

Poster submission for 18th IFOAM Organic World Congress

Growing a Local and Organic Movement in the State of Maine, USA—How MOFGA (Maine Organic Farmers & Gardeners Association) succeeds as a small sustainable farm advocacy NGO with an associated USDA–accredited certification agency

The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, or “MOFGA”, was formed in 1971 by back-to-landers and others interested in growing their own food organically. MOFGA is the oldest and largest state organic organization in the United States. Its mission is to help farmers and gardeners grow organic crops, increase local food production and support rural communities. MOFGA also endeavors to educate consumers and lawmakers about the connection between healthful food and environmentally sound farming practices.

MOFGA began its organic certification program in 1972. True to the roots of the organic movement, these first certified organic farms and gardens were small-scale homestead-type operations. Accordingly, MOFGA’s certification program was a grassroots effort, following Rodale’s organic garden certification guidelines. Education was a significant part of the certification process in these early days, with organic farmers inspecting and instructing one another during the certification process. Twenty-seven farms were certified that first year.

Much has happened in the organic movement in the four decades since MOFGA began. Most notably was the establishment of a federal rule forming the National Organic Program within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). This national set of criteria defining organic agriculture can still spark controversy. In 2001, in order to comply with the new regulation, MOFGA established a subsidiary, MOFGA Certification Services LLC, to carry on the role of organic certification for its constituents in Maine, but now as an accredited certifying agent under the USDA. Locally, there is still work to be done to educate farmers and processors about compliance with the rule. Those who get certified want to see a greater return on the effort and expense involved in certification. In spite of these challenges, the number of organic farms and processors—now over 430—continues to grow in Maine. MOFGA has had an important role in cultivating new farmers, many of whom get certified. Growing the number of farmers selling through Community Supported Agriculture or CSAs and other forms of direct to consumer outlets has also been a programmatic focus. MOFGA is currently working on a marketing campaign to promote brand recognition for the MOFGA certified organic label.

This poster will present recent trends at MOFGA with data filled graphics. We hope our experiences can inform other NGOs from around the world and that conversations and connections can be made at this IFOAM Congress that can improve MOFGA’s work in Maine.

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