan.

Throughout the day, Dan provided lots of practical information on how we can produce food with heightened nutrition and at the same time have lower disease and pest pressure. He pointed out that we could greatly reduce inputs and thus lower the cost of food if we use cultural practices that cooperate with the soil biology to release nutrients already present in our soils.

Dan mentioned that he likes to "see" his soil no more than two weeks a year. He does a light very shallow tilling on his vegetable beds to prep them for spring planting. He then mulches heavily after planting. In August when the mulch has broken down considerably, he broadcasts a cover crop cocktail.

Dan pointed out that if we practiced what he and many others in the regenerative agriculture have spoken about, we could raise the soil organic matter level by ½ to 1% per acre per year. This translates to sequestering a lot of carbon from the atmosphere.

This intensive provided us with a foundation for a practical vision for renewed and deepened health of our food, the soil food web, our bodies, and the earth!

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A unique value of the Organic Intensives is the course materials compiled for each participant. Presentation power points and supplemental reading materials were provided to maximize the learning in and after class. We appreciate the work our presenters did to help us make this information available.

As part of the evaluation, we asked participants to identify knowledge or techniques they learned that they plan to put into practice, and over 79% of the respondents took the time to do that. The information they provided will help us improve our future offerings.

We received many, many suggestions for future Intensives. The three topics mentioned most often were more about livestock, more about mushrooms, and more about soil ... and most but not all of those comments were from people who attended those sessions this year. A wide variety of other topics were mentioned, but the most common were about homesteading, hoophouse culture, and permaculture.

In addition to participant fees, the program was made possible by our Sponsors for 2019:

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Plymouth Orchards

Eleven of the participants attended on full-coverage scholarships made possible by a SARE mini-grant, and 13 received registration fee subsidies ranging from \$55 to \$80 thanks to a generous donation by George and Anne Bird as well as our other sponsors.

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 11, 2020.

