



OHIO ECOLOGICAL
FOOD AND FARM
ASSOCIATION

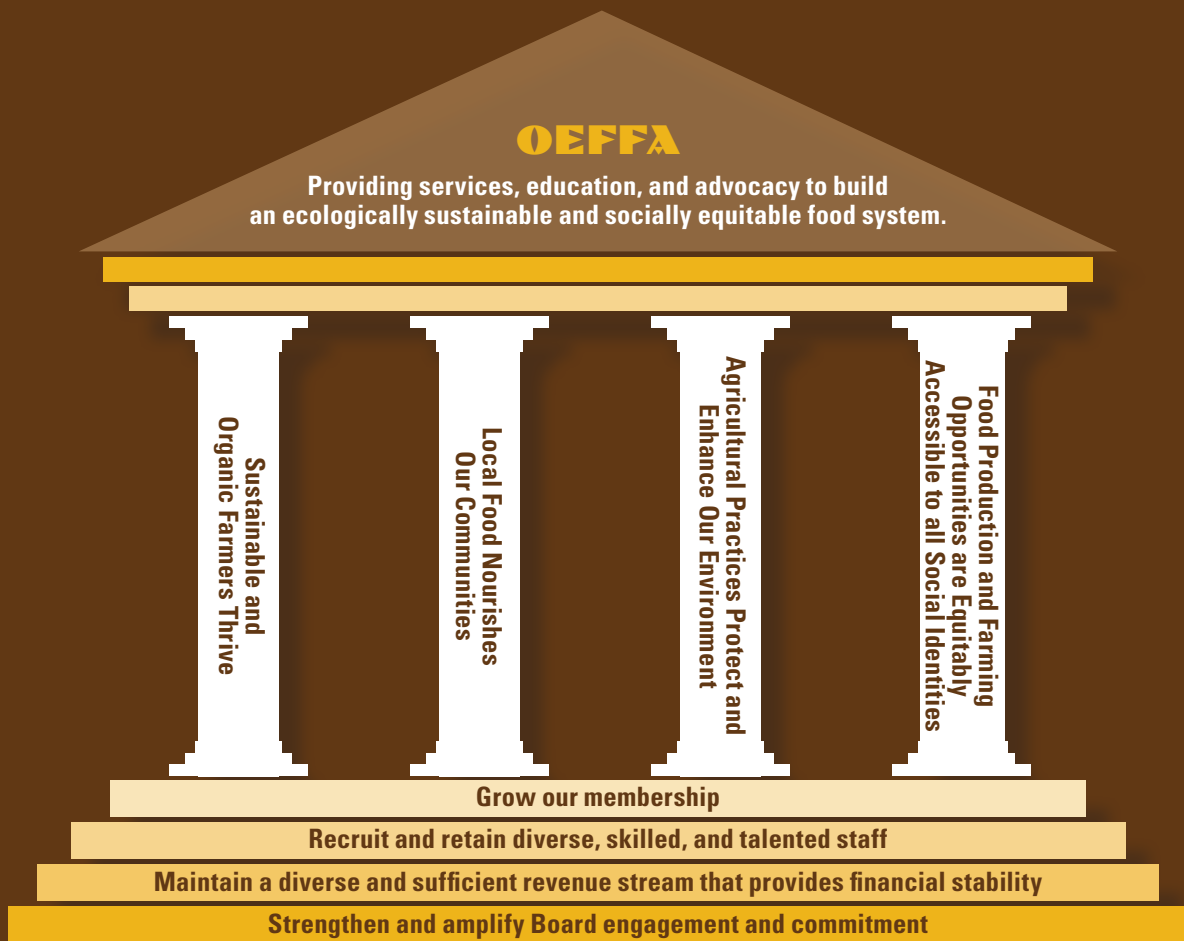


STRATEGIC PLAN

2021-2025

OEFFA'S MISSION

The Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association cultivates a future in which sustainable and organic farmers thrive, local food nourishes our communities, and agricultural practices protect and enhance our environment.



