

2024 ANNUAL REPORT



ORGANIC
FARMING
RESEARCH
FOUNDATION

Reflections on a Year of Growth and Impact

This is my first year as the president of OFRF's Board of Directors, but my sixth year serving on the board. In that time, I've seen firsthand how OFRF has grown—not just in size, but in impact. We've built strong networks, deepened relationships, and planted the seeds for lasting change in organic farming.

For me, 2024 marks a year OFRF truly came into full bloom. We're not just funding research—we're ensuring that research reaches farmers. We're not just shaping policy—we're making sure organic farmers' voices are heard. We're not just educating—we're making organic knowledge accessible to those who need it most.

Here are a few highlights we're most proud of:

- Funded [10 farmer-led research projects](#) supporting innovation in organic agriculture.
- Advanced two key bills—[SOAR](#) and [OSRI](#)—that would increase federal investment in organic research.
- Released new grower education resources, including an online soil health course in Spanish ([Los Fundamentos de la Salud del Suelo](#)) and toolkits on [Technical Note 12](#) and [NRCS's Organic Transition Initiative \(OTI\)](#).
- Launched the [Organic Is Regenerative](#) campaign, helping consumers, policymakers, and farmers better understand the climate benefits of organic farming.
- Secured a [USDA NRCS cooperative agreement](#) to enhance conservation support for organic farmers through training, resources, and community engagement.

And we're looking ahead. With collective input from staff, board members, and farmers across the country, the Board recently approved a new [five-year strategic plan](#) that builds on OFRF's strong foundation. It charts a clear course for the future—one that prioritizes direct farmer support, faces the challenges of climate change with bold, evidence-based solutions, and deepens our commitment to equity in all corners of organic agriculture.

As we look to 2025, I invite you to find a way to build a connection to or strengthen your ties with OFRF. So many hundreds of farmers across our country, like me, are counting on your engagement.

—April Thatcher

OFRF Board President,
April Joy Farm,
Ridgefield, Washington



Our Impact, By the Numbers

At OFRF, we believe research, education, and advocacy are the pillars of a thriving organic farming system. In 2024, we strengthened each of these, ensuring that organic farmers and transitioning producers have the tools, research, and policy support they need to succeed. This year, OFRF:



Provided direct support to **600+ farmers** through research funding, technical assistance, networking events, and educational opportunities—delivering the knowledge, resources, and connections essential for success in organic agriculture.



Engaged **71,000+** farmers, researchers, and agricultural professionals through our free toolkits, guidebooks, webinars, and online resources.



Advocated for organic-friendly policies in **70+ meetings** with lawmakers and federal agencies, ensuring organic research and farmer support remain priorities.

We've made incredible progress—but this is just the beginning. As we look to 2025, we're doubling down on our commitment to organic farmers by launching our [Organic Research Hub](#), developing new resources for growers and technical service providers, and hiring a policy fellow to represent the voices of organic farmers on the ground in Washington, D.C.

Thank you for being part of this movement. Together, we're building a more resilient future for agriculture.

—Brise Tencer
OFRF Executive Director



Custom, shallow cultivation equipment supports a shift away from using plastic weed cover at Lazy 8 Farm, Paint Lick, Kentucky.

No-Till Farming with Occultation Tarping

By Rhianna Simes, M.S.Ed. of Verdant Phoenix Farm & Nursery, Medford, Oregon

At Verdant Phoenix Farm, our mission has always been clear—**no-till, organic farming rooted in soil health and long-term resilience**. For over a decade, I've worked to integrate my understanding of soil health with the need to terminate weeds on my farm. I am striving to grow a regenerative ecosystem on our farm that not only sustains itself but thrives. To do this, we rely upon occultation tarping to manage weeds, protect soil structure, and foster biological activity in the soil.

Then, in 2020, the **Almeda Wildfire swept through southern Oregon, altering the landscape around us**. While the fire didn't change our farm's approach, it was a stark reminder of how critical soil health is in the face of disruption. It reinforced what I've always known:

A THRIVING ECOSYSTEM ISN'T JUST ABOUT GROWING FOOD—IT'S ABOUT BUILDING RESILIENCE FROM THE GROUND UP, EVEN IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE UNCERTAINTY.

