

# The Germinator

SPRING 2025

VOL. 45 NO. 2

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## VETTER & PALMERSHEIM

2025 NPSAS  
AWARD WINNERS

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FEATURED FARMER  
**ASKEGAARD  
ORGANICS**







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”  
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need a map. If  
you're brave enough  
to draw one, people  
will follow.  
“

Quote By Seth Godin

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## Mission Statement

Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society promotes sustainable food systems through education, advocacy, and research.

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# From the President

I hope everyone's spring is going good so far. Looking out my window, it doesn't feel much like spring as I watch what I'm hoping is our last snowstorm of the year—no complaints though, since we could use the moisture. We just wrapped up a great conference down in Aberdeen again this year, and it was awesome seeing so many of you there. Now we're getting ready for our board's planning meeting to figure out our plan for this coming year, to those who attended and offered input at the Saturday morning meeting it was much appreciated! At the conference, we picked a new board member, Larry Sax, who seems like he'll fit right in and is already digging into our finances as the new treasurer. I also want to give a big thanks to Brad as he is leaving our board after 6 years; he's put in a ton of effort for us as treasurer, and we wish him well and success in all his future endeavors.

Our theme this quarter is marketing, and when it comes to marketing grains I'm probably not the person to listen to. A lot of you like to pre-contract your grains, and I prefer to wait until I know what I have in the bin...do what works for you. I'm very optimistic in the organic market, and it seems consumers are showing more interest in regenerative organic grains with more focus on soil health and its relationship to healthy food. Lately, I've been looking at the gluten-free markets more and more as I am Regenerative Organic Certified, and it seems those are the largest demand at the moment. This fits right in with our Devyatka Buckwheat the Farm Breeders Network has been working on. Stay tuned for more information as we continue to develop it and get seed out to more farmers. Here's wishing you a successful planting season ahead!



President Martin Goter

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**The greatest  
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planet is the  
belief that  
someone else  
will save it.**

- Robert Swan



# Marketing in an Ag World

Marketing can be one of the more challenging aspects of any niche farming or ranching operation. Whether you're certified organic, regenerative, working in CSA, or selling a new or uniquely grown or raised product, marketing and selling product isn't as simple as loading up and going to the local elevator or sale barn and collecting a check.

Two of my four children are now part of the fourth generation of farming on the organic farm where they were raised. This farm was certified organic in 1988. Between their dad, their uncle, and even me, and now them, there have been many, many hours each year spent on calls, visits, emails, and texts negotiating prices, contracts, delivery, and collection of the crops grown and livestock raised.

Each year, we attend the annual NPSAS conference in January, where we meet vendors and reestablish or create new buying relationships. We all know that people buy from people, and it's essential to get to know, like, and trust those with whom you are doing business to maintain success. While we obviously felt the value of getting to know our buyers. The buyers want to get to know you, say hello, and build rapport as well.

We used to have most, if not all, of our contracts filled after the annual conference. We knew what and how much of each organic crop we were growing, as well as the price we could expect after harvest. Now that prices are lower, contracts can be more intimidating to lock in, as the hope is that better pricing will be available later. However, the relationship-building aspect is still highly valuable.

In addition to building relationships, we also built a website, started a blog, and got on social media (although those last two are not super active lately). We all know that you can't just plant a crop and sit



Executive Director Krysti Mikkonen

back, hoping it will grow. You need to fertilize the soil, control the weeds, find a good crop rotation, plant cover crops, and more.

In this issue of The Germinator, we are looking at some different marketing options that we hope might help you. Our featured family, Askagaard, is a great example of good marketing. They are at the conference networking, doing some direct marketing to consumers, and they have good, active content on their social channels.

NPSAS is here to help you. If you're looking for more ideas than what lies within these pages, let us know. Together we can develop more ways we can help support our members.

“Once in your life you may need a doctor, a lawyer, a policeman, and a preacher but every day, three times a day, you need a farmer.”

—Brenda Shoepp



# 2025 Inductees into the ND Agricultural Hall of Fame

Two past Northern Plains Sustainable Ag Society keynote speakers were inducted as the newest members of the North Dakota Agricultural Hall of Fame. Gabe Brown, a trailblazer in soil health, and Sarah Vogel, an advocate for farmers known as “the farmers’ lawyer,” were formally inducted on March 5, 2025, during the ND Winter Show in Valley City.

Gabe Brown has been a keynote speaker at the Food and Farming conference and most recently presented at a field day at an event co-hosted by NPSAS. He is recognized as a pioneer in regenerative agriculture. His innovative approaches as a conservationist, entrepreneur, and agricultural systems thinker have garnered international acclaim. The National No-Till Association has recognized him as one of the top 25 most influential agricultural leaders in the United States. At his ranch near Bismarck, Brown has implemented no-till seeding systems, diverse cover crops, rotational grazing, and integrated crop/livestock systems long before they became widely adopted.

Brown has shared his knowledge with farmers across the U.S. and internationally. His acclaimed book, “Dirt to Soil,” has been translated into eleven languages, highlighting his global influence in the field. He co-



Gabe Brown is shown here speaking at a field day co-sponsored by NPSAS at Doubting Thomas Farms

founded Understanding Ag LLC, a consulting firm focused on regenerative agriculture. His ranch has hosted countless visitors from all over the US and more than 30 countries eager to learn from his progressive practices.

Sarah Vogel spoke at the NPSAS conference in 2023. She is renowned for her advocacy and leadership on behalf of family farmers and ranchers, both in North Dakota and nationwide. She made history in 1988 by becoming North Dakota’s Commissioner of Agriculture, marking the first time a woman was elected to such a position in the U.S.

