



The Cornucopia
Institute

Harvest Report

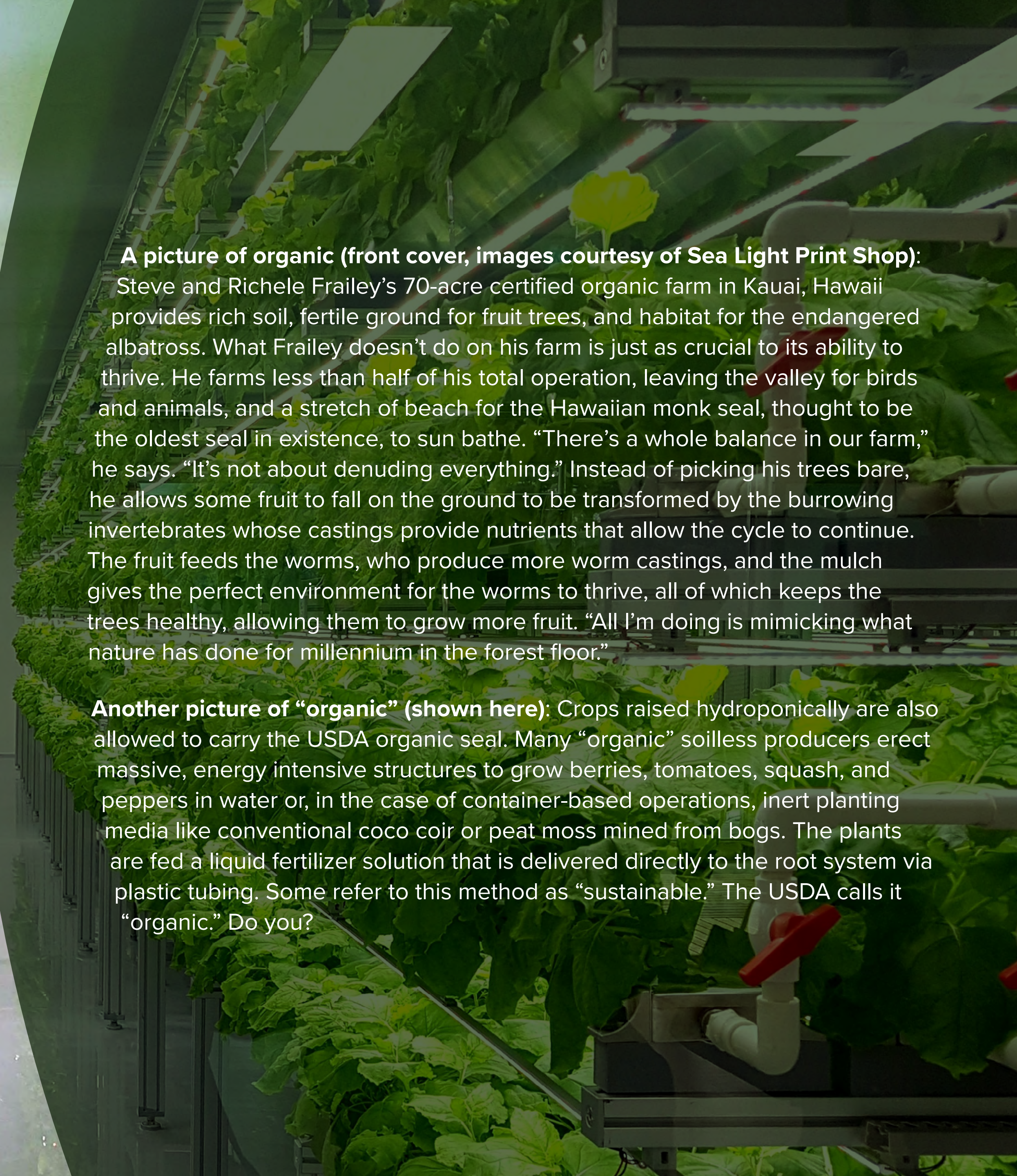
March 2020 - February 2021





A picture of organic (front cover, images courtesy of Sea Light Print Shop): Steve and Richele Frailey's 70-acre certified organic farm in Kauai, Hawaii provides rich soil, fertile ground for fruit trees, and habitat for the endangered albatross. What Frailey doesn't do on his farm is just as crucial to its ability to thrive. He farms less than half of his total operation, leaving the valley for birds and animals, and a stretch of beach for the Hawaiian monk seal, thought to be the oldest seal in existence, to sun bathe. "There's a whole balance in our farm," he says. "It's not about denuding everything." Instead of picking his trees bare, he allows some fruit to fall on the ground to be transformed by the burrowing invertebrates whose castings provide nutrients that allow the cycle to continue. The fruit feeds the worms, who produce more worm castings, and the mulch gives the perfect environment for the worms to thrive, all of which keeps the trees healthy, allowing them to grow more fruit. "All I'm doing is mimicking what nature has done for millennium in the forest floor."

Another picture of "organic" (shown here): Crops raised hydroponically are also allowed to carry the USDA organic seal. Many "organic" soilless producers erect massive, energy intensive structures to grow berries, tomatoes, squash, and peppers in water or, in the case of container-based operations, inert planting media like conventional coco coir or peat moss mined from bogs. The plants are fed a liquid fertilizer solution that is delivered directly to the root system via plastic tubing. Some refer to this method as "sustainable." The USDA calls it "organic." Do you?





Dear valued supporter,

I invite you to pause and reflect on the many ways in which you are connected to your food system. Your favorite farmers at the market or your CSA share may come to mind. More broadly, though, how do the farming practices you back impact the air and water? How do they support wildlife, the soil microbiome, and your own health?

At The Cornucopia Institute, we take organic seriously. We name extractive operations and brands that flout the organic rules, and we fight for truth and transparency among regulators and corporations. We mobilize people to demand integrity from the organic label. And we connect you to authentic organic farmers.