In this plan, we have identified four pillars that will be essential in service of our mission over the next five years. These pillars, in turn, rest on and necessitate a strong organizational foundation. Our pillars and foundational principles, along with the benchmarks against we will chart our progress, are described in detail on pages 6-15.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

In the 1970s, farmers seeking information about sustainable practices found traditional agriculture institutions and agencies had little to offer on the topic and were even hostile to the approach. Out of necessity, and with generous spirits, these farmers connected to learn from and support each other. At the same time, retailers and other non-farmers wanting to access ecologically-produced food came forward to help. The first conference, in 1979, emphasized farmers teaching other farmers, and soon after an organic certification program was established, based on volunteers who conducted inspections and a committee which reviewed applications and made decisions about granting certification. The legacy of the “DIY alliance” that founded the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association is that grassroots and farmer-centered activities and services prevail throughout the organization today.

In 1980, OEFFA was initially incorporated with the IRS as a 501(c)5 – a labor and agricultural organization. About 10 years later, a sister 501(c)3 was created: the “Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association Education Fund.” This status as a charitable organization allowed OEFFA to accept tax-deductible donations. All other activities of OEFFA – certification, educational programs, etc. – were still housed in the (c)5.

This changed in 2002 with the implementation of the National Organic Program (NOP). In order to comply with the standard for certifiers that they not provide consulting or advising on “overcoming identified barriers to certification,” the activities of the organization were split: certification remained in the (c)5 while all other activities of the organization were moved to the (c)3. This structure continues today.

It is worth emphasizing, however, that this division is more a matter of fulfilling our obligation to the NOP than it is the ethic or culture of the organization. OEFFA Certification has expanded its work to include Organic Grass-Fed and Food Justice certifications. Educational programming often targets the needs of organic farmers, frequently identified through the experiences

of our certification staff. While this programming may originate with the needs of organic farmers, it typically serves a diversity of farming operations along the sustainability spectrum, as all seek to farm in a way that protects ecosystem integrity. OEFFA also expanded upon the initial focus of peer learning to include state and federal policy work, programming focused on beginning farmers and, most recently, agricultural justice work.

Embarking on this round of strategic planning, our self-critique of our prior plan was that we did not capture potential synergies between the different program areas. As you will read below, our focus in this strategic planning process was to bring our core activities of education, policy advocacy, and certification services into alignment, recognizing how each makes vital contributions to achieving our mission and has the potential to amplify the others. In this strategic plan, we worked to identify goals that not only support our mission but also allow us to simultaneously bring the efforts of multiple program areas to their achievement, positioning us for maximal effectiveness.

HOW WE CREATED OUR PLAN

Figure 1 summarizes the flow of activities for creating this strategic plan. The process began in January 2021 and was completed in December 2021.

OUR MEMBERS SPEAK

We launched work on this plan with a survey of the OEFFA membership. Nearly half of the 400+ respondents were organic farmers certified by OEFFA; the remainder were members who described themselves in other terms, such as “gardener,” “homesteader,” and “concerned citizen.” By a very wide margin (more than 60%) they indicated their reason for being a member of OEFFA is: “to support an organization that is helping organic and sustainable farmers.”

Asked about the greatest threats to sustainable agriculture, they focused on economics: the difficulty of making a living in farming; the ways in which policies prioritize cheap food;

and the cost and availability of farmland. And reflecting on these threats, they suggested our priorities for education should focus on educating consumers about the importance of sustainable and organic practices (emphasizing these as a climate change solution), and rebuilding processing and distribution systems to support a local food economy. Certified organic farmers also identified helping farmers transition to organic production: they do not see other entrants to the organic market as a threat. On the contrary, and in keeping with the spirit of generosity and encouragement that typifies our members, they want to see more of organic farmers.

This same group of certified organic farmers expressed their concern about reducing fraud in organics, citing as their top policy priority strengthening organic enforcement to prevent fraud. Among all respondents, policies to advance soil health, promote sustainable and organic agriculture as a climate change solution, and reversing consolidation and concentration in agriculture and the food system were top priorities.

OEFFA has always seen itself as a “big tent” organization and our members confirmed that OEFFA should continue to serve consumers and others in addition to serving farmers. And yet, among our mission areas, respondents stated that

our top priority should be “helping sustainable and organic farmers thrive.”

The take home message from our survey was to “stay the course.” Respondents affirmed OEFFA’s current direction and indicated that no radical shift in priorities or focus was needed. But survey responses also revealed support for OEFFA to consider how its work could additionally build on social justice.