For over 15 years, I have relied on [occultation tarping](#)—a technique that uses tarps (I opt for repurposed vinyl billboards) to smother weeds and enhance biological activity while keeping the soil horizons intact. Unlike tilling, which disrupts soil structure, occultation **fosters the conditions for a biologically rich, self-sustaining soil ecosystem**. With inspiration from the [Soil Food Web](#) and the [One Straw Revolution](#), I saw firsthand that this method worked, but I was eager to research the impacts on soil health and weed termination. It was a dream come true to learn more through a hands-on, in-the-field, research-based trial. This project helped me measure the impact and refine my approach so that I can share it with others as part of our farm's educational work.

That's why I applied for [OFRF's Farmer-Led Trials program](#). With their support, I **designed and carried out a research trial** to compare the effects of **tarping versus tilling on soil health and weed suppression**. OFRF's assistance offset project costs, and their technical support was **invaluable**. They provided guidance on structuring the trial, assistance with data analysis, and the expertise I needed to translate my fieldwork into **measurable research that benefits other organic, no-till farmers like me**. The OFRF team is great to work with!



On-farm trials at Verdant Phoenix Farm.

This project gave me the confidence I needed to pursue further research, and even leverage additional opportunities—from joining The Soil Inventory Project to securing a Western SARE Farmer/Rancher grant to continue to research and legitimize occultation as a technique for no-till farmers and beyond.

My on-farm trial reaffirmed what I've always believed: when farmers have the resources to explore and refine organic practices, new strategies are developed, and —

THIS INNOVATION HELPS THE ENTIRE MOVEMENT. 🌿



Illustration by Isabelle Blum.



MEET THE **9** FARMERS CONDUCTING ON-FARM TRIALS WITH OFRF'S SUPPORT

FROM OFRF 2022 RESEARCH GRANTEEES:

“Without OFRF’s funding, we would have stopped short with our research. We would have ended with ideas that ‘might’ work and no concrete solutions. OFRF allowed us to take that next step in discovery while engaging with our local community of farmers.”

— Christiana Huss
Commercial Horticulture Agent, Clemson University



▶ WATCH A PRESENTATION FROM 2022 RESEARCH GRANTEEES



“This funding specifically helped us to examine seeding methods that were suggested by regional producers who were desperate to improve cover crop establishment but also lacked the time, resources, and equipment to do so themselves. This type of support is vital to help organic farmers make timely decisions to continually improve and strengthen their organic rotations.”

— Dr. Axel Garcia y Garcia
Associate Professor, University of Minnesota

A WIN FOR ORGANIC RESEARCH

The Fight Against Fire Blight

Drawn from a [previously published OFRF blog post](#) by Dr. Quan Zeng, Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station

When I met with staff from Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro's office earlier in 2024, I wasn't there to discuss politics—it was about a disease threatening apple and pear orchards across the country.

Fire blight, a bacterial infection, has already cost U.S. farmers over \$100 million annually. Organic growers who lost access to streptomycin and other antibiotics in 2014 due to resistance and ecological impact concerns are in desperate need of alternatives.

At [my lab](#), we've been working on a breakthrough: **identifying naturally occurring yeasts that trigger plants' natural defenses, offering organic farmers a sustainable way to fight fire blight.** Early trials are promising, but as with all agricultural research, progress depends on reliable funding. The USDA's **Organic Research and Extension Initiative (OREI)** made our work possible, but [federal research funding is declining](#), and organic research receives **less than 2% of the USDA's total research budget.**

That's why **meeting with Rep. DeLauro's office was critical, given her seat as a leader in the Appropriations Committee. Without continued investment in organic research, all farmers are left without the tools they need to adapt and thrive.** And without OFRF's advocacy and facilitation, these conversations might not happen. OFRF doesn't just push for more organic research funding; they aim to connect impacted communities like researchers and farmers directly with policymakers, making sure science informs policy and policy leads to real solutions for farmers.

The impact of agricultural research goes far beyond individual farms. Every \$1 dollar invested in public agricultural research generates [\\$20 in public benefits](#), improving resilience, reducing pesticide use, and shaping climate-smart farming practices. Yet, despite these clear benefits,

PUBLIC FUNDING FOR AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH HAS DROPPED OVER 20% OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES.