Vogel boldly filed a national class-action lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Agriculture (Coleman vs. Block), during the 1980s economic farm crisis,

which she won. This landmark case stopped farm foreclosures and safeguarded the constitutional rights of 240,000 American farm families. She has earned many accolades and awards for her work. A prolific author, she has published various works on agriculture and legal issues; her 2021 book, “The Farmer’s Lawyer,” focuses on the Coleman vs. Block case.

The North Dakota Agricultural Hall of Fame was established by the North Dakota legislature in 1997 to honor individuals who have made significant contributions to the state’s leading industry: agriculture. NPSAS members are lucky to have had two such distinguished honorees who shared their knowledge with our members.



Sarah Vogel speaking at the NPSAS Food & Farming Conference in 2023

# OFRF Launches Organic Research Hub to Support Farmers Nationwide

One-of-a-kind platform offers curated, science-based organic farming tools and resources to help farmers find trusted, practical solutions to on-farm challenges.

SANTA CRUZ, Calif., April 7, 2025 /PRNewswire/ -- The Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) today announced the launch of the Organic Research Hub, a new online platform giving organic and transitioning farmers access to trusted, science-based tools to overcome production challenges.

Search the Organic Research Hub by keyword, production topic, crop type, region, date, or resource type.

Search the Organic Research Hub by keyword, production topic, crop type, region, date, or resource type.

OFRF is a national nonprofit working to foster the widespread adoption of organic farming systems through farmer-informed research, education, and federal policy advocacy. With the Organic Research Hub, the organization has created the first platform of its kind—a centralized, searchable collection of practical resources tailored to organic producers.

Available now at [organicresearchhub.org](https://organicresearchhub.org), the Hub features factsheets, research summaries, webinars, videos, and technical guides from leading agricultural institutions, land-grant universities, and organic organizations. It also includes nearly 200 final reports from OFRF-funded research projects, making decades of farmer-informed research available in one place.

"We created the Organic Research Hub to meet farmers where they are," said Dr. Heather Estrada, OFRF's research & education senior scientist and architect of the Hub. "They don't have time to dig through journals or outdated PDFs. They need practical, credible resources they can use in the field—and that's exactly what this tool provides."

Farmers can search by keyword, topic area, crop type, region, and resource type—and sign up for customized alerts when new content relevant to their interests is added. The platform also includes a national Organic Extension Directory to

help farmers connect with local agricultural experts.

"I was changing our compost management and had some questions," said Jordan Settlege, an organic dairy farmer at Settlege & Settlege Farms in Ohio. "In less than a minute, I found exactly what I needed—from credible sources I trust. That's a big deal. I can use it to make real decisions for our farm."

Although organic accounts for over 6% of U.S. food sales and 15% of produce sales, organic agriculture receives less than 2% of USDA research funding. Public investment in agricultural research has declined, leaving many organic farmers to innovate alone. The Organic Research Hub is a direct response to that gap, offering equitable access to technical knowledge for producers working to improve soil health, adopt regenerative practices, and build climate resilience.

"This is about access," said Brise Tencer, OFRF's executive director. "For too long, organic farmers have had to piece

together information on their own—often without institutional support or public investment. This tool puts trusted, science-backed information directly into farmers' hands. Organic producers need it, but any farmer interested in sustainable, non-chemical practices can benefit from it."

The Hub features content from organizations such as SARE, The Organic Center, ATTRA, and dozens of research institutions—and will continue to grow as new content is added.

Explore the Organic Research Hub at [organicresearchhub.org](https://organicresearchhub.org).

About the Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF)

The Organic Farming Research Foundation works to foster the improvement and widespread adoption of organic farming systems. OFRF cultivates organic research, education, and policies that bring more farmers and acreage into organic production. Learn more at [www.ofrf.org](https://www.ofrf.org).



# Conference Wrap-up



Dr. Bob Quinn's wisdom, entrepreneurial ideas, and organic farming strategies drew listeners to his workshop following his keynote.



NPSAS board members who could attend the conference lead the annual meeting and answer questions for members.



Ray Archuleta shares great advice on the value in doing research on your farm.



The conference sponsor booths are a popular place for attendees to talk business and see what's new in the industry.



The Dakota Organic Academy Road Show is a great introduction on the steps to transition to organic farming and ranching practices



This panel of young farmers gave great perspectives on why they farm, the difficulties, the best advice they've received and more.

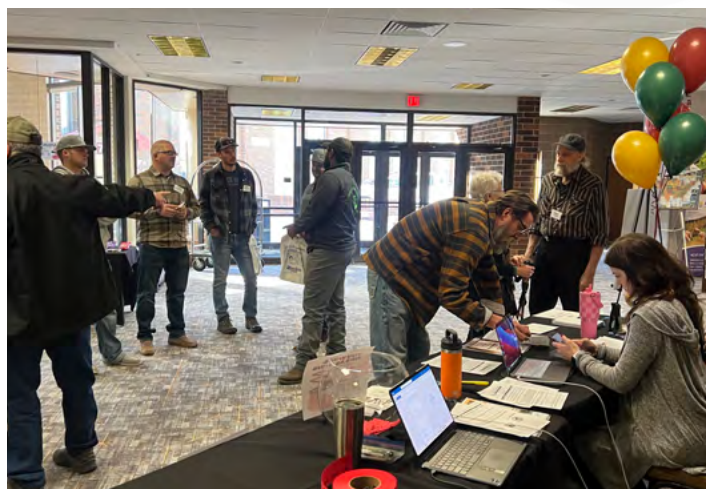




# Conference Wrap-up



Attendees get information and first-hand visuals of new technologies in the sponsor's booths like this new booth for 2025 on drones



Registration is a gathering place to greet friends made at past conferences and see who has yet to arrive.



Some youth from a local Hutterite colony that introduced their honey to Taste of Ag participants also entertained attendees participants of the Taste Of Ag.



This awesome crew from the Brown County Master Gardeners did an amazing job teaching kids different lessons on soil, agriculture, and food.