When you buy local, authentic organic food, your dollars stay in your community, you eat the freshest, most nutrient-dense food available, and you support the care of the soil, water, air, and biodiversity where you live.

Thank you for your trust in our staff, your commitment to organic food and farming, and your financial investment in this work. We could not do it without you!

Kindly,

Melody Morrell
Executive Director
The Cornucopia Institute

Board of Directors

Cameron Molberg

Organic Poultry Farmer
Greener Pastures Chicken

Helen Kees

Organic Beef Farmer
Wheatfield Hill Organics

Kevin Engelbert

Organic Dairy Farmer
Engelbert Farms

Jim Crawford

Retired Organic Produce Farmer
New Morning Farm

Goldie Caughlan

Former NOSB Member and Retired
Nutrition Educator
PCC Community Markets

Board of Advisors

Anaïs Beddard

Lady Moon Farms

Dr. Joan Dye Gussow

Columbia University

Dr. John Ikerd

Sustainability Thought Leader

Michael James

Heartland Media

Kendra Kimbirauskas

State Innovation Exchange

Tom Willey

T&D Willey Farms

Dr. Frederick Kirschenmann

Iowa State University

Dr. Jennifer Taylor

Florida A&M University CAFS

Steve Sprinkel

Del Pueblo Farm

Jim Munsch

Organic Beef Farmer

Amanda Love

Holistic Nutritionist



Andrew Hernandez II of GreenStar Food Co-op in Ithaca, New York, says customers want even more local produce—and they’re willing to pay a price that reflects the true cost of production.

The Living Soil

Fierce debate continues regarding the eligibility of soilless operations for organic certification under the Organic Foods Production Act. While some certifying agents are calling on the USDA’s National Organic Program to clarify standards for hydroponic and container-based systems, many soil-based farmers staunchly oppose the inclusion of hydroponically produced food under the label. Because of your support, Cornucopia can empower more people to take action on this issue in the year ahead:

- **Market Research** continues as Cornucopia partners with consumer advocates to gather data about which organic brands in the grocery store are grown in soil.
- Our **Hydroponic Buyer’s Guide** will identify hydroponically grown brands of organic berries, cucumbers, and tomatoes for consumers and wholesale buyers to avoid.
- **The Living Soil Campaign** will include Action Alerts, issue articles, and farmer spotlights in favor of farms and farming practices that encourage biodiversity, water retention, and soil health.