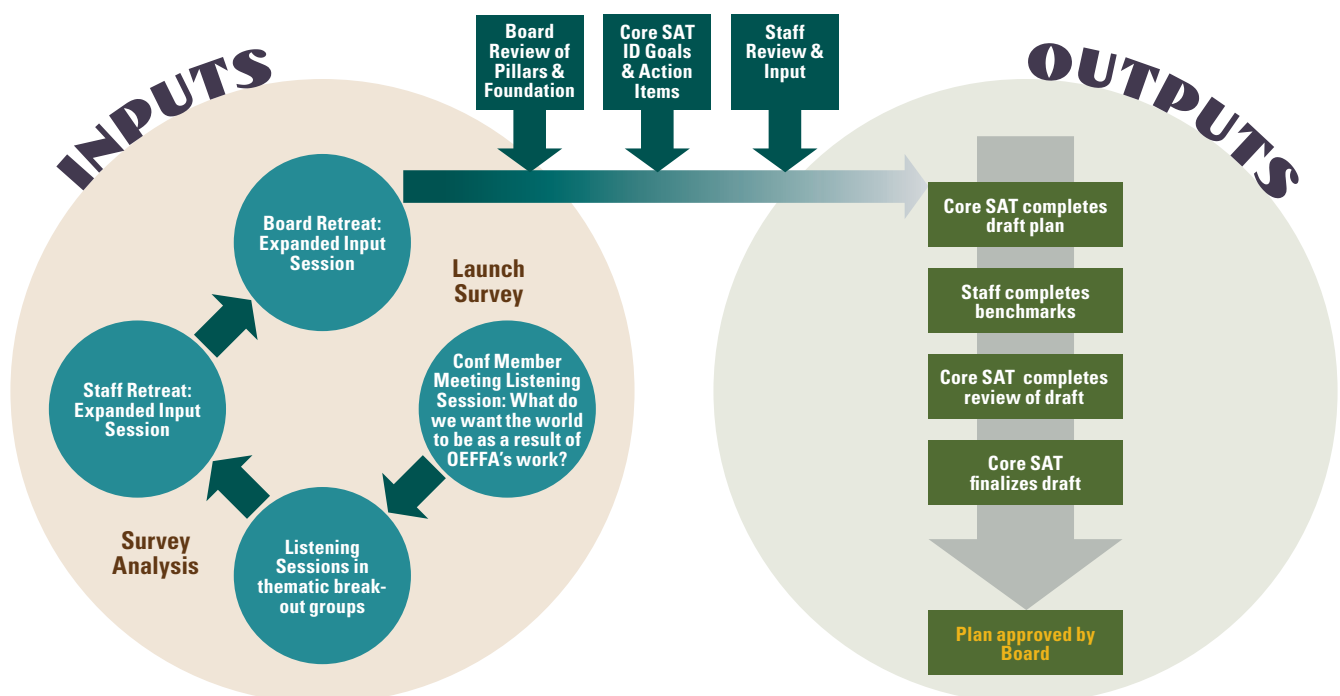
INPUT SESSIONS

While collecting survey responses, OEFFA’s annual conference took place. We took advantage of this gathering to conduct two input sessions with our members.

In the first session, we reviewed OEFFA’s mission and then prompted our members to describe OEFFA’s most important values. The responses were heartening and inspiring. Words such as “community,” “sustainable,” “health,” and “justice” rose to the forefront. See Figure 2.

In breakout sessions, we also asked participants to think about one of the three aspects of OEFFA’s mission (organic and sustainable farmers thrive; local food nourishes our communities; agricultural practices protect and enhance the environment) and what should be the result of OEFFA’s efforts in each of these areas. The visions expressed in

FIGURE 1





SUSTAINABLE AND ORGANIC FARMERS THRIVE

1. Ecological farmers prevail over corporate consolidation and control of the food system and build greater food sovereignty through cooperative action.

- a. Conduct grassroots campaigns and work with partners in support of legislation to break up food and agriculture monopolies.
- b. Develop and promote a vision and narrative for the future of agriculture that includes farmers and non-farmers alike.
- c. Hold spaces for farmers to connect and plan for cooperative action and provide tools and resources for interested chapters, networks, and groups.

