



# SOUTHEAST

## TRANSITION TO ORGANIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM



SE TOPP NEWS, July 2024

### SE TOPP MENTORSHIP SPOTLIGHT

The Southeast Transition to Organic Initiative is proud to spotlight the inspiring journey of two of our program participants from Alabama: mentor Marguerite McClintock and mentee Dr. Dana Nettles. Their story is a testament to the power of mentorship in transforming conventional farming practices into thriving organic enterprises.

#### Meet the Mentee: Dr. Dana Nettles

Dr. Dana Nettles, a determined and passionate farmer, joined the mentorship program with a clear vision: to obtain organic certification to grow her tea business. With a deep commitment to sustainable practices, Dana sought the guidance and support needed to navigate the complex process of organic certification.

#### Meet the Mentor: Marguerite McClintock

Marguerite is a seasoned organic farmer with over 10 years of experience in sustainable agriculture. Based in Alabama, Marguerite has been a cornerstone of the organic farming community, known for her dedication to environmental stewardship and innovative farming techniques. As a mentor, Marguerite brings a wealth of knowledge and a passion for guiding the next generation of farmers.

#### Navigating the Inspection Process

One of the most challenging steps in obtaining organic certification is the inspection process. Dana said that although the paperwork for applying for USDA Organic Certification is time consuming, with help from a mentor, it made the process run smoother. With Marguerite’s mentorship, Dana meticulously prepared for the inspection, ensuring that all farm practices met the stringent organic standards. Marguerite’s experience was instrumental in helping Dana document her practices, maintain accurate records, and implement necessary adjustments to comply with certification requirements.

#### A Celebrated Success

This spring, Dr. Dana Nettles proudly received her organic certification, marking a significant milestone in her farming journey. The successful certification not only validates her hard work but also opens new opportunities for her farm in the organic market.

SE TOPP is thrilled to witness such success stories. Marguerite and Dr. Dana’s journey exemplifies the impact of mentorship on the organic farming community. We encourage more experienced farmers to join our program as mentors and support the growing number of farmers transitioning to organic practices.



Photo: Dr. Dana Nettles (Left) and Dr. Joseph Nettles (Right), co-founders of Dr. Nettles Natural Beauty.

# BECOME A MENTOR OR MENTEE!

Are you ready to take your farming practices to the next level? Join the SE TOPP Mentorship Program, where experienced organic producers guide and support those transitioning to organic farming mentorship experience.

This program not only connects you with knowledgeable mentors who share your passion for sustainable agriculture but also provides invaluable resources and personalized guidance tailored to your farm's unique needs. Mentors in the program undergo comprehensive training to ensure they can effectively assist mentees through one-on-one support, virtual or in-person farm visits, and regular meetings during the growing season. Mentors receive compensation and are matched based on expertise, ensuring a productive and enriching mentorship experience.

## Spanish Mentorship Resources

Florida Organic Growers and national TOPP partners have developed mentorship training resources specifically for participants in the mentorship program. Find Spanish resources on the TOPP website: [www.organictransition.org/es/](http://www.organictransition.org/es/)

## Mentees

- Benefit from direct mentorship, developing a customized transition plan towards organic certification or refining existing organic practices.
- Gain insights into organic farming methods, soil health management, pest control strategies, and more, all while connecting with a supportive community of like-minded farmers and mentors.
- Receive a \$500 educational stipend to further enhance their learning and development in organic agriculture

## Mentors

- Guide Southeastern farmers transitioning to organic practices,
- Share expertise to inspire enthusiasm for organic agriculture.
- Help mentees navigate certification and sustainable farming methods through one-on-one support, virtual or in-person farm visits, and structured mentorship
- The program includes training, and requires 40 hours annually, including operation visits and seasonal meetings.
- Mentors receive \$3,000 each per year for the first two mentee matches, contributing to the growth of organic farming while building a strong network of producers