This conference welcomes families and interactive workshops are offered for the young ones while parents learn and network.





# **DAKOTA ORGANIC ACADEMY ROAD SHOW THIS SUMMER - 2 SESSIONS ONE EACH IN NORTH & SOUTH DAKOTA**

Don't miss your opportunity to explore certified organic production systems for livestock, grains, oilseeds, and pulses!

These workshops are **FREE** and are geared for beginning farmers and ranchers who want to transition their operations to organic production.

**Join us to learn about transitioning to organic.**

**For Questions or to get on the list to be notified of event dates  
Please contact Krysti Mikkonen at [director@npsas.org](mailto:director@npsas.org).**

United States Department of Agriculture  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
National Organic Program  
Transition to Organic Partnership Program





# MARTY PALMERSHEIM – Friend of the Farmer Award

Marty grew up on a hobby farm and worked for his neighbor, who was a farmer. He got his start serving the organic industry with Canton Mills, located near Winona, MN. They were mostly known as Sure-Gro. At the time, that company was one of the first to sell a wide range of organic inputs. He learned the industry and found a passion for helping farmers care for their soil. Marty was looking for a change and worked for Midwest Bio-Ag for a brief time, and then, 36 years ago, he decided to go on his own.

Marty has traveled thousands of miles each year, working directly with customers, sitting at many kitchen

tables, walking through many fields, and attending numerous conferences, spreading the word about good soil health. His farmer first mindset may have spread Marty too thin on many occasions and limited the time he had to build a big empire of a company. Instead, he built a company founded on trust, care, and friendship that has endured for over 34 years.

Attending the NPSAS conference as one of the longest-running sponsors, Marty has been a part of NP-SAS almost since the beginning. His steady and passionate commitment to the industry is a highly respected trait among many of his customers, as well as the NPSAS Board and Staff.



Marty Palmersheim 2025 Friend of the Farmer

# DAVID VETTER – Steward of the Year

David Vetter has unselfishly mentored and shared information about organic to countless numbers of farmers transitioning to organic production, from Canada to Central America, from Europe to Australia.

David grew up working on his family's farm in central Nebraska. In the 1950s, David's father began questioning the ethics and science behind emerging agricultural practices that were part of the Green Revolution, and the family farm began to adopt organic farming methods. David left the farm and went to college to earn his Bachelor's degree in agronomy and soil science and a Master's of Divinity. He returned in 1975 and helped the farm become certified organic. For David, organic and sustainable farming methods were a way to integrate his studies of biological and theological principles.

"Taking care of the environment



David Vetter 2025 Steward of the Year

and our natural resources is one of my core values, and something I have always strived to do," says Vetter. "Organic agriculture is an integral part of that mission, and it's been especially fulfilling to help other farmers adopt organic and see organic agricultural practices become more common."

Over the years, the farm has grown into Grain Place Foods, employing three generations of Vettters, and helping steward other farms into making the transition to organic. It has been certified organic since 1978. In 1987, the family operation took the next step of processing its own grains into value-added products onsite. Today, it employs nearly 25 people, several of whom have been with the company for over 15 years. The farm produces organic heirloom barley, soybeans, popcorn, corn and grass-finished beef in a nine-year rotation.

Today, Grain Place Foods also sources organic grain to supplement what is grown on the Vetter farm because the family business has expanded so much. It purchases organic grains from 128 organic farm families, including 46 neighboring farms in Nebraska.



# OCIA R&E Mentorship Program



## Paid Mentor Opportunities for Organic Growers:

As a Core Partner in the USDA's Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP), OCIA Research & Education is looking for organic growers in the Great Plains Region (NE, CO, KS, OK, ND, SD) to serve as mentors to farmers who are transitioning to organic.

Mentors need to be certified by any USDA-NOP certifier and in good standing OR have a minimum of 3 years experience in organic production. A commitment to 45 hours per 12-month cycle will include 2 on-farm visits, 3 touch points during the growing season, and mentor trainings. Mentors will be provided a \$3,000 yearly stipend for their participation and travel.

If you are interested in being contacted further regarding a mentor training for this exciting new program, please email at [info@ocia.org](mailto:info@ocia.org).

Thank you,

*Angie Tunink*

Executive Director  
OCIA Research & Education, Inc.

United States Department of Agriculture  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
National Organic Program  
Transition to Organic Partnership Program





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Not sure of your membership status? Email [info@NPSAS.org](mailto:info@NPSAS.org) with questions

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*Thanks for your continued support of NPSAS!*

***The NPSAS Board & Staff are committed to honoring and building on what the founders created and previous boards and staff nurtured. We will serve the mission of the organization to the highest standard to ensure NPSAS is here to serve for generations to come.***