If we don't act, we risk falling behind in developing the solutions farmers need to navigate a changing climate.

Staff from Rep. DeLauro's office are planning to visit my lab to see this research in action. It's a small but important step toward securing stronger investment in organic research at the federal level. Conversations like this, sparked by OFRF's work, are how we transform research into meaningful change for farmers. 🌱

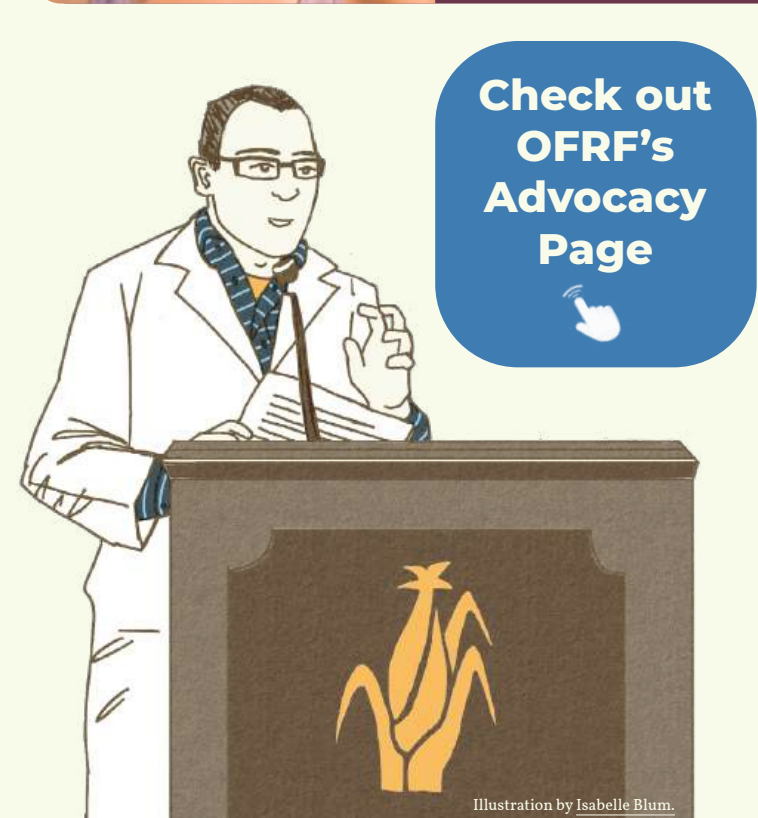


"[Communicating with policymakers](#) and decision-makers is a skill, and having research and results that are easy to translate to them is super important.



We can see that over the last couple of decades, the work that university researchers and organic advocates have done to build and expand [OREI](#) and [ORG](#) as granting programs is incredibly important to researchers working in the organic sphere."

— Dr. Brigid Meints, Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist, Oregon State University



OFRF ADVOCACY BY THE NUMBERS

90 farms, businesses, and research institutions joined OFRF in urging Congress to increase organic agriculture research funding in the upcoming Farm

[READ OFRF'S STATEMENTS](#)

48 state-specific organic research and market briefs created to equip policymakers, farmers, and advocates with key data for organic advocacy.

[STATE-BY-STATE GUIDES](#)

RETURNING TO MY ROOTS

How OFRF Helped Me Grow as a Farmer and Advocate

By Dakota Moore, Moore Family Farms, Warsaw, North Carolina

Farming is in my blood. For generations, my family has worked the land at **Moore Family Farms** in North Carolina. When my father and I began transitioning to organic, we knew we were investing in our farm's future. However, through my internship at OFRF, I discovered something even bigger—how organic farming is part of a movement, one that connects research, policy, and farmers like me in ways I never imagined.

As an intern, I worked on OFRF's **new Organic Research Hub**, a one-of-a-kind platform designed to connect farmers with the latest organic research. Sorting through peer-reviewed studies on **soil health, water dynamics, and weed suppression**, I realized research isn't just for scientists—it's for farmers. These findings provide real solutions to challenges we face every day, but only if they reach the people who need them.



THAT'S WHERE OFRF COMES IN, MAKING SURE CRITICAL RESEARCH DOESN'T SIT ON A SHELF BUT GETS INTO FARMERS' HANDS THROUGH ON-FARM TRIALS, WEBINARS, TECHNICAL RESOURCES AND ADVOCACY.

