



MIDWEST
TRANSITION TO ORGANIC
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

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YEAR IN REVIEW

MIDWEST TRANSITION TO ORGANIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM: THE FIRST YEAR IN REVIEW

By Allison Walent, Midwest TOPP Program Director

It was just one year ago that MOSA announced it was named by the National Organic Program to lead the Midwest Region's Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP). The past year has been filled with learning moments, programming, systems development, relationship building, and more learning moments. MOSA hired two new team members to lead the work, connected with many potential partners throughout the 11 state region, participated in our first TOPP sponsored events, and developed plans to support the program's four main priorities: farmer to farmer mentorship, community building, technical assistance, and workforce development. Our 15 core partner organizations are primarily responsible for delivering programming to their constituents and engaging local organizations that will provide additional support to their efforts. The core partners have also been instrumental in lending their expertise and experience as we developed programming. Through this network, we are investing approximately \$3.75 million dollars over the next 16 months to support farmers who are transitioning land to certified organic production.

We know that learning from those who have walked through organic transition offers many benefits to those interested in embracing organic production methods. We also celebrate that learning is a two-way street and we expect experienced mentors will learn through the mentoring process too! Farmer to farmer mentoring is the foundation of TOPP. While not every farmer is keen on or ready for one to one mentorship, this program will offer opportunities to attend field days, workshops, or round table discussions; to participate in group mentorship; or to receive individualized support completing (or revising) an organic system plan. In addition to offering mentorship, technical assistance and community building, TOPP will support workforce development in the organic sector.

In September we launched our first MW TOPP Newsletter and a national website for TOPP. In future newsletters you will find information such as updates about MW TOPP programming, event highlights, information about becoming a mentor or mentee, and highlights of our program partners.

Also in September we, in collaboration with the other five regional lead organizations, launched an official TOPP website, www.organictransition.org. TOPP's new website is the national hub for program opportunities, news, events, and resources. The TOPP website features a host of essential functions designed to support and nurture the growth of organic farming across diverse regions. Key features of the TOPP website include: mentor and mentee program sign-up, comprehensive event listings, organic resources, and organic news.

The TOPP website is a testament to the commitment and cooperation of TOPP's six regional leads and countless partners, who collaborated diligently to create this user-friendly and informative platform. Their collective effort ensures that the website caters to the unique needs and challenges faced by producers nationwide.

Whew, what a first year it has been! We are looking forward to our second year: our first mentorship pairs under TOPP, an in-person core partner meeting, spreading the word at conferences in January and February, and above all increasing organic acres! Stay tuned for future program updates, and to learn more about TOPP, check out our website at www.organictransition.org!