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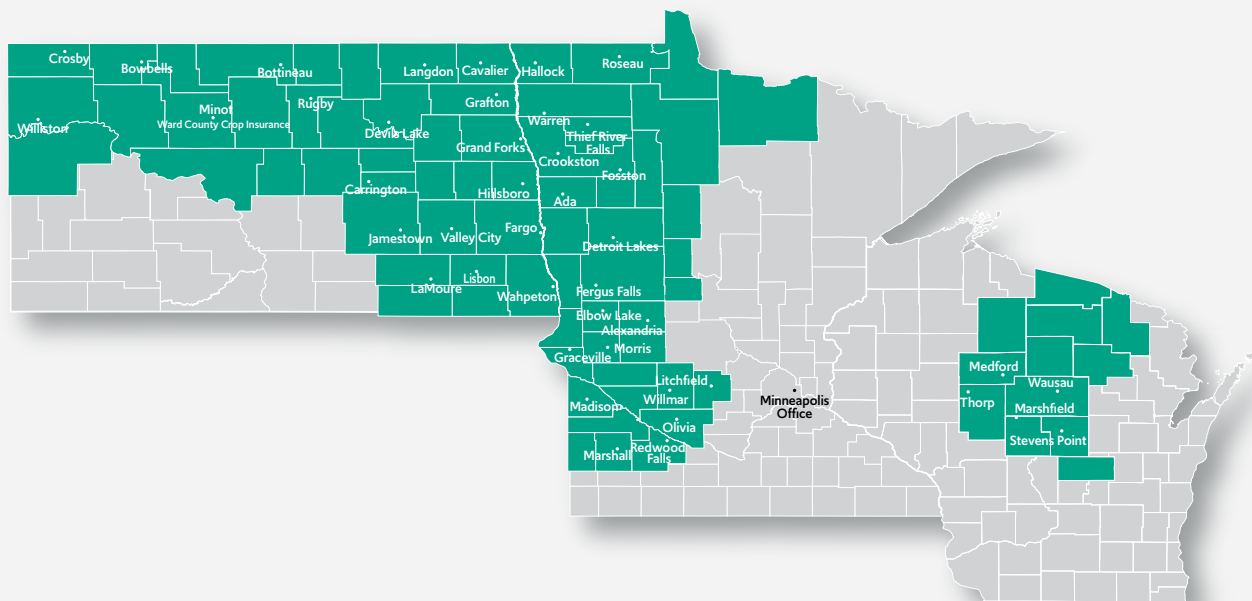
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# OFARMS Gives Insight on Marketing 2025

The entry of corporate entities into organic grain and livestock production remains the biggest threat to family farm organic agriculture. The ongoing influx of corporate consolidation and its related impact on market prices and manipulation in the organic industry remains the major concern for OFARM and our members."

So stated Oren Holle, President of the marketing bargaining cooperative OFARM (Organic Farmers' Agency for Cooperative Marketing) as it wrapped up its annual meeting in February in LaCrosse, WI. Organic field crop farmers came to the Marbleseed Organic Farming Conference experiencing field crop marketing opportunities and farm gate prices at ten-year lows leaving organic producers with, in many cases, negative net returns. This has stymied potential consideration for new transition acres and, in fact, has some organic producers abandoning their organic status.

OFARM's decade-long exposure of the fraudulent activity in the organic certification arena, both domestic and international, has been a productive collaborative effort among its members and its partners, and did result in the formation and implementation of the SOE (Strengthening Organic Enforcement).

Additionally, the collaborative initiatives of concerned organizations resulted in significant increases in funding for the National Organic Program opportunities and thus provided for more robust surveillance and enforcement. It is becoming more evident, however, that increased direct oversight is needed with more authority to address penalties for noncompliance. It further appears that a significantly greater involvement by NOP personnel will be required to more fully and directly investigate high-risk activities where gaping shortcomings in meaningful surveillance and enforcement still exist. The ongoing rhetoric to relegate the responsibility to NOP-sanctioned certifiers for action on non-compliances is a 'fox guarding the chicken house' scenario. Authority now exists in the SOE for more direct action. In plain English, we just ask NOP



Conversation and interaction at the OFARM workshop.

enforcement to do its job.

Ever-increasing uncertainty surrounding funding for organic initiatives under the new administration is an added huge concern. Any funding cuts would severely impact a number of very important programs that address areas of research and promotion of organic as environmentally beneficial while enhancing the increased food security where in many instances, our industrial model of agriculture falls short.

In light of these critical concerns, OFARM leadership remains committed to its ongoing mission to provide an environment for cooperative marketing initiatives as the only viable answer to addressing this dismal atmosphere

Our collective collaboration remains committed to preserve these beneficial initiatives, as it is not only the funding that is in jeopardy but also the workforce which needs to be maintained to bring the benefits to fruition. For the present, organic fam-

ily farms are left with a dim hope for any real action that our political leadership will take a more active role to assist in these endeavors as it appears they remain unable to finalize a new farm bill let alone take into account the desperate need to update our food security policy.

The marketing bargaining cooperative approach continues to remain the most durable approach to providing a platform for real-time marketing assistance, as well as the best venue to address the many related issues that affect the multiple economic opportunities in organic crop production.

OFARM continues to adhere to its mission of establishing and maintaining sustainable prices for organic farm production through coordinated efforts of organic farmer cooperative marketing groups. And to protect and defend organic standards that promote environmentally friendly, socially responsible, and economically viable food production systems



# Collaboration & Building Strategic Partnerships Could Help Your Bottom Line

In the dynamic and competitive world of organic and regenerative farming, one of the most effective strategies for achieving favorable contracts and better prices is through strategic partnerships. By collaborating with other stakeholders in the agricultural supply chain—including businesses, cooperatives, and community organizations—farmers can enhance market access, pool resources, and ultimately create more resilient operations. There can be value in building strategic partnerships.

Strategic partnerships allow farmers to leverage combined strengths and capabilities in ways that single operations often cannot. By working together, farmers can enhance their bargaining power when negotiating contracts and access new markets that may have seemed out of reach. For example, a group of farmers can collaborate to meet the large order requirements of grocery chains or restaurants that prefer to source organic products locally, improving their chances of securing better pricing agreements.

Partnerships can also foster innovation. Networking at events like the NPSAS Food & Farming Conference, field days, ag shows, and other events and talking with people can add enormous value. By sharing knowledge and expertise, farmers can learn about new techniques, technologies, and market trends, ultimately leading to improved practices. Collaborative efforts can also help in creating value-added products, where farmers jointly develop processed goods—such as jams, sauces, or flour—tapping into different revenue streams.

The TOPP or Marbleseed Mentorship programs are notable examples of successful strategic partnerships. Pairing experienced farmers with new and

Another example can be found in community-supported agriculture (CSA) models, where multiple small farms come together to offer a diverse range of products to customers. This arrangement not only diversifies the produce offered to subscribers but also stabilizes income for farmers who might otherwise face market fluctuations on their own.

