



# National Organic News

by Dave Colson, Ag Services Director

## The National Organic Coalition

The National Organic Coalition (NOC) is a national alliance of organizations working to provide a "Washington voice" for farmers, sustainable agriculture organizations, consumers and others involved in organic agriculture. Started ten years ago, the members include farm organizations (MOFGA was a founding member) as well as environmental groups and cooperative retailers. NOC provides members with monthly updates on farm legislation and the National Organic Program (NOP) and works to coordinate strategies. In June of this year I attended a NOC meeting during which members met with House and Senate Ag Committee members to lobby for portions of the farm bill important to the organic community. In October the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) met in Rhode Island. At this meeting NOC arranged for an open meeting of interested groups, supported testimony to the NOSB and coordinated involvement in ongoing discussions over projects and processes under NOSB review. The advantage for MOFGA in working with this Coalition is both administrative, as NOC provides the framework for meetings, but also gives us a forum and voice, which would not be as strong alone. The next NOC meeting will be held in DC in January and there will be a NOC gathering at the next NOSB meeting in Portland, Oregon in the spring.

## National Organic Standards Board Meeting

In October, the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), advisory body to the USDA's National Organic Program, met in Rhode Island. The discussion regarding inclusion of biodegradable bio-based mulch film on the national list is of particular interest to crop farmers. The result was that these biodegradable plastics (such as BioTelo) will undergo a product review based on specific criteria. So, the good news is that these mulch films, that many in MOFGA and elsewhere have advocated using, have taken a step closer to approval. However, don't plan on using these products any time soon, as the NOP still needs to work out a review process and the companies involved will have to apply for approval. In other words, BioTelo or any other plastic must still be removed at the end of the season and cannot be incorporated into the soil.

Additional guidance from the NOSB on biodegradable mulch is expected some time in 2013.

## The 2012 Farm Bill

The Farm Bill is the U.S. government's primary agricultural and food policy tool. It is a comprehensive piece of legislation that is renewed about every five years.

In June, the Senate passed their version of the bill, which MOFGA and NOC generally supported, but the House version was held up by Republican leadership. The presidential election stalled further work and currently House Republicans are waiting for 'fiscal cliff' negotiations to inform their approach to the bill. The debate will center on the level of funding for food stamps and crop subsidies, the two biggest expenditures in the current (2008) bill. Other significant expenditures are for crop insurance and conservation. The Senate version cuts \$23 billion in spending from 2012 levels. The precise target for farm spending cuts may be determined as part of high-level deal making between the White House and Congress. The White House has suggested cuts of \$32 billion, including a reduction in crop insurance. The federal cost share for organic grower certification fees appears safe, at least for Maine and a few other states.

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