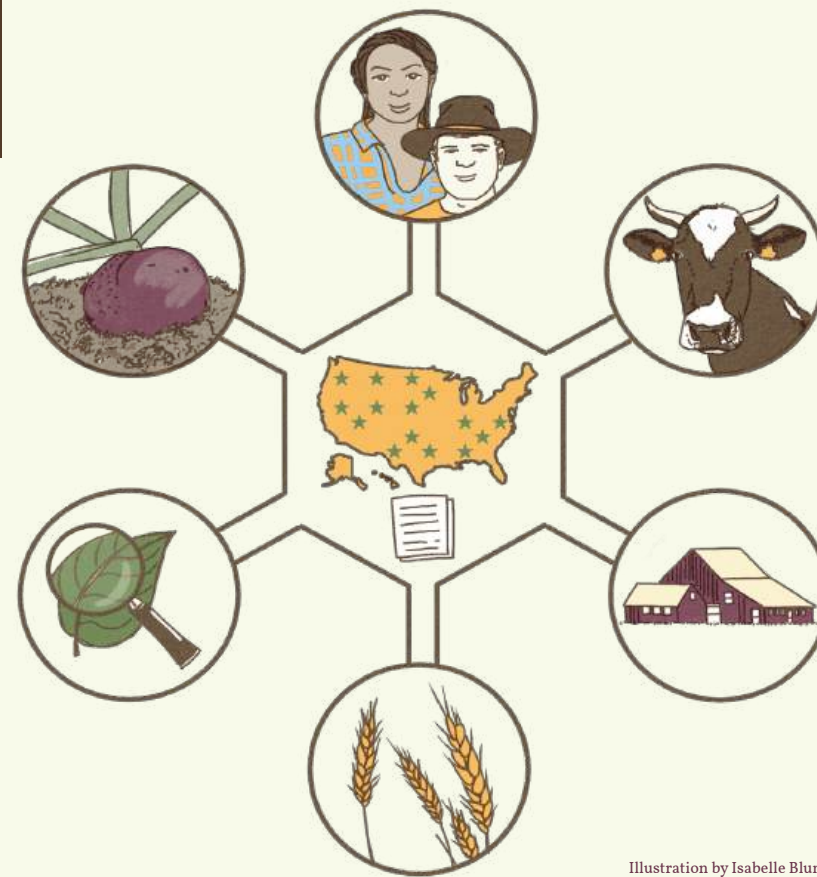
But OFRF's work is about more than research grants and policy wins—it's about making sure **farmers like me have the support we need to succeed**.

One of the highlights of my internship was co-presenting in OFRF's Seeds of Success webinar, "Farmer Perspectives on Transitioning to Organic." Sharing our farm's journey and hearing others navigating the same path reminded me that organic farming isn't just about production methods—it's about community. Farmers need other farmers.

As I return full-time to **Moore Family Farms as farm manager**, I'm bringing back more than just knowledge—I'm bringing **connections, confidence, and a deeper understanding of how organic farming fits into the bigger picture of agriculture in the U.S.** But organic farming's future depends on **continued investment in research, funding, and policies that support farmers like me**. That's why I'm committed to staying engaged—not just as a farmer, but as an advocate.

And I know that, with organizations like OFRF leading the way, we're planting the seeds for something bigger than any one farm—

WE'RE GROWING A MOVEMENT. 🌱



NEW: OFRF'S NATIONAL ORGANIC RESEARCH HUB

Former OFRF Board Member Katrina Heinze, who utilizes planned giving to support OFRF.



Photo: Zachary Coody

FROM OTHER 2024 INTERNS

"I am leaving OFRF a more knowledgeable and confident professional version of myself. I am excited to take these skills to my next position as a Community Outreach Farmer. Thank you to all of OFRF's staff who have supported me during my time here. I learned so much from everyone, and am grateful that I was able to spend time working with such a dynamic team over the past couple of months."



— Marina Vargara, OFRF intern alum

"My time with OFRF has reinforced my passion for working at the intersection of climate and food systems. I could not be more grateful to OFRF for providing me with an enriching internship experience, and also for the support and inclusivity of all of the team members I collaborated with throughout the summer."



