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organics guide: bob scrowcroft of ofrf

Q: You recently announced you're stepping down as the executive director of the OFRF in the spring . What's prompting this move?

A: The combination of family needs, historic reflection and that it's a perfect time to step back and put my beliefs into practice. The next generation needs to step into a leadership role. OFRF has just completed a strategic plan for two outrageously important new initiatives. It all seems to fit together.

One of these initiatives is a five-year organic-seed research program in which we'll partner with [Matt Dillon's Organic Seed Alliance](#) and, in a different manner, [Andy Kimbrell's Center for Food Safety](#). The [Clif Bar Family Foundation](#) made a \$500,000 pledge to us over five years, which in part suggested the three of us use our expertise to work together. OFRF will be awarding research grants, Organic Seed Alliance will build a political alliance of organic seed breeders and the Center for Food Safety will be in court defending organic seed producers from the contamination of [genetically modified organisms].

Q: Will you be involved with OFRF in a different capacity?

A: When a cofounder steps aside it's generally understood that the break has to be clean, so I'm not moving to the board, I'm not moving to a prepaid consultant position; I am leaving OFRF. That stated, we already have a little working memo signed or initialed that I'm available for calls and historic perspective and check-ins for the foreseeable future.

Q: You said this move will allow you to put some of your beliefs into practice; can you divulge more on that?

A: There are a whole batch of us that are in our 50s, 60s and, in some cases, 70s who have been doing this for so long that there is a leadership ceiling for today's generation of organic activists. I have been very public in calling for the youth movement to step forward and take some risks. OK, 35-, 40-year-olds, you've got some new ideas? Things that have to happen in the next 20 years? Step on up.

Q: Do you know who will be filling your shoes?

A: This will be an open hire in a national search. The announcement went up in the first part of August, and the interview process will occur in September and October. The board hopes to make an offer at the fall meeting in November.

Q: You have been a part of OFRF for nearly 20 years now. How do you think organics has grown in that time?

A: This is something I have been giving thought to. For OFRF, I'm a cofounder with two farmers, but I've been involved with organics for almost 32 years. The first decade was from an environmental perspective. Organic was a solution to the toxic chemical approach of industrial ag production. I think in the past 20 years organic farming has an acceptance in many corners of agriculture, though certainly not all. It has grown to 4 percent of the market share, which most people would say, "gosh after 30 years all you've got is 4 percent?" But this agro-industrial system has almost no allowance for any alternative production to move into the marketplace. So I think to some extent 4 percent is a pretty remarkable number.

Q: What are some of the biggest issues impacting organic right now?



A: Some people like to use words like “pioneer” or “historic” for the work I’ve done. I keep reminding them it’s “we,” not “me.” This is a team effort. The real pioneers and heroes I think are the next generation of nonprofit leaders, young business men and women and of course very innovative farmers who will take organic to 30, 40 percent of the marketplace. How that happens is a mixture of strong advocacy and being part of “the system” to lobby Congress for grant academic programs. I also think there is a passion that we need to tap into relative to what this means in our communities—whether it’s an urban minority community, a depressed rural community or a very well-endowed suburban community. Organic has to get out among the people and promote its benefits very directly.

Q: Do you feel retailers have a special role in the advancement of organic?

A: I think retailers are hidden resources that need to somehow get a jolt to understand the role they can play. Every retailer should invite their local congressman to tour their store. They should proudly show their organic produce label—most all now have some local produce. They should talk in terms of their store representing jobs. Most of the successful retailers are growing and then adding jobs. They are a grassroots business alliance for organic farmers. It’s critical for them to access info they can translate into their neighborhoods.

Q: Where do you see organic in the next 10, 15 years?

A: OFRF is starting another project that I think will have a five- to 10-year critical lifespan. With support from the academic world, we’re analyzing the multiple benefits organic farming brings to communities. Often, organic is correctly portrayed as an environmentally sound farming system that grows some crops and is kind of good. But what we are initiating is a project to analyze in an integrated manner the benefits that organic brings to clean air, clean water, global warming and, most importantly, jobs in suburban and rural communities. If we can address the benefits, whether they’re environmental or for the consumer, we’ll go a long way in leveraging more resources for organic.