

# FRONT PIECE

## I'm pleased to be on board

As your new Executive Director, I have had a whirlwind first few months, fortunately with Katherine DiMatteo by my side to offer information and contacts whenever I have asked. It would be hard to imagine a more harmonious transition.

I continue to be very excited about leading OTA. As I said at OTA's Annual Meeting, members are the heart of this organization. I look forward to working with as many of you as possible. I have found a staff eager to serve each member and the general interests of organic in every configuration—big or small, food or fiber and more.

Already the media has caught on to the fact that organic is not a niche market anymore. This brings new challenges, and we face a continuing debate about maintaining the spirit and idealism that helped shape the organic community even as others "late to the party" begin to grow and sell organic products.

At our exceptionally successful All Things Organic™ conference and trade show, plenary speaker Gary Hirshberg pointed out that while pioneers often resent the "settlers" who come next, it is important to remember that such "settlers" are a measure of the pioneers' success. It was a great articulation of where some now find themselves—excited about increased availability of organic products, yet fearful of the future and worried about change—looking back nostalgically to the niche market days.

It is thus important to maintain confidence in organic as a certified USDA label with a strong set of criteria for production that contributes to both environmental and consumer well being.

First, research efforts and measures to encourage transition to organic practices are needed to increase the supply of organic product in the United States and Canada. OTA can act as a clearinghouse for a number of these efforts. Second, OTA can help ensure that standards that underlie the organic label are well understood by consumers and those directly selling these products. To address this, OTA intends to undertake a label educational program.

Finally, I am calling for the organic community to take on a Civility Project. A reporter recently asked whether I was worried about all the "trashing" of organic going on inside the organic community. I told her I would be a fool not to be worried. When misinformation and disinformation are delivered in a constantly uncivil manner, eventually those who understand little about the real facts about organic may believe the bad information.

A Civility Project cannot prevent disagreement on policy from emerging inside our community, but it can call on all members and OTA staffers to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner, and to try to understand one another's opinions, use accurate non-biased facts, and communicate not only our differences but our strong unity in wanting to deliver organic products to consumers and heal the land through organic practices. To do less will be destructive.

I look forward to working with each of you to advance the mission of the Organic Trade Association.

Caren Wilcox  
OTA's Executive Director



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