Charlotte Vallaeys, pictured here with her beloved hens, brings her expertise in sustainable agriculture, nutrition, and food labeling to her new position as **policy consultant**. While working to complete her PhD at Tufts University, Vallaeys will spearhead a brand new project at Cornucopia: ***Produce, Pesticides, and Pollinators***.

Vallaeys’ favorite dish to cook? *Pasta with vegetables and the most amazing homemade sweet Italian sausage from our friends at Reber Rock Farm. I put in lots of different kinds of vegetables, whatever is in season, and preferably from my garden—roasted butternut squash and beets in winter and fresh tomatoes and peppers in summer. Mix it all with Parmesan cheese, and it’s one of the easiest meals to cook and so delicious.*

Why organic matters? *The organic label signifies that the food is safer for me and my family—because of lower pesticide residues—but it isn’t just about me. The organic label also communicates the farmer’s commitment to protecting the health and well-being of all of the living organisms in and around the farm, including those in the soil. It’s about long-term sustainability, building soil health, and thereby ensuring that the land will not only produce nutrition for us today, but also for future generations.*



Charlotte Vallaeys

Rachel Zegerius, **director of advocacy and development**, is most excited about Cornucopia’s newly refined strategic approach and bringing together diverse stakeholders to solve complex challenges. Driven by a deeply spiritual relationship with the natural world, and equipped with an MS in resource management from Antioch University, Zegerius aligns her career choices with her environmental ethic. This year she will bring innovative approaches to Cornucopia’s investigations.

Her favorite dish to cook? *It has to be lasagna—it is so forgiving. My new take on this traditional favorite includes a caramelized onion, spinach, and artichoke mix with cheese on a bed of green lentil noodles.*



Favorite CSA share item? *Last year, I fell in love with the feathery fennel from Birdsong Farm. Both hearty and delicate, fresh fennel citrus salad brought summer into my kitchen year round.*

Why organic matters? *In a world where the challenges can feel overwhelming, organic food empowers me to put my values into action. I find nothing more fulfilling than investing in the people who meticulously care for our precious soil, water, and pollinators. My hope for the future is tended by authentic organic farmers.*

Rachel Zegerius



“It is imperative that organic agriculture not be monopolized by corporate organic, but remains equitable and accessible for producers of all sizes,” says Brian Bates of Bear Creek Organic Farm. Bear Creek workers pictured here on the farm in Petoskey, Michigan.

Consumer Advocacy

With your help, Cornucopia mobilized consumers in the marketplace and in Washington to support authentic organic farmers. Last year, your dollars had impact:

- Our widely distributed **Milk Plant Code Action Alert** uncovered the meaning behind these mysterious codes found on all milk cartons. More than 28,000 people used this critical information meant to help them avoid factory-farmed “organic” milk.
- Partnering with other organizations, we mobilized voters to send a message to Congress to resume assistance for organic farmers after the USDA announced a partial defunding of the **Organic Certification Cost Share Program**.
- Cornucopia called for public comment to tell the USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service to improve and finalize the long-awaited **Strengthening Organic Enforcement Rule**. This rule follows years of international fraud investigation by Cornucopia staff, made possible by your donations.

Marketplace Activism

The powerful consumer dollar is the ultimate protector of the true values behind the organic label. Our research-based Organic Brand Scorecards rating foods like milk, yogurt, snack bars, and eggs allow shoppers to differentiate between authentic and industrial organic products.

- In 2020, the **Organic Dairy Scorecard** was used 359,621 times to inform shoppers about the best dairy brands on the crowded shelf.
- Cornucopia regularly hears from people who suffer from carrageenan exposure. This year we will partner with consumers to broaden marketplace research and **inspire concrete action** to pressure organic brands to remove the harmful ingredient.
- Our upcoming **Organic Beef Report and Scorecard** will draw from recent science to explore issues surrounding the organic beef marketplace, while ranking brands to help consumers choose the very best products for their families.



