

DECEMBER 2024

OAK FIELD NOTES

News and Events from the Organic Association of Kentucky



Dear OAK Members and Friends,

It has been a year full of growth, resilience and innovation within OAK's programs and our farming community. We are proud to share some of the impacts that we have made together. I encourage you to reflect on all that was accomplished this year and to join us as we plan for the future.

This year, OAK staff worked with over 750 stakeholders to provide critical technical assistance, educational programming and regional market development through four new and three expanded programs. Staff visited dozens of farms, providing direct technical assistance supporting farmers with strategies to improve soil health, expand conservation practices, diversify crops, plan for organic transition and strengthen farm businesses. New projects offered significant financial incentives to farms implementing conservation practices and serving as organic farming mentors. Workshops and field days encouraged peer-to-peer learning across the state, and community supported agriculture (CSA) promotion generated direct farmgate impact. Your participation, collaborative partnership and dedicated funding have been instrumental to these successes.

I am proud to be with you at the forefront of this movement supporting Kentucky farmers using organic practices and creating durable local market demand to help farm businesses thrive. Looking ahead, there is much more to be done through ongoing programs, advocating for a fair Farm Bill and long-term market development to build a vibrant and resilient food and farming system.

OAK will begin strategic planning in 2025 when members and program stakeholders will have the opportunity to engage in the process through a survey and in person at the OAK Conference and Annual Membership Meeting. I wholeheartedly encourage you to contribute to this shared vision for the future of OAK's work. Again, looking ahead, we know there is more to do and we want to make that plan with you.

Your support for OAK's programs matters. Please consider a financial contribution or join our membership to cultivate the programs that grow regenerative organic agriculture in the Commonwealth.

With gratitude,

Brooke Gentile, Executive Director



Board of Directors

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David Koester
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Rachel Rudolph
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Board of Directors Meetings

Tuesday, January 14th
Tuesday, April 1st
Tuesday, September 9th
Tuesday, November 11th

2025 meetings at 9-11am ET.
Open to members & interested
individuals.

Contact us for details at
board@oak-ky.org or 502-219-7378.



OAK Staff

Kenya Abraham, Organic Transition Program Manager
Marissa Arnoldussen, Soil Health and Conservation Specialist
Leigh Cocanougher, Climate and Conservation Project Manager
Brooke Gentile, Executive Director
Sarah Geurkink, Organic Production Specialist
Katie Harvey, CSA Marketing and Outreach Program Manager
Jenny Howard Owen, Farmer Education Program Manager
Madeline (Mad) Marchal, Conservation Outreach Coordinator
Dee Owens, Marketing and Outreach Coordinator
Shannon Post, Farmer Education Coordinator
Natalie Rider, Associate Director
Robin Verson, Membership and Communications Coordinator
Annie Woods, Research Manager
Holly Chiantaretto, Organic Transition Trainer (Consultant)
Blake Van Sanford, Organic Transition Trainer (Consultant)

Member Survey

OAK members, provide your feedback!
Take the member survey:



Annual Member Meeting

Join us on Friday evening during OAK Conference, January 24, from 5:30-7:30pm ET in Frankfort at Kentucky State University's Harold R. Benson Research and Demonstration Farm for the Gather & Grow: Member Meeting & Social, featuring free beverages and snacks.

Gather for the meeting, followed by time to socialize, snack and grow together. Get to know OAK's staff, board members and community. Both members and prospective members are welcome. Register here:





Celebrating 1 Year of OAK's Soil Health & Climate-Smart Farming Project

Year 1 of OAK's USDA Soil Health Climate-Smart Farming Project is wrapping up, with 50 farms participating and numerous wins to celebrate. Eight different commodities were produced on enrolled acres spanning 31 counties. Eight climate-smart practices like cover cropping, mulching and prescribed grazing were used in Year 1, and 12 more will be incorporated in 2025. By the end of Year 1, farmers should receive more than \$150,000 in incentive payments!



Two key aspects of OAK's project are whole-farm sustainability and one-on-one technical assistance. Enrolled farms complete the Global Farm Metric-Farm Sustainability Assessment Tool (GFM-FSAT) annually, and the results create a dashboard of information that the farmer and OAK staff use to inform management plans and practice implementation to improve on-farm resilience. Farmers attest that OAK's free, one-on-one technical assistance (TA) is an invaluable part of this project. OAK's TA staff visit farms to collect soil samples and to connect with producers about their production goals, challenges and ideas for the future.

OAK is working closely with partners that focus on everything from farmer outreach to value chain coordination and business plan development to marketing. In Year 2, OAK and project partners will focus on building and expanding durable markets to help farmers earn premiums on enrolled commodities.

