

# OTA ANNUAL MEETING

## New leaders see OTA at a "tipping point"

Organic is "hot," outgoing OTA President Phil Margolis told OTA members attending OTA's Annual Meeting Saturday, May 6. "We are doing good work, and we should be proud of it." He said a sign of the surging excitement around organic: a sold-out All Things Organic™ trade show floor.

Incoming President Jesse Singerman outlined three issues for OTA to focus on in the coming months: to support measures to increase the domestic supply of raw materials, to be the voice of the industry by providing accurate and consistent messages to consumers, the media and government, and to be home of the emerging organic industry. "We need your time, energy, and financial support," Singerman said, noting that OTA will continue to protect organic standards, speak for the industry, and deal with emerging issues.

Calling the organic industry at "a new tipping point," Singerman said, "Never before have we seen the degree of acceptance and interest in organic from mainstream supermarkets and consumers." In fact, she pointed out, 90 percent of consumers have heard about organic, and 82 percent say the benefits of organic products are believable.

Singerman recognized outgoing president Margolis, and Katherine DiMatteo, OTA's first executive director, for their service to OTA, as well as Nancy Hirshberg and Debra Boyle who were going off the Board of Directors. She also introduced Caren Wilcox, OTA's executive director since March 1.

Telling attendees "I can't imagine a more exciting group to work with," new OTA Executive Director Wilcox added, "Members are at the heart of this association."



OTA President Jesse Singerman (center) thanks Debra Boyle (left) and Nancy Hirshberg (right) for their service on OTA's board. Boyle and Hirshberg were also recognized in March at OTA's Annual Organic Industry Reception for their fund-raising prowess.

In her address, Wilcox announced her intentions to build on the firm foundation already established, and to make OTA the "go-to" organization for information on and issues surrounding organic agriculture and products. To do this, Wilcox said OTA intends to conduct a market survey every year, to have active forums and task forces, and to cooperate with other entities that provide solid data. In the area of public affairs, OTA will continue to strengthen its presence in Washington, will analyze and comment on proposed rules, work with allies, work in Ottawa and the Canadian provinces, and collaborate on activities at the state level. OTA will continue to work to support provisions for organic agriculture and products in the area of appropriations and the 2007 Farm Bill, Wilcox added.

In the next year, OTA will focus on promoting and marketing the certified organic label particularly to consumers and on enhancing OTA's role in how the United States can increase the production of organic food and fiber, Wilcox said.

"U.S. agriculture should not miss the boat," Wilcox said, emphasizing the need to increase domestic supply

to meet demand.

OTA's continued marketing and promotion efforts will include the annual All Things Organic™ Conference and Trade Show, the Go Organic! for Earth Day campaign, September as Organic Harvest Month™, and active press and communications strategies. Internationally, OTA will continue its work as a North American organization, as well as a member of IFOAM, its work with Codex Alimentarius, and its efforts to improve international organic trade.

Wilcox said OTA will maintain its headquarters in Greenfield, Massachusetts, and also keep its Washington, D.C. presence as well as step up expanded efforts within Canada.

Meanwhile, she added, she will insist on what she dubbed a "Civility Project," namely that organizations within the organic community respect one another despite their differences.

During the meeting, OTA staff reported on accomplishments and work of the association, including public policy and advocacy efforts, public relations achievements, and work to establish OTA Canada. Overall, OTA currently has over 1,700 members.

In addition, there was time for members to give input on possible directions for OTA. In a brain-writing exercise, members broke into groups and discussed the topic, "In order to realize its vision, OTA must..." Representatives from each group then shared the suggestions made by their teams for further consideration by OTA leadership and staff.

To read the addresses presented by Singerman and Wilcox at OTA's Annual Meeting, go to [www.ota.com/m/events/annualmeeting06.html](http://www.ota.com/m/events/annualmeeting06.html). ■