Collaboration  
and strategic  
partnerships can  
help your  
bottom line.



Another instance can be seen in cooperative marketing ventures where farmers collaborate to brand their products collectively. For example, a group of organic vegetable growers may form a cooperative to market their produce under a single brand, which can enhance visibility and credibility in the marketplace. By pooling their resources for marketing, distribution, and logistics, these farmers can cut costs and increase overall market presence.

## Tips for Building Strategic Partnerships

### Identify Potential Partners:

Begin by mapping out local businesses, other farms, and community organizations that share similar values regarding sustainability and

organic practices. Look for partners who complement your offerings—whether through complementary products, shared customer bases, or operational synergies.

### Communicate Clearly:

Once potential partners are identified, foster open communication about goals, expectations, and visions for collaborative efforts. Establishing a mutual understanding from the outset is essential for successful partnerships.

### Start Small:

Consider launching a pilot project or a short-term collaboration before committing to a long-term partnership. This allows both parties to assess compatibility and refine the collaborative approach based on initial results.

*Continued on page 22*

# Digital Marketing Options for Farmers

In today's digital age, farmers in niche markets can harness digital platforms to expand their reach and promote their products effectively. With increasing consumer demand for organic and sustainably produced foods, innovative marketing strategies through digital channels can help farmers connect with broader audiences, increase sales, and foster community engagement.



Clint and Kelly Brandlee of Back Forty Beef a family farm in Pierpont, SD presented marketing ideas and options at the 2025 NPSAS Food & Farming Conference

Historically, agriculture relied heavily on face-to-face interactions and local markets. The rise of digital marketing has transformed how farmers engage with consumers. With smartphones and social media, farmers can create compelling online presences that showcase their commitment to sustainability, transparency, and quality. By using these digital platforms, farmers can build lasting connections with consumers interested in the stories behind their food.

## Key Digital Platforms for Marketing

### Social Media:

Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and

TikTok enable farmers to share their stories and connect with customers. Visual storytelling through photos and videos is particularly effective. Kelly Brandlee of Back Forty Beef in Pierpont, SD, highlights the importance of social media: "Social media has allowed us to pull back the curtain on daily life at Back Forty Beef. By sharing behind the scenes, we've built a loyal customer base that doesn't just buy our beef—they believe in our story." This engagement fosters meaningful conversations and enhances trust among customers.

### Websites and E-Commerce:

A well-designed website serves as a 24/7 digital storefront for farmers,

allowing them to provide information about their practices while facilitating online orders. Kelly explains, "Our website has truly become our digital storefront. Customers can shop for our beef and tallow products, plan their visit to the corn maze, and choose the pickup or delivery option that works best for them." This approach enhances profit margins by reducing reliance on intermediaries and allows for direct customer engagement.

### Email Marketing:

Building an email list offers a direct line of communication with customers. Regular newsletters can share farming updates, new product launches, and seasonal offerings. Kelly notes, "Email marketing is our most direct—and most reliable—line to our customers." Owning the email list allows farmers to avoid the risks from social media algorithms and platform outages, ensuring consistent communication.

### Online Marketplaces:

Platforms like Etsy and Local-Harvest provide additional selling avenues for local and organic products. These sites help farmers reach consumers who prioritize local and sustainable goods, enhancing visibility and sales potential.

Content marketing is another essential component of a successful digital strategy. By creating informative and engaging content such as blog posts, videos, and educational webinars, farmers can educate consumers on the benefits of sustainable farming practices. Sharing recipes, sustainable living tips, or insights into farming further creates valuable content that informs and inspires.

*Continued on page 22*



# Strategies for Pricing and Contract Negotiation

In the highly competitive landscape of organic and regenerative farming, understanding market trends is crucial for farmers seeking to secure favorable prices and contracts for their products. With the growing consumer demand for organic products and the shift towards sustainability, farmers must be equipped with the knowledge and strategies necessary to navigate this evolving marketplace. There are some key market trends impacting the organic farming sector and practical strategies for effective pricing and contract negotiation.

The organic food market has witnessed substantial growth over the years, driven by a rise in consumer awareness about health, environmental sustainability, and animal welfare. Consumers are increasingly looking for products that align with their values, prompting a shift in purchasing behaviors. Some key trends include:

## 1. Sustainability Focus:

Many consumers prioritize brands that demonstrate a commitment to sustainability and ethical practices. This trend has heightened interest in organic practices, making transparency around farming methods vital.

## 2. Local Sourcing:

The local food movement has

gained momentum, with consumers preferring to buy from local farms. This presents an opportunity for farmers to forge direct relationships with consumers and local businesses.

## 3. Plant-Based Diets:

The increasing popularity of plant-based diets has led to a surge in demand for organic vegetables, grains, and legumes. Farmers who can adapt their offerings to align with these dietary trends may capture a larger share of the market.

## 4. Value-Added Products:

Consumers are increasingly interested in convenience and health, leading to a rise in demand for value-added products such as organ-

ic sauces, snacks, and ready-to-eat meals. Farmers can capitalize on this trend by diversifying their product lines.

Understanding market trends is essential for developing effective pricing strategies. Here are several tips for pricing organic products competitively while ensuring profitability:

## 1. Conduct Market Research:

Stay informed about current market prices for similar products. Research competitors and understand what consumers are willing to pay. Resources like farmers' markets, local co-ops, and online marketplaces can provide valuable pricing insights.

## 2. Evaluate Production Costs:

Calculate the true cost of production, taking into account not only inputs but also labor, equipment, and overhead. This understanding will help farmers set prices that sustainably cover their costs while remaining competitive.

## 3. Differentiate Your Offerings:

Highlight unique selling points (USPs) of your products—such as hormone-free, organic certification, regenerative certification, grass-fed, or foods with specific types of exceptional flavor. Products that clearly stand out can justify premium pricing.