2. Support and grow next generation farmers.

- a. Provide business, production, and marketing education and other learning opportunities for beginning/early career farmers.
- b. Advance policies to increase land access for beginning farmers.
- c. Support beginning farmer access to capital and resources to establish a farm business.
- d. Investigate alternative models for land transfer and succession.

3. Give farmers the tools and education they need to effectively tap into market demand and support local and regional food systems to ensure that small and mid-sized farms can access markets and communities have access to healthy foods.

- a. Provide education and technical assistance to farmers so they have skills and knowledge in sustainable production practices.
- b. Educate farmers on successful business models.
- c. Support cooperative and worker owned models for food production, distribution, and marketing.
- d. Engage in discussion and planning to address the gaps in infrastructure faced by small to mid-scale farmers.
- e. Support farmer adoption of market certifications such as organic, food safety, grass-fed, and food justice that help them to effectively market their products and represent the values behind them.

PILLAR 1

BENCHMARKS

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Seek funding to support market research for local products and the exploration of various business model opportunities for farmers and their buyers, through a total of 5 meetings (chapter, online, conference)			●	●	●
Engage in effective advocacy for the Concentration and Competition farm bill campaign by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developing 2 member leaders on this campaign priority; and 2. Facilitating a minimum of 25 comments on fair competition rulemaking 		● ●	● ●		
Provide business, production, and marketing education and other learning opportunities for beginning and early career farmers by annually: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serving 10 farm operations through the Heartland Farm Beginnings course Serving 5 farmers through the Farm Vision course Serving beginning farmers through workshops on a variety of relevant topics and through direct technical assistance Placing 12 interns and 5 apprentices on host farms 	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●
With collaboration between certification and education departments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create 5 new and updated existing resources on crop rotation, cover cropping, and other soil building techniques Cross-train staff to share resources proactively with producers Ensure that organic producers are connected with existing resources by expanding the common language bank utilized by certification staff 		● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●
Increase the number of farm operations that are certified organic annually by up to 5%			●	●	●
Assist 75 farmers per year in the process of transitioning to organic production	●	●	●	●	●
Develop learning communities of farmers, through the OSU/CSU/OEFFA farmer research network and through the formation of interest-focused OEFFA chapters	●	●	●	●	●



LOCAL FOOD NOURISHES OUR COMMUNITIES

1. Build a stronger regional food system by reducing market barriers.

- a. Rebuild processing and distribution systems that support a local food economy.
- b. Support local slaughter facilities in acquiring organic certification.
- c. Advocate for local and regional food system funding, promote those opportunities, and provide feedback and evaluation for effective implementation.
- d. Identify gaps in the local and regional food infrastructure and create a plan to address them.
- e. Assist farmers in accessing institutional/wholesale markets (i.e. grocery stores, schools, processors, other institutions).

2. Facilitate access to land for growing food.























- a. Advocate for policies that reduce the barriers to land access.
- b. Collaborate with local and regional organizations that focus on land access and farmland preservation.
- c. Provide education and technical assistance for exiting landowners and beginning farmers seeking to access or acquire land.

3. Build consumer engagement and increase access to locally and sustainably produced foods.

- a. Provide consumers with information about the benefits of locally and sustainably produced foods.
- b. Advocate for policies that work to make local food accessible to all income levels.
- c. Assist farmers in marketing products directly to consumers.

PILLAR 2

BENCHMARKS

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Funding for regional processing and distribution is included in the 2023 Farm Bill					
30 farmers are provided with education and technical support related to marketing (access to wholesale markets and/or direct marketing to consumers)					
The Ohio Family Farms Regeneration Act is signed into law					
30 beginning farmers and 10 exiting landowners are assisted with land access and transfer					
A program targeted to consumers providing in-depth information on a timely food-related issue is offered each year					
3 educational programs targeted to middle-infrastructure food system development are offered					
A family-focused farm tour (may be in partnership with other organizations) is planned and executed					



AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES PROTECT AND ENHANCE OUR ENVIRONMENT

1. Reward farmers for the ecological management and climate resilience of their practices.

- a. Advance policies that promote adoption of good soil health practices.
- b. Reward/provide incentives to farmers for conservation and nutrient planning.
- c. Publicly acknowledge farmers carrying out exemplary practices.

