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## NOFA Connecticut Records

1977-2005

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A product of the back-to-the-land movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Northeast Organic Farming Association began as the vision of a New York City plumbing supplies salesman. Now an increasingly influential non-profit organization with chapters in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont, NOFA has "nearly 4,000 farmers, gardeners and consumers working to promote healthy food, organic farming practices and a cleaner environment."

The CT NOFA collection documents the evolution of NOFA from its founding in 1971 to the present, with a notable concentration

on the Connecticut branch beginning with correspondence and publications dating from the late 1980s.

## Background on NOFA Connecticut

The Connecticut branch of the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) was founded in 1982 by Bill Duesing, the third state-level chapter to organize formally. Today, CT NOFA sponsors twice-yearly conferences and issues a quarterly newsletter, *Gleanings*. It stands out among NOFA chapters for its emphasis on organic lawn and land care, working cooperatively with the Massachusetts chapter to conduct a formal organic land care program. The goal of this program, according to CT NOFA, is to "extend the vision and principles of organic agriculture to the care of the landscapes where most people live, work, play, and otherwise spend their daily lives," a particularly important goal in a state as densely settled as Connecticut. Chaired by a scientist at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station and with ties to several colleges and universities, the Organic Land Care Program makes CT NOFA the most academic branch of NOFA.

## History of NOFA

Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, Samuel Kaymen -- the "NOFA prophet" -- was privy to all the movements and motivations of the 1960s. Like many others in his time, Kaymen felt that his life was spiritually undernourished, and in 1969, he moved from the city to rural Unity, New Hampshire, to start a self-sufficient garden with his wife, Louise.

With no previous experience in agriculture, Kaymen learned all he could from outdated library books, eventually stumbling across Edward Hyams' *Soil and Civilization*. Hyams argued that "the first thing a civilization loses is its topsoil," and that the fall of all the great civilizations of the past could be linked to agricultural collapse. Kaymen was shocked. "I didn't know that agriculture was important," he wrote, "I thought that food was assembled in the backs of grocery stores!" But with his surprise came inspiration. Kaymen would start an organization of like-minded growers who would farm in an organic, natural, and sustainable way. In 1971, now living in Westminister, New Hampshire, Kaymen founded the Natural Organic Farming Association.

The first meeting of NOFA (which would change the first part of its name to "Northeast" in 1993) took place on June 7, 1971. Kaymen had posted fliers and sent out mailers announcing that NOFA would teach and promote nine principles, including proper composting, seeding, weeding, and other skills necessary for farm production. Conspicuously missing from the list was marketing. "This shows how naive I really was," Kaymen said in 1998. Starting with a budget of \$35, Kaymen and the farmers, gardeners, and hippies who attended that first meeting decided that NOFA would sponsor seminars, seed-exchanges, bulk shopping, and apprenticeships. They would also publish a quarterly newsletter named after what Kaymen hoped to be, *The Natural Farmer*.

Eventually, Kaymen "hooked up with people in New York City who were running daycare centers" and at least once a week, NOFA farmers would load up an old truck in the middle of the night and drive six hours to Manhattan and Harlem to deliver fresh produce to daycare centers and to people on street corners who "hadn't seen fresh collards since they were in the South."

In 1973, Kaymen was given a farm in Cornish, New Hampshire, by a group of people who thought he "was a good organizer... a good speaker and [who] wanted [him] to be a New Hampshire person." Robert Houriet, a farmer and writer living in Hardwick, Vermont, offered to take over *The Natural Farmer*, and according to Kaymen, "it immediately became a thousand percent better." With Kaymen in New Hampshire and *The Natural Farmer* reaching more people than it ever had before, NOFA became truly a multi-state organization.

The first NOFA conference, cosponsored by the Biodynamic Farming Association, was held in Wilton, New Hampshire, in 1975. Wendell Berry was the keynote speaker and around 350 people attended, which Kaymen thought was "quite a lot." Win Way, a member of the University of Vermont faculty ("the establishment" as Kaymen called it), brought air of the academy to the 1976 conference which helped transform NOFA from a group of former New York City hippies into an influential organization with scientific backing. The 1978 conference saw the "old timers... come out of the closet" to support NOFA.