Strategies for contract and pricing

*Continued on page 24*

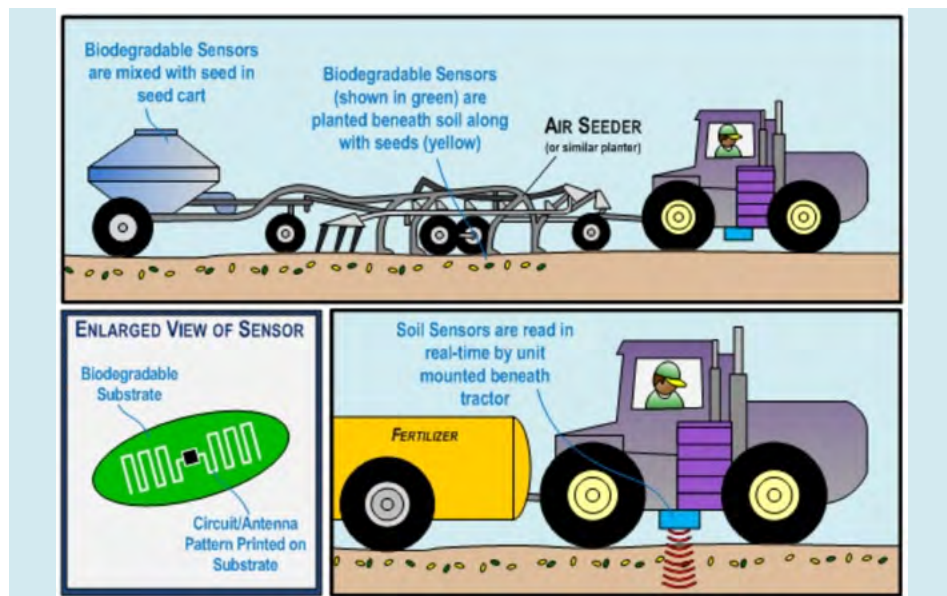
# Innovating Agriculture: The Promise of Biodegradable Soil Sensors

Typically, this innovation section covers a technology or innovation that is newly available. During the research process, an innovation that has not yet been fully developed was discovered. Although not yet available, sharing the story here may increase the chances of the ideas coming to fruition, as technological advancements in the evolving landscape of agriculture are creating significant opportunities for farmers to optimize their practices.

To that end, among the promising innovations lies the development of biodegradable soil sensors at North Dakota State University (NDSU). These sensors, known as Sensing Earth Environment Directly (SEED) sensors, offer a groundbreaking approach to soil monitoring that combines environmental sustainability with high-tech precision. The invention, which emerged from the collaborative efforts of NDSU researchers, harnesses novel printing techniques to create eco-friendly devices capable of providing real-time data regarding soil conditions.

The SEED sensor represents a new frontier in agricultural technology, utilizing a combination of traditional and additive manufacturing processes to produce sensors made from bio-based materials. These sensors are designed to be “planted” directly into the soil along with the seeds during cultivation. By employing a revolutionary “direct write” electronic printing technique, researchers print intricate circuit and antenna patterns onto renewable materials, enabling the devices to monitor soil environments effectively.

One of the standout features of these sensors is their construction, which contains trace amounts of metallic materials, such as aluminum, that pose no threat to the soil. By avoiding traditional toxic components found in electronic devices, the SEED sensors can decompose naturally over time, leaving virtually no harmful residues behind, a significant advantage for maintaining soil health. The biodegradable nature of these sensors aligns seamlessly with the increasing demand for environmentally respon-



sible agricultural practices.

As quality and efficiency become paramount in agricultural production, the ability to monitor soil conditions in real-time is invaluable. The SEED sensors enable this capability by directly measuring vital parameters, including soil moisture, temperature, and chemical content. Data collected by the sensors can then be transmitted wirelessly to devices mounted on agricultural vehicles, providing farmers with immediate insights necessary for enhancing crop performance.

Chad A. Ulven, a professor of mechanical engineering at NDSU and key figure in the development of the SEED sensor, emphasizes that the integration of smart technology and data collection has reached a tipping point for farmers. “This concept was created about ten years ago. The acceptance of smart technology with big data and collecting that information is prime for farmers to take action,”

Ulven points out. With the SEED sensors, agricultural stakeholders can make informed decisions regarding irrigation, fertilization, and soil management based on comprehensive data recordings.

Despite the promising technology, SEED sensors are still navigating challenges associated with funding and market acceptance. Ulven explains that the project is currently in the research and development phase, with a critical need for ongoing financial support to accelerate advancement. Additionally, the initial costs associated with sensor deployment pose a barrier for widespread adoption in conventional row crops. “We quickly realized at the time that the technology is too expensive for row crops initially,” Ulven states. “Because of the cost, right now, this technology is geared more toward high-dollar, high-return crops like almonds, berries, grapes, and avocados.”

*Continued on page 24*



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## Digital Marketing Options for Farmers...

*Continued from page 19*

Digital platforms also allow farmers and ranchers to build community. By participating in online forums and social media discussions, farmers can connect with consumers, solicit feedback, and share experiences. This engagement fosters trust and loyalty, as customers feel a personal connection to the farms that produce their food.

For farmers, especially organic, regenerative, and specialty farmers, embracing digital platforms is not optional but essential for growth and

sustainability. By utilizing social media, developing websites, engaging in email marketing, and creating compelling content, farmers can effectively market their products and share their values. In a world where transparency and authenticity matter, digital innovations present a unique opportunity for farms like Back Forty Beef to connect, educate, and thrive in a competitive marketplace. By leveraging these tools, they can amplify their voices and contribute to a more sustainable future for agriculture.

