



# MIDWEST TRANSITION TO ORGANIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

## December Highlights

### **Partner Spotlight: *The Land Connection in Illinois***

Land Connection (TLC) was founded in 2001 in Evanston, Illinois as an educational nonprofit dedicated to preserving farmland, training new farmers, and connecting consumers with local producers by author and good food advocate, Terra Brockman. TLC still embodies the founding mission by embracing a vision for healthy farms, healthy food, and healthy communities. The Land Connection trains farmers in resilient, restorative farming techniques; informs the public about the sources of its food and why that matters; and works to protect and enhance farmland so that we, and future generations, will have clean air and water, fertile soil, and healthy, delicious food.



With growing interest in organic production in central Illinois and across the state, TLC has developed and launched the Organic Grain Mentorship Program to reach row crop farmers. They are also collaborating with partner organizations, Food Works and Farmers Rising, in their Farm Beginnings programs that support specialty crop and livestock producers. These partnerships and programs connect new, beginning, and transitioning farmers with experienced organic farmers to provide guidance and support during organic transition and certification.

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### **2024 Meeting of the Minds Recap**

Midwest TOPP partners met this past November for the annual Meetings of the Minds, a three-day retreat for our 17 (...and growing) core partner organizations to convene and collaborate around the broad range of experience, passion, and potential to increase organic transition and certified organic production through mentorship, technical assistance and community support across the 11-state region.



**2024 Meeting of the Minds Recap-continued.** Meeting activities centered around in-person, face-to-face networking and guided facilitation to share resources, tools, and best practices for meeting TOPP objectives; developing innovative strategies and programs to attract and support new and existing organic producers and businesses, especially our underserved and marginalized communities; and shaping a foundation to continue advancing the organic movement beyond TOPP.



*"Operating in a virtual workspace has many advantages, but it was invaluable to come together at the MW TOPP Meeting of the Minds to learn from core partners, celebrate accomplishments, and openly share the challenges of doing this important work. Meeting in person allowed us to collaborate more effectively than in a Zoom meeting, strengthen our connections, and be fully present with one another. This time together was incredible for fostering growth, learning, and becoming our best selves—so we can, in turn, help farmers thrive."  
— Tay Fatke, Marbledseed Farmer Education Specialist*

The outcomes from the work resulted in renewed energy, deeper connections, and a collaborative action plan to expand and strengthen the Midwest organic community, specifically, develop and implement:

- Mentor/mentee recruitment strategy
- Resources to help build relationships and bridge to underserved farmers
- Systems to weave together partner technical assistance assets
- Recruitment and training for inspector and certification reviewers
- Podcast series highlighting the rich history of Midwest agri-culture

*"Creating more opportunities for more farmers in organic agriculture can only be done through industry-wide participation, collaboration, and solidarity. The 2024 MW TOPP Meeting of the Minds provided a powerful platform for all partners to come together, share updates on ongoing initiatives, explore opportunities to enhance regional synergies, and strengthen strategic impacts. It was an invaluable opportunity to foster deeper connections and drive meaningful change in the sector." — The Organic Association of Kentucky, Organic Transition Program*



## Midwest TOPP 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Summary

MW TOPP partners continue to make progress on TOPP goals to increase organic production across the U.S. We are seeing a shift from transition to certification with **14 producers now certified on 719 new acres**. Nearly all 11 states have an active Organic Mentorship Program supporting **89 mentor pairs in the region** (only 2<sup>nd</sup> behind the Northeast with 129). The MW team provided **1:1 technical assistance to at least 195 producers, created 32 new resources, hosted 48 events, and attended 61 stakeholder programs** to provide resources about organic certification, crop production, markets and other related-topics.

## Success Stories

### Organic Grain Mentorship at The Land Connection



The Land Connection produced a short 3-minute video to highlight the purpose of the Organic Mentorship Program and how it supports seasoned conventional farmers (folks with many years of conventional row crop experience) as they transition some or all of their acres into organic production. The goal is to connect farmers with experience in organic transition as mentors to new and beginning producers to offer guidance and support so they don't have to navigate this transition alone.

[>>> VIDEO >>>](#)

### TOPP Progress with University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension



Over the past year, the Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) has supported the establishment of organic transition outreach and support at University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension. Ariana Abbrescia joined Extension as an Organic Transition Outreach Specialist in January 2024, and has spent the past year developing programming to support organic transition and agriculture in the state.

Opportunities to collaborate with Extension colleagues and external partners have also flourished; new partnerships and projects have been established with Extension and this fall, they partnered with FairShare CSA Coalition to present an organic transition webinar and farmer panel to diversified vegetable farmers and agriculture professionals. Ariana shares that one of the most exciting aspects of her growing program are the opportunities to collaborate with colleagues on technical assistance requests.

