

Spring 2018

The Organic Sprout

MOFGA's Newsletter
for Organic Producers

MCS Client Survey

by MCS Staff

This Spring, MCS sent an invitation for an anonymous, online 10-question survey to all MOFGA certified producers. The survey link was emailed to those clients with email addresses, while a hard copy was mailed to the segment of producers who do not use email. The survey began collecting responses on April 13th, and was closed 4 weeks later on May 11. During this period we collected a total of 181 responses, which represents a 35% response rate.

It was our genuine intent to gain valuable insights about our program pertaining to satisfaction, marketing, branding, and add-on labels. We thank all who participated by lending their time and thoughtful commentary during this busy season. MCS will use this anonymous feedback to strategize and continue to improve the services we provide.

Question Summaries

(Q1) Over 86% of survey respondents reported being satisfied or very satisfied with MOFGA Certification Services (MCS).

(Q2) 80% of respondents support additional efforts to promote the MOFGA Certified Organic Brand.

(Q3) 60% felt MOFGA/MCS should explore additional marketing materials related to promoting the MOFGA Certified Organic brand. (See page 4 for sample comments.)

In terms of which promotional options would be most effective for MCS to pursue **(Q4)**, respondents ranked Consumer Education as the most important

by a wide margin, followed by Social Media and Website and Video (including Farm Documentaries). Options identified as having average effectiveness were Print and Publications and Customizable Farm/Market Materials.

(Q5) For the question of add-on labels to NOP certification, survey respondents chose "None" or no add-on label by 44%, followed closely by Real Organic by almost 40%. (Note: totals are over 100% because multiple answers were allowed.) See page 7 for more info on ROP, and page 8 for more info on the Regenerative label.

MCS's semi-annual newsletter, *The Organic Sprout*, was found to be useful by nearly 70% of respondents **(Q6)**. A number of respondents feel it provides valuable information, but lack the time to read it. Realizing that farmers' time is one of their most valuable commodities, we encourage you to sign up for electronic delivery, which can be read on any device, at any time. Additionally, all issues of the Sprout are available as PDFs on the MCS website.

(Q7) 81% of respondents said being certified organic is very important or extremely important to their customer base, while less than 2% said being certified organic is not at all important to their customers.

(Q8) Overwhelmingly, 95% of respondents feel MCS provides the guidance needed to comply with the NOP Standards.

(Q9), (Q10) The last two questions asked for open-ended commentary. (Sample comments on pages 4 and 14)

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BRAND ALCHEMISTS



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MCS Client Survey (cont'd from Page 1)

Question 3 (Q3) Comments:

- Additional logos can become confusing and wearables are neat, but I find in my business that they don't really raise brand awareness beyond those who are already interested in the brand and can be quite costly to keep in inventory. I think digital marketing materials are more cost efficient since they can be changed quickly and once created, are not costly to keep on hand.

- I'd like small signs that I, as a producer, can put up on the coolers in stores educating the consumer about why they should consider buying organic products. I would wear a t-shirt, too.
- Whatever it takes to get your name in front of consumers. Unless you are a person who is actively involved in the organic movement in Maine, or a Maine-based processor of organic foods, I don't think that MOFGA is exactly a household name. Yet.

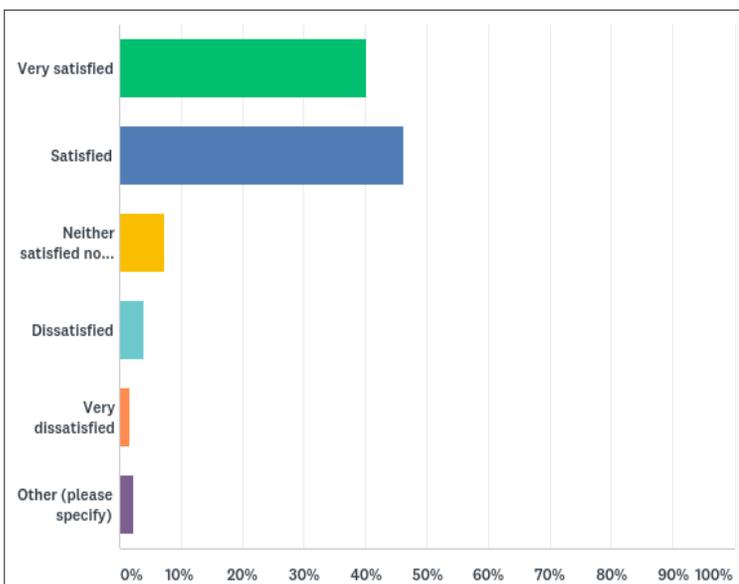
- I think wearables and a PR campaign to differentiate MOFGA-certified from USDA.
- 12" twist-ties for bunched produce. More POS/farm-stand signage materials. If MOFGA Cert Services had an informational poster of sorts (could be 8.5x11) promoting itself and the brand, I would post it at my farm-stand.
- Cloth produce bags.

Question 9 asked "What do you consider your biggest market opportunities? Challenges?" The following table summarizes the most prevalent comments:

Opportunities	Challenges
Farmers' Markets, Local farm markets	Distribution – farm to market, lack of regional wholesale distribution, access to marketing channels beyond farmers markets and CSAs
Institutions / Food Service markets	Scaling up for wholesale markets
Value-added products	Competition with "Big Organic" as well as small operations under the "\$5,000 Rule"
Young people/ young families as a buying demographic	Consumer education and awareness of certified organic vs. "organic"
Direct to customer sales	Organic pricing vs. conventional; convincing/educating consumers about the higher quality of organic produce
Larger wholesale and distributor accounts, wholesale to restaurants, natural food stores	Location - lack of markets in many regions (Aroostook, Piscataquis and Washington Counties, for instance)
Competing on the national front; opportunities for export	Difficulty in bringing value added products to market
Fulfilling consumer demand for products that are both local AND organic	Competing against "cheaters" and fraudulent companies
Expanding into larger retail (grocery) establishments	Crowded marketplace; competition from new farms

Sample Graphs

Q1 Overall, how satisfied are you with MOFGA Certification Services?



Q5 Add-on labels to NOP certification have come to the forefront of late. Which of the following labels should MCS consider or would you be interested in attaining for market differentiation?