## LEARN MORE AND APPLY

[www.organictransition.org/mentorship-program](http://www.organictransition.org/mentorship-program)

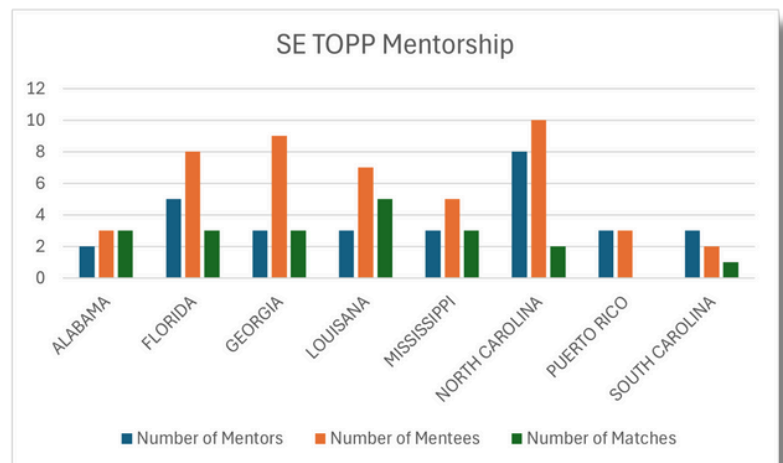
## MENTORSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

*"Thanks to the guidance we received from Grateful Pastures and Georgia Organics, we were able to become a certified organic pasture poultry farm. The Farmer Field Day was a fantastic opportunity to connect with experts and gain the clarity we needed to make the leap into organic certification."*  
- Justin Davis, Grace Valley Farms

Through Mentorship and Technical Assistance efforts, 12 farmers have achieved organic certification in 2024, resulting in 21 certified acres. The SE TOPP Mentorship program currently has 30 mentors and 47 mentees participating, with over 1,130 acres in transition.



These accomplishments underscore SE TOPP's commitment to expanding organic farming in the region.



# EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

SE TOPP has made significant strides in promoting organic farming across the Southeast.



In 2024, SE TOPP partners have hosted and attended 139 events, engaging with 1,492 attendees including reaching at least 785 producers, while proudly fostering a growing community of sustainable agriculture enthusiasts.

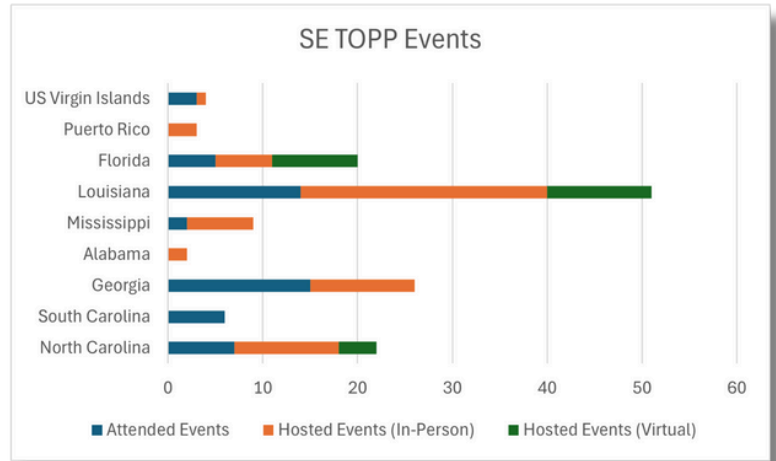


PHOTO: Ben McLean III discusses the organic farming practices used by McLean Family Farm to enhance the quality of their soil and plant nutrition

## Farmer Led Field Day Helps Transitional Organic Growers Gain Knowledge on Organic Farming Practices

FOG, in collaboration with McLean Family Farms, hosted a field day on March 28, 2024, in Clermont, FL. Participants explored a range of benefits of organic farming, focusing on enhancing soil quality and nutrient content in crops. Ben McLean III and Benny McLean Jr. led the field day and shared insights from their 20-year organic certification journey. FOG staff Dr. Ram Balasubramanian and Dr. Juan Carlos Rodriguez also provided insights into the certification process. Farmers said they appreciated learning about biological and chemical soil management practices suitable for Florida and found the event informative and thought-provoking. Participants' pre- and post-test scores revealed an increase in knowledge at the event. The field day underscored the value of organic farming methods in enhancing crop health and sustainability, leaving participants inspired and better equipped for their own agricultural endeavors.