2. Build a movement of resilient soil-building, holistic farming solutions to the climate crisis.

- a. Programs that recognize climate resilience value of agro-ecological systems are developed and/or supported.
 - i. Engage and support members in campaigns to fully fund the conservation practices that help farmers be part of the climate change solution.
 - ii. Advocate for incentives for farmers starting new farms to build climate resilient farms.
 - iii. Influence conversations regarding development of carbon credit programs.
 - iv. Advocate for systems-level analyses in program development that take into account full life-cycle assessment of climate impacts.
- b. Provide on-demand education to farmers focused on soil building practices.
- c. Promote and share research on how farmers are part of the climate change solution.
- d. Support exponential growth in utilization of conservation programs that support soil health principles, carbon sequestration and mitigation, and food systems resilience.

3. Maintain integrity of labels used to identify food produced using specific environmentally-beneficial practices.

- a. Strengthen organic enforcement to reduce fraud.
- b. Advocate for the preeminence of ecological principles in whatever new labels emerge.

4. Increase the adoption of ecological farming practices through education and technical support.

- a. Provide educational outreach to farmers on best management practices.
- b. Expand capacity to provide ecological management practices support.
- c. Develop farmer-to-farmer peer learning networks.
- d. Advocate for policies that support organic transition.

PILLAR 3

BENCHMARKS

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
CSP and EQIP programs include a 50% funding increase towards climate friendly practices		●	●		
20 OEFFA members will be leaders in the soil health campaign		●	●	●	
50 farmers participate in soil health meetings and peer-to-peer learning opportunities		●	●	●	●
3 members of the Ohio delegation co-sponsor the Agricultural Resilience Act and/or related farm bill legislation		●	●		
Promotional materials showcasing 5 farmers employing holistic organic conservation planning and soil health principles are developed and distributed		●	●	●	●
500 ecological farmers are encouraged to utilize CSP and EQIP; 100 are provided with educational information; and 20 are assisted in accessing/applying for these programs			●	●	●
5-10 organic farmers comment on ongoing fraud prevention rulemaking		●			
Organic enforcement to reduce fraud is strengthened			●	●	●
Education, resources, and support on ecological management practices is provided to 400 producers annually	●	●	●	●	●
500 farmers and community members attend farm tours annually			●	●	●
10 farmer-mentor pairs to guide beginning farmers through the initial stages of business development are established	●	●	●	●	●
75 farmers are assisted with the process of transitioning to organic production each year	●	●	●	●	●
Secure restoration of at least 75% cost sharing for organic certification		●	●	●	●



FOOD PRODUCTION AND FARMING OPPORTUNITIES ARE EQUITABLY ACCESSIBLE TO ALL SOCIAL IDENTITIES

1. The contributions of indigenous and farmers of color will be recognized and elevated.

- a. BIPOC farmers are conference speakers, farm tour hosts, and presenters in other OEFFA educational programming.
- b. Staff, leaders, and presenters are encouraged to review their privilege with an equity lens.

2. OEFFA fosters essential conversations (guided by fairness, inclusivity, grace, and solidarity) that will contribute to dismantling inequality in our food system.

- a. Hold at least one essential conversation at conference and at least one outside of conference each year.
- b. Build relationships with BIPOC-led organizations.
- c. Listen to and support suggestions and outcomes of these conversations.

3. Structural barriers are acknowledged and addressed.

- a. Work to make state and federal resources available to all communities.
- b. Provide equitable and inclusive outreach, education, and technical assistance.
- c. Expand opportunities for and support of organic certification for all populations.

4. Issues of social justice in farm labor are highlighted and addressed.

- a. Build the Food Justice Certification program.
- b. Encourage and support fair labor practices for OEFFA-affiliated internship, apprenticeship, and farm labor projects.

5. BIPOC needs and perspectives are built into the design and implementation of programming and policy positions.

- a. Collaborate to better understand, communicate, and seek solutions to how food system disparities affect the experiences of those most affected by systemic inequities.
- b. Work with and respect all community members as leaders, experts, and co-creators in developing solutions to build a more just food system for all people.