This material is based on work supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, under agreement number NR233A750004G092, and the Owsley Brown II Family Foundation.

"I loved being a part of this project...and was able to plant the most cover crops ever thanks to the financial incentive and management plan from OAK specialists!"

PARTICIPATING FARMER

Learn more and apply for Year 2:





“I learned more about climate-smart practices and got to meet the farmers and other wonderful people.”

2024 FIELD DAY ATTENDEE

Learning Together: Farmer Education and Conservation Support

From April to November, OAK brought farmers and allied professionals together for five online learning events and seven visits to Kentucky farms to explore best practices in organic and sustainable farming and learn alongside peers and supporters. Hundreds of participants watched climate-smart practices in action, discussed perennial and annual cropping systems, witnessed rotational grazing tools and techniques and toured fields, tunnels, pack-sheds and pastures. Farming resources, event summaries and webinar recordings are available at oak-ky.org/field-days.



In 2024, OAK launched a conservation assistance program for farmers and growers of any scale, including Kentucky's backyard and urban growers. OAK's Conservation Coordinator provides tailored support for Kentuckians' goals of natural resources stewardship. Reach out to schedule free assistance with OAK or check out resources for navigating NRCS' technical and financial assistance programs at oak-ky.org/conservation.

From cover crops to covered production, pastured livestock to pollinator habitat, OAK's on-farm Field Days, online resources and conservation support offer opportunities to learn and connect with Kentucky farmers and ag professionals. 2025 events coming soon!

This work is supported by a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Kentucky Agricultural Development Fund (KADF) and multiple programmatic partners.





Join Us for OAK Conference on January 23-25 Grounded in Organics: From Soil to Market

OAK's 14th Annual Conference returns to Frankfort on January 23-25, 2025 at KSU's Harold R. Benson Research and Demonstration Farm! Plan to join us for three days of immersive learning and connection with fellow farmers, ag professionals and researchers. This year's agenda includes roundtables on grazing and organic horticulture, specific crop production, pest and weed management, on-farm research, state and federal issues impacting farms, business and marketing, soil and nutrient management, on-farm conservation and much more! Find exciting details on keynote speakers, the agenda and pre-conference workshops at oak-ky.org/annual-conference. Registration is open for #OAK2025! All are welcome and scholarships are available. Register at oak-ky.org/registration or mail in this registration form.

See Agenda Here



Online
Registration
Open

Register by December 13 to save with early-bird pricing!
OAK Members receive an additional discount on registration.

Pre-Conference Workshops: Agroforestry, Profitability, Silvopasture, Storage Crops, Walk-Behind Equipment

OAK Conference 2025 Registration

Today's Date: / /

Register ONLINE: www.oak-ky.org or mail in this form and envelope.

Choose Ticket :	Oct. 30-Dec.13	Dec. 14-Jan.17	Jan. 18-Jan. 25	Member Discount**	# Tickets	Subtotal
<input type="checkbox"/> 2-Day* - Fri./Sat.	\$150	\$170	\$190	– \$20	x <input type="text"/> =	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> 1-Day - Friday	\$95	\$105	\$115	– \$10	x <input type="text"/> =	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Day - Saturday	\$95	\$105	\$115	– \$10	x <input type="text"/> =	<input type="text"/>

*Student discount available without membership, \$20.

**Add a membership below!

Check here to : ☐ Apply for a scholarship ☐ Be contacted to register additional people

Select Lunch:

- ☐ Meat
☐ Vegetarian
☐ Vegan

Choose Pre-Conference Workshop - Thursday (\$50*/\$55) :

- Morning**
- ☐ Walk-Behind Tractors A to Z
☐ Adding Perennials to Farmscape
☐ Find Profit with High Input Costs

- Afternoon**
- ☐ Silvopasture in Hardwood Forests
☐ Storage Crop Success
☐ Mini-Mastermind: Experienced Growers

# Tickets	Subtotal
x <input type="text"/> =	<input type="text"/>
x <input type="text"/> =	<input type="text"/>
x <input type="text"/> =	<input type="text"/>

*Early pricing through Dec. 13

Full Name :
Farm/Business Name :
Phone Number :
Email Address :
Address :

Add an OAK Membership:

- ☐ Student (\$20) ☐ Supporter (\$120)
☐ Individual (\$40) ☐ Agribusiness (\$500)
☐ Family Farm (\$70) ☐ Equity Member (\$0)

Subtotal

=

TOTAL DUE:



“I am so grateful to have this technical assistance free resource! As a business owner who both farms and runs a value-added product brand...The time alone that Sarah has saved me in doing research and connecting me with experts and peers has been invaluable.”