Michele Marchetti

As Cornucopia's **deputy director**, Michele Marchetti specializes in empowering people to engage with their food systems through storytelling and philanthropy. The former chair of a local food co-op, she is eager to resume travel so she can visit the co-ops and natural food stores that support Cornucopia's work and operate her favorite places to eat and shop.

How Marchetti accesses her local food system?

My family receives weekly deliveries from CentreMarkets, which recently won the Community Leadership (COVID Response) Award from Pasa Sustainable Agriculture. The overflowing bags stacked outside my door always bring me joy. Our family of four has been stuck in the house since March, and we spend an inordinate amount of time in the kitchen, where I've peeled enough Jade Family Farm organic carrots to fill a commercial compost facility.

Why organic matters? *As a parent, it's tough to avoid the stronghold of the industrial food system. So I do my best to counterbalance the impact with food from the organic farms that are foundational to my community. And organic food is an entry point into some of the best conversations I've had with my kids.*



As **policy director**, Marie Burcham specializes in analyzing the complex web of policy questions, concerns, regulations, and aspirations in the world of organic and sustainable agriculture. As the lead in Cornucopia’s advocacy work, they are driven by a desire to promote environmental resilience and animal welfare in agriculture—and supporting the organic farmers that excel at just that.

Their favorite dish to cook? *As a plant-based pescatarian, my favorite dish to cook (and eat!) regularly is tacos. I typically stir fry a filling made up with whatever vegetables and greens I have on hand, add some homemade vegan “cheese,” and enjoy a filling and delicious meal. As an extra delight, I sometimes make fresh tortillas from homegrown corn.*

Their favorite farmers market item?

I always look for local farm-fresh berries when they are in season. Oregon berries are better than any candy you can buy!

Why organic matters? *Organic agriculture matters because it’s one alternative to practices that are harmful to the environment. Even though industrial agriculture is the status quo, we know that the management in industrial agriculture contributes to climate change, pollution, the loss of healthy soil, and many other serious harms.*

Marie Burcham



Policy Watch

Cornucopia policy staff research and analyze the organic sector, identifying high-leverage issues where action and impact align. This policy work is deeply embedded in a foundation of advocacy for authentic organic farmers and the benefits their farming practices provide for consumers, farmworkers, and the environment. Highlights of 2020 included:

- Policy staff tracked, analyzed, and advocated in the regulatory sphere for the entire organic label. Concerns and highlights of this regulatory work included **advocacy and official commentary** on Origin of Livestock, protection for native ecosystems, and animal welfare rules (the Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices rulemaking).
- Cornucopia followed and **participated at the National Organic Standards Board meetings**, important venues for voices from throughout the organic community to be heard by both the National Organic Program and the advisory board. Cornucopia is always present, reporting out on the activities and representing the voices of thousands of farmer and consumer advocates (that’s you!).
- Through ongoing advocacy and research efforts, Cornucopia keeps up to date on the latest science surrounding resilient agriculture to **champion the protection** of soil health, animal welfare, and economic justice for organic farmers.



The Cornucopia Institute

PO BOX 826
VIROQUA, WISCONSIN 54665
608-637-8278
CULTIVATE@CORNUCOPIA.ORG
CORNUCOPIA.ORG



I have been an organic farmer since the 70's and have seen a lot of organizations and magazines come and go over the years. But I personally have found that The Cornucopia Institute and the Cultivator are by far the best source of reliable, authentic and verifiable information on organics and organic practices that one can find. Their studies and reports are superb. The educational information is always very helpful plus they are a great "watchdog" protecting everything organic. I receive many emails from lots of different organizations that I do not open but any email from Cornucopia is immediately opened and enjoyed. They are top notch in my book and one of the few organizations that I donate

to each year to support their mission.

Mahalo,

Steve Frailey

Hawaiian Organic Noni

(Farm pictured on front cover)