PILLAR 4

BENCHMARKS

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Hold at least two essential conversations about equity per year					
From a baseline of 10% in 2022, each year increase the number of BIPOC presenters and hosts as a percentage of all speakers at OEFFA educational events					
Develop a guide for presenters and work with at least 10 per year to utilize an equity lens in preparing presentations					
Provide at least one training annually for both staff and board leaders on DEI					
Assess possible BIPOC and other identity-related organizations connected with food and farm systems in Ohio and work with at least one to present joint programming or other collaborative efforts					
Provide direct support for at least 15 socially disadvantaged farmers to apply for and receive USDA program support					
When generating new OEFFA materials, ensure that they are accessible, equitable, and welcoming, and review key materials every 3 years, updating as needed					
5 farms or retail establishments seek Food Justice certification as new applicants by 2025					
35 farmers develop, improve, and implement fair labor practices and policies					
Work with partners to ensure accountability of our diversity, equity, and inclusion work					

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

Accomplishing these pillars necessitates a strong organizational foundation on which to build. As part of our strategic plan, we identified the following Organizational Foundations:



To accomplish our goals, OEFFA will be a financially sound and sustainable organization, with a growing base of members and other supporters.

1. Grow our membership.

- a. Enhance and communicate the value proposition of OEFFA membership.
- b. Develop and implement a member acquisition and retention strategy.
- c. Ensure that we are consistently inclusive and welcoming.
- d. Dedicate staff to supporting chapters.

2. Recruit and retain diverse, skilled, and talented staff.

- a. Regularly assess and address employee satisfaction and morale.
- b. Assess and address staff capacity needs to effectively manage workload.
- c. Benchmark wages and benefits to comparative organizations to ensure that OEFFA's compensation is equitable.
- d. Work to increase paid time off benefits commensurate with peer organizations.
- e. Endeavor to provide employer assistance with health insurance for dependents.
- f. Foster a collaborative approach to problem-solving.
- g. Provide staff with flexibility in work hours and work location.

3. Maintain a diverse and sufficient revenue stream that provides financial stability.

- a. Build development staff to increase our capacity to do this work.
- b. Strengthen planned giving outreach.
- c. Build a strong support base to ensure essential revenue streams.
 - Increase the number of members.
 - Seek corporate sponsorships and donations.
 - Develop a major donor program.
- d. Identify, strengthen, and grow strategic relationships/partnerships.
- e. Seek support through grants that are clearly tied to achieving the mission and strategic plan.
- f. Maintain financial stability in the Certification program.
 - Continuously analyze fees to ensure they are reasonable and cover program expenses.
 - Utilize tools and processes to balance efficiency and staffing.
 - When timely service can be delivered, increase the number of operations we serve through a marketing campaign.

4. Strengthen and amplify Board engagement and commitment.

- a. Ensure optimum Board composition and leadership succession.
- b. Engage Board members in active committee structure aligned to strategic goals and needs.
- c. Strengthen and increase Board member role in fundraising, including leadership for planned giving.
- d. Refine expectations of Board members (eg., financial support, committee participation).
- e. Establish an organizational culture based on transparency and trust.

BENCHMARKS

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
By 2023, OEFFA has dedicated development staff			●	●	●
75% of OEFFA staff stay for at least 5 years	●	●	●	●	●
Grow our membership by 200 members per year, to reach 5,000 members by 2025	●	●	●	●	●
Retain 85% of members from year to year	●	●	●	●	●
Collate and review feedback from staff annual reviews and exit interviews to identify common themes and initiate plans to address issues and make improvements		●		●	
Benchmark wages and benefits to comparable organizations to ensure that OEFFA's compensation is equitable			●	●	●
Review OEFFA policies and procedures to ensure they are equitable and welcoming		●	●		
Solicit planned gifts and develop major donor program including corporate sponsorships and donations				●	●
By 2025, have 8 new major donors and 5 planned gifts					●
Increase the number of members who give individual gifts each year		●	●	●	●
Maintain a cash reserve of 6 months of operating funds	●	●	●	●	●
Maintain a building reserve of \$40,000	●	●	●	●	●
Establish a development committee of connected and knowledgeable volunteers				●	●
Forty percent of members interact with chapters, interest groups, policy advocacy, or farm tours at least once a year	●	●	●	●	●
Set goals for Board composition and leadership succession, review and improve as needed the job description for Board members, and cultivate leadership among OEFFA members to join the Board		●	●	●	●

HOW WE DO IT

OEFFA embraces a three-pronged approach to creating change.