## Empowering Farmers at the Florida Organic Growers' SE TOPP Summit Track

In April, FOG hosted an SE TOPP Track at the Organic Food and Farming Summit in Tampa, Florida. Led by experienced farmers, inspectors, certifiers, and researchers, 42 participants attended workshops offering practical insights and strategies on recordkeeping, certification processes, marketing, and accessing NRCS funding. Dr. Jennifer Tucker from the USDA National Organic Program delivered a keynote address, reinforcing the collaborative spirit essential for a thriving organic industry. Her insights resonated deeply, inspiring attendees to uphold sustainability and shared values in their agricultural practices.



PHOTO: Dr. Jennifer Tucker gives the keynote address to Summit participants



**BROWSE**  
**TOPP Resources**

Explore comprehensive resources available on the Transition to Organic Partnership (TOPP) website! Whether you're interested in our farmer-to-farmer mentorship program, seeking technical assistance, or accessing organic transition resources, TOPP has you covered. Discover valuable tools, upcoming events, and the latest news to support your journey towards organic farming at [www.organictransition.org](http://www.organictransition.org).



In the podcast episode "Growing Together: SE TOPP's Farmer to Farmer Mentorship Program" hear from Emily Deruelle, SE TOPP Program Specialist, and Amanda Rose Newton, SE TOPP Technical Assistance Specialist, as they

delve into the SE TOPP Mentorship Program. This insightful episode explores the program's objectives, benefits, and the invaluable farmer-to-farmer mentorship it fosters. Access the episode here:

<https://bit.ly/4dxwfr4>



**Organic Inspection Webinar Guides Producers Through Inspection Process and Organic Compliance**

Whether you're new to organic farming or a seasoned producer, this webinar equips you with essential knowledge and confidence to navigate inspections successfully. Led by seasoned professionals in organic certification and compliance, this workshop covers everything from thorough pre-inspection preparations to effective post-inspection follow-up. Access this resource on FOG's YouTube channel here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ra2ju3U3G9g>



Florida Organic Growers and SE TOPP Present:  
**ORGANIC 101:**  
Understanding regulations, practices and first steps to certification

**Organic 101 Webinar Provides Essential Insights for Transitional Organic Growers on Certification Basics**

This comprehensive session offers a clear introduction to the organic certification process, providing crucial information for both newcomers and those seeking a refresher. Learn about the regulatory frameworks, best practices for compliance, and receive step-by-step guidance on starting your certification journey. Whether you're just beginning or looking to deepen your understanding, this resource is designed to help you navigate the certification process with confidence. Access the recorded webinar on FOG's YouTube channel here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9wRCM0R0S4Q&feature=youtu.be>



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## Upcoming Events

Visit the SE TOPP website page to find and register for free and upcoming events!

[www.organictransition.org/region/southeast/events/](http://www.organictransition.org/region/southeast/events/)

	AUG 16	Managing Pests, Weeds and Diseases using organic practices: Strategies and Recommendations from a Successful Organic Farm	>
	AUG 22	Allowed Inputs for Organic Farms: OMRI Certification, Certifier Roles, and Best Practices	>
	AUG 26	Organic TA Office Hours	>
	SEP 08	Alabama CRAFT: North AL Market Access for Sustainable, Organic & Specialty Growers	>
	SEP 11	Clemson University Organic Certification Basics	>

Thank you to our SE TOPP Partners for making this program a success!



**Questions for SE TOPP?**

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<https://www.organictransition.org/region/southeast>