## Collaboration & Building Strategic Partnerships...

*Continued from page 18*

### **Negotiate Fair Agreements:**

When negotiating partnerships, ensure that all parties feel their contributions and needs are adequately addressed. Clear contracts should outline each party's responsibilities, profit-sharing arrangements, and exit strategies to create a solid foundation for the partnership.

### **Leverage Technology:**

Utilize digital platforms and tools to streamline collaboration efforts, particularly in logistics and

communication. Online project management tools can help keep everyone on the same page, while e-commerce platforms can facilitate joint sales efforts.

Building strategic partnerships is a powerful and often underutilized strategy in the world of organic and regenerative farming. By collaborating with local businesses, cooperatives, and other farms, producers can enhance their market access, pool resources, and negotiate better contracts. Such partnerships not only help achieve better prices but also foster community resilience, innovation, and sustainability in agricultural practices. Embracing

# Askegaard Featured Family

## Can you tell us about your farm?

Our farm is a sixth-generation family farm located south of Moorhead, MN. The primary crops in our crop rotation are spring wheat, soybeans, flax, oats, winter wheat, and cover crops. We sell value-added products that we mill and package on-farm, including whole & milled (ground) flaxseed, wheat berries, and whole wheat flour. Our products are sold in grocery stores and food cooperatives, to school districts, hospitals, and bakeries, and direct to consumer.

## Can you tell us a little about your family?

Mark is a fifth-generation farmer. His wife, Barb, retired in 2024 after a 45-year career at Bell Bank. Mark & Barb have two daughters; Claire is a pharmacist, and Beth farms with Mark. Beth is married to Tony, a physical therapist, and they have a 2.5-year-old daughter, Hazel. Our farm is home to one dog, four cats, and 8 chickens.

## What year were you first certified organic?



The Askegaard family

We first applied for organic certification in 1995 and we harvested our first certified organic crop in 1997.

## What is the best advice you've received that helped your operation?

The best advice we've received that has helped our operation is to have a diverse crop rotation. Strive to always have living roots in your soil and keep your ground covered.

## With multiple generations

## working together, do you have advice you received and can provide for other families working together in and through the potential transition process?

Each generation has knowledge to share that can help your operation. Work as a team and utilize each other's skills. Communication is essential.

## Do you have anything new you're working on or a goal for the operation in the next 5 years?

A 5-year goal that we have for our operation is to start working with a distributor for our value-added products, which will help us expand into new markets.

## Do you have any great advice for new and transitioning farmers?

Don't get discouraged! Farming can be challenging and each growing season is different. Have a mentor or someone you can talk to for advice.



Mark Askegaard with grandchild



# Innovating Agriculture: The Promise of...

*Continued from page 21*

The pricing structure offers a potential return on investment, but not all crops yield the same financial benefits. For example, while an investment of approximately \$20 per acre may yield a return of \$40 per acre in certain cases, Ulven cautions that the rate of return may not justify the initial costs for some farmers. Electric conductivity and temperature data collected by SEED sensors ultimately enable the optimization of crop management; however, the economic feasibility is an essential factor to consider in their wider adoption.

The SEED sensors underwent rigorous field testing, with prototypes utilized in irrigated sugar

beet fields and corn-soy-bean rotations across Minnesota and North Dakota. By correlating sensor data with traditional soil samples, researchers gathered valuable insights into the functionality and precision of these devices. "The sensors give you temperature and bulk electrical conductivity," Ulven notes, highlighting their capacity to inform farmers about critical conditions like salinity levels.

The competitive landscape for soil sensing technology is becoming increasingly crowded, as demonstrated by a competition held by Bayer in 2020, where the SEED sensor competed against various other sensor products. Despite facing

tough competition, Ulven proudly reports that the SEED sensor ranked fifth out of seven, showcasing its potential effectiveness and ease of use in practical applications. Part of the score rating was because it requires a passover of a pivot, drone, or some other device to be read, but that's also because it's components are biodegradable which makes it an attractive option for sustainable farming practices.

The agricultural sector's evolution is marked by the shift towards more sustainable practices, and the SEED sensors exemplify this transformation. With insights garnered from soil temperature and moisture monitoring,

farmers can make strategic decisions that culminate in more efficient resource usage. Ulven emphasizes the importance of moving towards a biodegradable sensor version that remains effective while minimizing environmental impact. "We have a path toward moving to a biodegradable version that can remain in the soil," he affirms, reinforcing the commitment to eco-friendly agricultural solutions.

As the quest for sustainable agricultural practices continues, innovations like the SEED sensors are vital to shaping the industry's future. By integrating environmental responsibility, precision measurement

## Strategies for Pricing and Contract Negotiation...

*Continued from page 20*

### 4. Implement Flexible Pricing Models:

Consider offering bulk pricing, seasonal discounts, or subscription models to attract more customers. This flexibility can help farmers gauge demand and adjust prices accordingly.

### Techniques for Successful Contract Negotiation

Effective contract negotiation is vital for securing favorable agreements with buyers. Consider the fol-

lowing strategies:

#### 1. Know Your Value:

Clearly articulate the benefits of your products and practices during negotiations. Emphasize organic certifications, quality, freshness, and sustainability to substantiate your pricing.

#### 2. Build Strong Relationships:

Establishing rapport with potential buyers can foster trust and result in better contractual terms. Take the time to understand their needs and preferences, allowing for a collaborative approach to negotiation.

#### 3. Prepare for Negotiation:

Before entering discussions, assess your bottom line and identify non-negotiables. Be ready to present clear proposals while also allowing for flexibility to accommodate buyer needs.

#### 4. Document Everything:

Ensure that all contractual agreements are documented clearly, outlining pricing, delivery schedules, and any contingencies. Having a well-structured contract minimizes misunderstandings and helps build long-term professional relationships.