SARAH BARNEY
AMONG THE OAKS HERB FARM

Helping Farmers Solve Problems

OAK's new Organic Production Program delivers specialized technical assistance to help farmers optimize their production practices. The program fills a long-identified need in Kentucky and complements a range of services currently available in the state.

In its inaugural year, the Organic Production Program was a great success, supporting 64 farms in 40 counties with personalized advice and practical recommendations for organic production. As part of the program, OAK developed valuable production, planning and record-keeping tools which growers can access on OAK's website and customize to fit their production needs.

The Organic Production Program is a free consultation service available to commercial farms in Kentucky that are currently using—or interested in introducing—organic practices on their farm. Farmers can get assistance with crop and fertility planning; weed, pest and disease management; covered production; livestock and grazing systems and more. To learn more about the program, request an Organic Production Consultation, and access OAK's production tools, visit OAK's website or call Sarah at 502.517.8908.

This program is supported by the Kentucky Agricultural Development Fund (KADF).

Farmer Mentorship Supports Success

Farmers managing certified organic operations have long identified mentorship as critical to their success. New this year, organic mentor farmers were at the helm of guiding mentee farmers through the organic transition and certification process. OAK's 2024 Organic Farmer Mentorship Program included 24 amazing Kentucky farmers. They engaged in a year-long commitment that was a paid role for mentor farmers, and an invaluable learning experience for mentee farmers. With a new cohort in 2025, mentor and mentee farmers will meet monthly, visit each other's farms and attend one in-person event together. Learn more and apply for organic mentorship: oak-ky.org/transition-to-organic-partnership-program.

This program is supported by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, Transition to Organic Partnerships Program (TOPP).





Organic Transition Services Support Success

Over the past year, OAK's Organic Transition Program staff worked with over 50 farmers preparing for organic certification. Staff traveled state-wide, conducted farm visits and offered one-on-one support and virtual technical assistance. Direct on-farm technical support helped farmers adapt management plans, modify equipment use, update records and prepare to bring over 900 acres into organic management. Outreach workshops connected farmer groups with certification assistance, including refugee community cooperative farms in Lexington and Bowling Green, fruit and vegetable growers, beginning farmers, veteran farmers and agricultural professionals. Watch the new Organic System Plan Video Tutorials and check out recordkeeping resources and templates at oak-ky.org/oak-resources. Request organic transition support: oak-ky.org/organic-transition.

This program is supported by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, Transition to Organic Partnerships Program (TOPP).

Improving Wellness One Box at a Time

In 2024, Kentucky Farm Share Coalition (KYFSC) farms distributed over 20,000 weekly produce boxes through workplace CSA (community-supported agriculture) programs, matching employers with partner farms to distribute CSA shares across the state.

This direct-to-consumer model offers convenient access to healthy local food and fosters a deeper connection to a local farm. This year, KYFSC partnered with 11 farms serving over 1,000+ individuals across 20 counties and generated \$600,000 in revenue benefiting Kentucky farmers. Program participants reported increased healthy behaviors, such as cooking more at home, eating more vegetables and consuming less processed foods.

Now in its seventh year, KYFSC aims to build on this momentum and increase access to fresh, local produce. If you are interested in exploring workplace CSA, email Dee Owens (dee@oak-ky.org).

This program is supported by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP), the Kentucky Agricultural Development Fund (KADF) and the Owsley Brown II Family Foundation.

"The mentorship has been incredibly helpful for us this year. Our mentor has worked with us through a tough year and provided accountability, encouragement and support. We have learned so much and are closer to our goals!"

FARMER MENTEES
ELIZABETH AND BRIAN

Learn more and
apply for 2025:





Organic Association of Kentucky
PO Box 22244
Lexington, KY 40522

Advancing organic regenerative agriculture to improve the health of our environment and communities. Growing resilience, economic viability and socially just futures for Kentucky farmers through educational, technical and marketing resources.

www.oak-ky.org | 502.219.7378 | info@oak-ky.org

DONATE TODAY. GROW THE IMPACT



You can support OAK's work of advancing regenerative organic food and farming with a donation of any amount! Use the enclosed envelope or visit OAK's website to make a donation today: oak-ky.org/donate

BECOME AN OAK MEMBER



Farmers and eaters, agricultural professionals and students, gardeners and educators - it takes all of us to build a sustainable food system for everyone! Use the enclosed envelope, call or join online today: www.oak-ky.org/join