— Julia Nelson, OFRF intern alum

290+
organic and transitioning farmers participated in OFRF's **Seeds of Success.**



Meg Moynihan Stuedemann, of Derrydale Farm in Minnesota and member of OFRF's Organic Stewardship Council, participated in the Successful Farmer-Researcher Collaborations Seeds of Success Networking Session.

Support the Future of Organic Farming

Our roots are deep, and our vision is bold: organic farming as the foundation of a healthier, more sustainable food system. With your support, OFRF provides science-backed research, practical tools, and strong advocacy to help organic farmers thrive.

Ways to give include cash, stocks, IRA distributions, donor-advised funds, estate planning, vehicle donations, and corporate matching.

Help us grow the future of organic. Visit ofrf.org/donate or email give@ofrf.org to get started.



Photo: Zachary Cody

Factsheets developed for the Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) help organic farmers navigate USDA programs, and are available in English and Spanish.

Equipped thousands of farmers with **new toolkits** and **factsheets** developed with USDA partners.



Green Things Farm Collective farmers in 2020: Eric Kampe (left the farm in 2022), Hannah Weber, Jill Lada, Nate Lada, Michelle Brosius. The farm was a member of OFRF's FLT 2024 cohort.



2,300+
Accessed OFRF's **Farmer's Guide to Conducting On-farm Research.**



197
organic research projects examined to **illustrate how federal funding drives practical solutions** for farmers and supports a thriving organic sector.



OFRF staff hosting USDA NIFA's Project Directors Meeting in April, 2024. Left to right: José Perez, Thelma Velez, Mark Schonbeck, Heather Estrada, Mary Hathaway, and Ashley Dulaney.

1,200+
Attendees reached through OFRF's in-person presentations across the country.

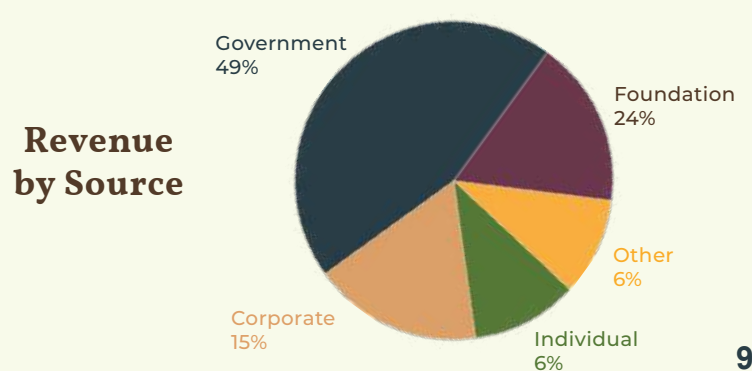
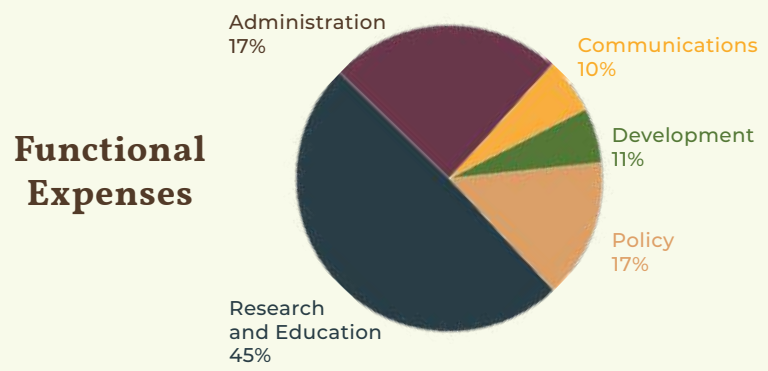


OFRF amplified organic research led by Dr. Ajay Nair, Chair of Department of Horticulture at Iowa State's College of Agriculture and Life Science.



Launched the **Organic is Regenerative toolkit**, downloaded over **2,000** times to show how organic farming supports climate solutions.

FINANCIALS





*Access the digital
version of this report
with live links:*



PO Box 440 Santa Cruz, CA 95061
831.426.6606 info@ofrf.org www.ofrf.org



Cover and back photos by Zachary Cody/naturemattersllc