In the evolving landscape of organic and regenerative farming, understanding market trends and employing effective pricing and contract negotiation strategies is essential for farmers looking to thrive. By staying informed about consumer preferences, conducting thorough market research, and developing solid relationships with buyers, farmers can navigate the complexities of pricing and contract negotiations effectively. With the right strategies in place, organic farmers can secure better prices and contracts, ultimately enhancing the sustainability and profitability of their operations.

# Farmhouse Flax Cookies



## Ingredients

- 1 cup Askegaard Organic Whole Wheat Flour
- 1/3 cup Askegaard Organic Ground Flaxseed
- 1/3 cup Askegaard Organic Whole Flaxseed
- 3/4 cup quick or rolled oats
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1/2 cup butter, softened
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/3 cup cane sugar
- 1 egg
- 1/2 tsp vanilla



## Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350F.
2. Mix the wet ingredients in a mixer until creamy & light.
3. Combine dry ingredients in a separate bowl, and add to wet ingredients.
4. Place dough by teaspoons onto an ungreased cookie sheet.
5. Bake for 12 minutes, or until lightly golden.
6. Cool on cooling rack and store in an airtight container. Enjoy!

Recipe inspired by <https://canadianliving.com/food/baking-and-desserts/recipe/farmland-flax-cookies>



# Triple Berry Muffins



## Ingredients

- 2/3 cup unsweetened, unflavored plant milk
- 3 Tbsp Askegaard Organic Ground Flaxseed
- 1.5 cups Askegaard Organic Whole Wheat Flour
- 1.5 tsp baking powder
- 2/3 cup pure maple syrup
- 1/2 cup unsweetened apple sauce
- 2 Tbsp almond butter
- 2 tsp lemon zest
- 2 Tbsp lemon juice
- 2 Tbsp pure vanilla extract
- 1 cup fresh blueberries
- 1 cup fresh raspberries or strawberries
- 1 cup fresh blackberries

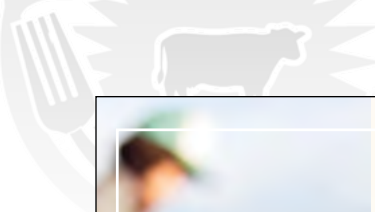


## Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Line muffin cups with paper liners.
2. Stir together the ground flaxseed and plant milk in a small bowl. Let stand for 5 minutes to thicken.
3. In a large bowl, stir together the flour & baking powder.
4. Use a medium bowl to stir together the flaxseed mixture with the maple syrup, applesauce, almond butter, lemon zest, lemon juice, and vanilla. Add in the flour mixture, stirring until combined. Fold in 2/3 cup of each berry.
5. Spoon batter into muffin cups. Sprinkle remaining berries on top of batter.
6. Bake for 20 minutes or until toothpick inserted into centers comes out clean. Cool for 10 minutes.
7. Muffins can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 days, or freeze for up to 1 month.

\* This recipe was adapted from Forks Over Knives Plant Based Magazine, Winter 2024 edition.





The USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program has been helping farmers, ranchers, gardeners, and students achieve their goals for improved profit, production, national resources and quality of life for 30 years.

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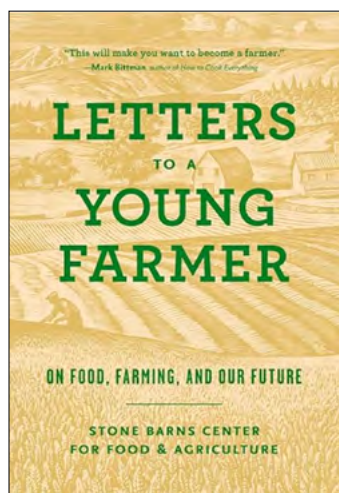


## Great Reads for Better Farming



### Marketing for Organic Farming" by Mario Atzori

**T**his book offers an insightful guide for farmers aiming to enhance their market strategies. The book effectively combines practical advice with real-world case studies, making it accessible and applicable. Atzori emphasizes understanding consumer behavior and sustainable practices, equipping readers with the tools needed to thrive in the competitive organic market. A valuable resource for both novices and experienced farmers.



### Letters to a Young Farmer: On Food, Farming, and Our Future" by the Stone Barns

**C**enter for Food and Ag is a heartfelt collection of essays aimed at inspiring the next generation of farmers. It addresses the challenges and triumphs of sustainable agriculture, emphasizing the importance of food systems. With diverse perspectives, the book encourages a deeper connection to land and community, making it a must-read for aspiring farmers.

## Askegaard Featured Family...

Continued from page 23

**Is there a change in your operation that made a big difference for you that others might benefit from hearing?**

We stopped importing animal manures and have been using only cover crops/green manures & crop rotations to increase our soil fertility. Because we don't have livestock on our farm, this seemed like a more self-sustaining option for us, and we feel good about not supporting CAFOs through the purchase of manure. We have noticed a decrease in weed pressure since we've stopped using manures.

**Why are you part of NPSAS, and how does it help your operation?**

We are members of NPSAS because it is a great network of peers. Everyone is friendly and we learn from each other. We appreciate the family atmosphere and sense of community that it pro-

vides.

**What is the most impactful success or lesson learned in your operation?**

Be open to change and always keep an open mind.

The soil is alive! Feed the soil, not the plant.

**What's the best thing(s) you've done that made your operation better?**

One of the things that we do on our farm that has made our operation better is to under-seed all of our small grains with clover at the time of planting. The clover grows alongside the wheat all season and it provides a number of benefits to the soil; it fixes nitrogen, suppresses weeds, increases organic matter, reduces soil erosion and attracts pollinators & beneficial insects. After the small grains are harvested, the clover continues to grow and keeps living roots in the soil into the fall season.

There is no WIFI in the forest,  
but I promise you will find a  
better connection.

- Ralph Smart





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