EDUCATE

We EDUCATE growers (organic, sustainable, or regenerative; established, beginning, or aspiring; grain, dairy, livestock, produce, flowers), gardeners, homesteaders, consumers, retailers, and public officials. Adults learn best when they are active participants in the learning process and are motivated by learning environments that are self-directed, challenging, and exploratory. Like other adult learners, farmers are likely to be more problem-centered in learning: they seek information that they can readily apply. Similarly, they prefer practical, applied, and skill-based information that can be used to create solutions with immediate impacts.



Our delivery methodology is informed by these principles:

- Farmers learn best from other farmers: Including farmers as panelists, speakers, and mentors is critical to enhanced learning opportunities and the success of our program.
- Programs are interactive and practical: Adult learners, including farmers, learn best through experiential learning and need to be able to walk away from an educational event with content and tools that can be applied to their operations.
- Ongoing technical assistance is available: Often, participants require on-going support and resources as they address new business or production challenges. OEFFA provides ongoing support after programs end, to enhance farmer engagement and increase success rates.
- Formative evaluation is used to improve programs: Evaluation is a key component in delivery of each program, is used to understand project outcomes, and to inform future programs.

Our approach rests on the belief that farmers' learning experiences should be diverse, inclusive of a community or network, attend to real-life issues, incorporate past experiences and knowledge, and should be aimed at encouraging personal growth with immediate benefits.

But education alone is not sufficient to cultivate the change we seek in our food and farm system.

ADVOCATE

We ADVOCATE for public policies that support sustainable farming practices, protect public health, and restore healthy ecosystems. Even as we work to increase knowledge and skills through our educational and technical assistance programming, we acknowledge that this alone is insufficient. We must seek changes that will provide farmers with greater economic and environmental success within our food and farm system. This upstream effort to address structural barriers requires investment in policy advocacy. For this reason, over a decade ago, OEFFA established a Policy Program. OEFFA's Policy Program works to counter the special interest influence over our decision-makers, gives voice to the needs of small- and mid-sized producers, and advocates for policies that are truly in the interest of the family farmers who enhance our rural communities and safeguard the environment.



Achieving our mission will require changes in state and federal policy to ensure that family farmers using sustainable and organic practices are able to compete in fair and transparent markets, access land to grow diverse products that sustain the health of people, soil, the environment, and the resilience of communities, while also making a viable living.

CERTIFY

We CERTIFY organic farms and processors, organic grass-fed livestock operations, and farms and retailers committed to food justice.



We know we must help open doors to opportunities so that farmers as small business owners can succeed in the marketplace. OEFFA has operated a certification program almost since its beginning. Today, our certification program offers certification for organic products, grass-fed livestock, and food justice. By operating a certification program so that producers can access markets that embody their ethics around ecological integrity and social justice, we are providing an additional way organic and sustainable farmers can thrive.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF CONTRIBUTORS

Sincere thanks to those individuals who gave their time and good energy to this planning process.

The Strategic Alignment Core Team: Board members Jim Bidigare, Bryn Bird, Jeff Dean, Paul Dorrance, Steve Edwards, Christine Hughes, Ben Jackle, Val Jorgensen, Abbe Turner. OEFFA members: Bill Miller, Alan Sundermeier. OEFFA staff: Carol Goland, Renee Hunt, Amalie Lipstreu, Alisha Schleining.

All OEFFA Staff, the OEFFA Board, and 400+ OEFFA members who participated by responding to our survey and/or taking part in input sessions.

Thanks also to Brian Raison, Associate Professor and Extension Field Specialist, Community and Organizational Leadership, Ohio State University, for facilitating our work throughout the process.



OHIO ECOLOGICAL
FOOD AND FARM
ASSOCIATION



41 Croswell Rd.
Columbus, OH 43214
(614) 421-2022
oeffa@oeffa.org

WWW.OEFFA.ORG