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## Upcoming Midwest Events

[>>> VIEW ALL TOPP EVENTS HERE <<<](#)

Dec  
17

Webinar: USDA Funding Opportunities for Urban Farmers in Iowa

[FIND OUT  
MORE](#)

## Upcoming Midwest Events-continued

Jan 9 – 10	2025 Minnesota Organic Conference   St. Cloud, Minnesota	<a href="#">FIND OUT MORE</a>
Jan 10 – 11	Practical Farmers of Iowa Annual Conference   Des Moines, Iowa	<a href="#">FIND OUT MORE</a>
Jan 15	Webinar: Helping Organic Producers Access NRCS Programs	<a href="#">FIND OUT MORE</a>
Jan 18	Organic Intensives Series with Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance East Lansing, Michigan	<a href="#">FIND OUT MORE</a>
Jan 24 – 25	OGRAIN Winter Conference   Madison, Wisconsin	<a href="#">FIND OUT MORE</a>
Jan 25	Organic Grain Market Update and Buyer/Seller Mixer   Madison, Wisconsin	<a href="#">FIND OUT MORE</a>
Jan 31 – Feb 1	Organic Vegetable Production Conference   Madison, Wisconsin	<a href="#">FIND OUT MORE</a>
Feb 5 – 6	Organic Grain Conference and Trade Show   Champaign, Illinois	<a href="#">FIND OUT MORE</a>
Feb 7 – 8	2025 Mid-America Organic Conference   Missouri	<a href="#">FIND OUT MORE</a>
Feb 8	Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota Annual Meeting St. Joseph, Minnesota	<a href="#">FIND OUT MORE</a>
Feb 13 – 15	46th Annual Ohio Ecological Food and Farming Association (OEFFA) Farming Conference   Newark, Ohio	<a href="#">FIND OUT MORE</a>
Feb 20 – 22	Marbleseed Organic Farming Conference   LaCrosse, Wisconsin	<a href="#">FIND OUT MORE</a>
Feb 20 – 22	Harvest of Ideas: “Organics as a Solution to Global Challenges” Madison, Wisconsin	<a href="#">FIND OUT MORE</a>

>>> [SUBMIT EVENTS HERE](#) <<<

# Announcements

## **Missouri Organic Association is Hiring a Programs Manager**



The Missouri Organic Association (MOA) is hiring a Programs Manager to oversee the planning, development, and execution of the Missouri Organic Association's educational, technical assistance, and outreach programs to support regenerative and organic agriculture. MOA is a non-profit membership organization that provides educational opportunities and technical support for organic producers and stakeholders to help create a more ecologically sound food environment for all.

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## **Ag Solidarity Network**



The Ag Solidarity Network is a member-led community space to grow the organic farming movement. Stay connected to farm folks, extend your network, share your experiences, and build power. Together we are stronger. Network features: People Directory, Opportunities, Events, Groups, Classifieds.

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## **Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative**



The Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) seeks to solve critical organic agriculture issues, priorities, or problems through the integration of research, education, and extension activities. The purpose of this program is to fund projects that will enhance the ability of producers and processors who have already adopted organic standards to grow and market high quality organic agricultural products. Projects should plan to deliver applied production information to producers.

- **Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative Funding Opportunity: due: Thur, Feb 13, 2025**
- **Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grants Program - Organic Transitions Funding Opportunity: due: Thur, March 6, 2025**

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## **USDA RMA Organic and Specialty Crop Insurance**



Risk Management Agency

Many organic and transitioning farmers manage risk through diverse production and stacked enterprises. In addition to those practices, crop insurance is a tool that supports organic curious, transitioning, and organic farmers as they manage risk in times of extreme weather events. The USDA Risk Management Agency has been working with organic partners across the U.S. to improve programs, products, and services to better serve organic, speciality crop producers. Learn more about those changes and available options, and stay tuned for producer and inspector trainings about RMA programs and products in early 2025.

[>>> READ MORE >>>](#)

# Find an Accredited Certifying Agent

The **Organic INTEGRITY Database (INTEGRITY)** created the Organic Certifier Locator. This helpful tool is updated regularly by the National Organic Program and it provides accurate information about accredited certifying agents.

**>>> FIND A CERTIFIER HERE <<<**

## ORGANIC MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

### Transition to Organic

**>>> BECOME A MENTOR <<<**

**>>> BECOME A MENTEE <<<**

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

## Midwest TOPP Partners

