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ACA Training Recap

The 2017 ACA and NOP Training, held January 31 through February 2 in Portland, Oregon, was once again a record-breaker in both attendance numbers and geographic representation. A total of 200 certification agency staff, NOP staff, and ACA Supporting Members participated, coming in from across the United States, Mexico, Guatemala, Australia, France, Belgium, Armenia, Switzerland, Bolivia, Peru, Canada, Germany, India, and Argentina.



Above: Penelope Zuck of the National Organic Program speaks. Photo: Stephen Walker

After the training, 68 Program Evaluation forms were returned. Comments from these will be taken into account when planning for future trainings. In general, comments indicated appreciation for the chance to interact directly with peers and hear from industry experts.

The *Organic CSI* panel discussion received especially high rankings for Quality and Usefulness. Participants in the panel included Connie Karr of Oregon Tilth (OTCO), Johanna Philips of the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA), Jake Lewin of CCOF Certification Services (CCOF), and Brenda Book of the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA).

The *Sharing Our Perspectives* sessions were also very well received. Ideas gathered in these sessions will be used to help form the ACA work plan for 2017. An Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices rule working group has already been initiated, and others will also be formed after further consideration by the ACA Board.

The ACA also co-sponsored a reception along with the Organic Materials Review Institute, Organicology, Organic Trade Association, and Sustainable Food Trade Association. This event allowed opportunities for further interaction among attendees.

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ACA Training Recap (cont.)

Recognizing the Contributions of Patricia Kane

At the training, Pat Kane was recognized by the ACA Board and the NOP for her 15 years of service to the ACA. During that time, she has organized trainings and annual meetings, coordinated working group activities, and carried out the day-to-day operations of the ACA.

Scott Rice, ACA Chair, presented Pat with an engraved wall hanging. Shown at right, Miles McEvoy and Cheri Courtney of the NOP presented Pat with a commemorative plaque. Pat will be retiring this spring. The ACA expresses a heartfelt *thank you* to Pat for her years of expertise and dedication.



Above: Miles McEvoy and Cheri Courtney recognize Pat Kane.
Photo: Jackie DeMinter

ACA Annual Meeting

The ACA Annual Meeting was also held during the ACA Training. Scott Rice, ACA Chair, and Pat Kane, ACA Coordinator, reviewed the work done by ACA during the past year and gave a brief Membership and Financial Report.

They also introduced new members of the Board. Beth Rota of Quality Certification Services (QCS), Sam Welsch of OneCert, and Amber Pool CCOF Certification Services (CCOF), were each elected to a two-year term, beginning in April 2017. Kelly Abbott of International Certification Services (ICS) was appointed to finish out the term of Brett Bakker, who recently left the Board due to his approaching retirement from the New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA). Board members who will finish their service this April were also recognized. These include Scott Rice of WSDA, Jackie DeMinter of MOSA Certified Organic (MOSA), and Sarah Townsend of ICS.

Join us for the Spring NOSB Meeting Activities

Sheraton Denver Downtown Hotel, April 19 – 21

April 18 – **National Organic Coalition Pre-NOSB Meeting**
9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

April 19 – **Accredited Certifiers Association Meeting** 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.

April 19 – 21 – **National Organic Standards Board Meeting**

ACA Board Activities

The ACA Board activities from December through February included:

- Approving BOD election results and filling another vacant seat by appointment.
- Overseeing and facilitating the 2017 ACA Annual training.
- Evaluating a review of the ACA financial records.
- Initiation of work planning for the 2017 year.
- Overseeing transition of ACA Coordinator duties.

Sharing Our Perspectives Summary

For several years, Brenda Book of WSDA has organized the “Sharing Our Perspectives” portion of the ACA Training. During these conversations, certification staff are able to interact directly with their peers to share tips, ideas, and solutions to common challenges certifiers face. This year, nine topics were discussed during three 45-minute sessions. Participants could attend three different groups, or simply stay parked in the same area for a marathon conversation if they chose.

While each broad topic had a “kick starter” question to get the conversation moving, group participants could take the conversation in a variety of directions. The goal was to identify top issues, questions, or inconsistencies and to propose action items to bring solutions. The notes collected by the group facilitators are used by the ACA Board during development of the organization’s annual work plan. Below is a summary of the suggestions generated by each group.

Topic 1: Evaluating Input Materials – Facilitated by Sam Schaefer-Joel, WSDA

- Develop a teat dip flow chart and consistency related to review of iodine.
- Develop a shared resource to make material reviews consistent and efficient; fill in details not provided in NOP 3012.
- Develop Best Practices in reviewing GMOs in vaccines and biologics.
- Identify concerns related to use of NOP 5033 Decision Trees.

Topic 2: Compliance and Investigations – Facilitated by Connie Karr, OTCO

- Seek written clarification on accepting a surrender while continuing with adverse action.
- Develop shared resources for handling mediations and settlements.
- Develop a system for certifiers to communicate about operations switching agencies.
- Survey certifiers about enforcement and investigation of complaints. Provide feedback to NOP and request training on investigations and enforcement action.
- Work with IOIA to develop Best Practices on safety issues during investigation.

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Sharing Our Perspectives Summary (cont.)

Topic 3: Inspections and Inspectors – Facilitated by Dan Coyne, WSDA

- Develop uniform approach to implementing NOP 2027.
- Develop Best Practices for tracking and recording inspector trainings/qualifications.
- Address inspector retention.

Topic 4: Accreditation and Administration – Facilitated by Scott Rice, WSDA

Focus on new transitional certification program. Generate a list of questions for USDA clarification.

Topic 5: International Markets – Facilitated by Jake Lewin, CCOF

Develop consistency in notation for COR/NOP attestation on Certificates.

Topic 6: Technical Assistance – Facilitated by Jenny Cruse, ACA

Develop a bank of shared resources for use by certification agencies, including and in addition to Sound and Sensible resources:

- Trainings for new certification staff and inspectors.
- Educational materials and sources.
- Input suppliers, buyers, consultants, etc.

Topic 7: Crops – Facilitated by Ali Dermond and Colleen O'Brien, WSDA

- Request clarification from NOP regarding definition of hydroponics and if definition of soil outlined in Livestock Rule covers all scopes.
- Request clarification from NOP regarding root balls of nonorganic planting stock.
- Develop a framework to share resources on Natural Resources and Biological Diversity assessments, inspector training, and outreach to clients.
- Establish Best Practices on evaluating GMOs, including thresholds, with NOP's blessing.
- Develop Best Practices on how to evaluate use of organic seed and planting stock.

Topic 8: Handling – Facilitated by Kyla Smith, Pennsylvania Certified Organic

Focus on draft guidance on calculating organic ingredients, specifically:

- Excluding water and salt from ingredients of ingredients.
- Calculating CO₂ in a consistent manner.

Topic 9: Livestock – Facilitated by Jackie DeMinter, MOSA

Focus on questions and details of Organic Livestock and Poultry Production Practices Rule.

- Work through plans for implementation. Send clarification requests NOP if needed.
- Develop Best Practices for consistent application of the rule

~ Thank You ~ To the Following Renewing Members

Americert International	Kentucky Department of Agriculture
Australian Certified Organic	Monterey County Certified Organic
ECOCERT SA	Organic Materials Review Institute
CCOF Certification Services	PrimusLabs
Crosstek Solutions	Utah Department of Agriculture and Food
Idaho State Department of Agriculture	Washington State Department of Agriculture
International Certification Services	WhiteWave Foods
Iowa Department of Agriculture	

Active ACA Working Groups

The ACA coordinates several working groups that seek to develop best practices, make comments to NOP or NOSB, or perform other tasks as determined by the group. The following working groups are currently underway.

- GMO Sampling Working Group: drafting a Best Practices document related to sample collection and handling of test results.
- Changes in Ownership Working Group: drafting a Best Practices document related to various circumstances that arise related to changes in ownership.
- Calculating Percentages for Organic Ingredients Working Group: drafting comments to NOP, which will likely include suggestions for alternative calculation tools. NOTE: the comment period for NOP 5037 has been extended to April 7.
- Organic Livestock and Poultry Production Practices: will begin meeting in early March.

The Path: Training Resource from NOP

At the National Organic Program portion of Training in Portland, the NOP showcased an interactive learning tool called [The Path to Sound and Sensible Inspections](#). The Path is an interactive online training for inspectors and certifiers, and it uses a choose-your-own-adventure approach. Playing the role of an organic inspector, trainees can choose various

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The Path: Training Resource (cont.)

“paths” during the process of leading an opening meeting, conducting a farm tour, collecting a sample, and many other parts of the organic inspection. After choosing a particular step or direction, the viewer can watch the results and reconsider options if necessary. NOP recommends that certification agencies use this training as a part of their continuing education. It can be done individually or in small groups. Further details and examples of training designs can be found at this [link](#).

More from Portland



Above: Portland at night. Photo: Stephen Walker

At right: The framed “Grow Food on an Organic Farm” art print was given to Pat Kane by the ACA Board, engraved to commemorate recognition of her work over the years. The NOP gave Pat a certificate of appreciation, along with some lovely, embossed beverage holders!



ACA looks forward to further work with all our members during the rest of 2017.