Kaymen stepped down from NOFA's presidency in 1981. Since that time, NOFA has grown, now claiming "nearly 4,000 farmers, gardeners and consumers [from] ... chapters in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont." NOFA started as a co-operative promoting and facilitating information sharing and other ways to help growers farm in a natural, organic, and sustainable way. While NOFA still promotes the nine principles Kaymen originally founded it to promote, that tenth item, marketing, now plays a larger role than ever before.

## Scope of collection

The CT NOFA collection contains documents from all six state branches of NOFA, with a particular concentration on Connecticut. Notable publications include issues of *The Natural Farmer* from 1977 to 1996, packets of rules and regulations, informational mailers, and conference booklets

Of singular value in the collection are the audio tapes. Recorded in 1998, the tapes provide a capsule history of NOFA as spelled out by some of its major players, including Kaymen and Houriet. These interviews provide an invaluable timeline from the

founding of the organization in 1971 up through the 1990s.

While the collection adequately documents the history of NOFA, the real worth of this collection is as an example and explanation of how priorities have evolved since the 1960s. Three decades of *The Natural Farmer* show the progression of NOFA from an organization motivated by a sometimes naive idealism to an organization thriving within the realities of the 21st century. Consider this headline from 1977, the earliest issue of *The Natural Farmer* in the collection: "Annual Conference to Stress Relation of Government to Farming." Compare it to a headline from 1996, the latest issue: "California Conference Considers Future of Organic Industry".

## Inventory

### Correspondence

#### Box 1: 1

Letter to Grace Gershuny with Eaton Farm Agricultural Services pamphlet

1980 Oct

Duesing, Bill: Letter to Interstate Council Members, Chapter Presidents and Staff

2001

*CSA Farm Network*, vol. II

1998

#### Box 1: 2

*Gleanings*

1999 Spring-2000 Fall

#### Box 1: 3

*Gleanings*

2000 Spring-2001 Winter

#### Box 1: 4

*Gleanings*

2002 Fall-2005 Winter

#### Box 1: 5

NOFA CT Newsletters

#### Box 1: 6

NOFA-CT Newsletter

1987 Aug

"Serving Connecticut's Organic Farmers and Gardeners"

1990 Nov 9

NOFA-CT News

1991 May

NOFA-CT News

1991 July

NOFA-CT News

1992 Jan

NOFA-CT News

1997 Winter

NOFA-CT News

1997 Summer

NOFA CT Pamphlets and Fliers

#### Box 1: 7

"CT NOFA Offers an Educational Conference," University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension Service

1987 Nov 20

"Growing Organically" membership mailer

1987 May 24

Directory of Organic Farms & Retailers in Connecticut

1992 Summer

Farm Tour flier

1993-1994

Certified Farm Directory  
1998  
Certified Organic Farms  
2002  
NOFA-CT membership mailer  
undated  
Organic Land Care pamphlet  
undated  
NOFA MA, NH, NJ, VT

Box 1: 8  
NOFA-NJ News  
1987 June  
McGlew, Edwin: "NOFA/MOFGA Inspectors, Certification Committee Members, and other interested parties"  
1992 Mar 19  
NOFA-MASS, "Food For Life: A Guide to Organic Food in Massachusetts"  
1992-1993  
NOFA-MASS, "'Organic' may soon become meaningless," informational mailer  
undated  
NOFA-NH, "NOFA: The newsletter of the New Hampshire chapter of the Northeast Organic Farming Association"  
2000 Spring  
NOFA-NJ, *Certification Standards and Procedures*  
undated  
NOFA-VT, "NOFA Notes"  
2001-2002 Winter  
NOFA-VT, "In Vermont We Can Choose Our Future," membership mailer  
undated  
NOFA NY

Box 1: 9  
NOFA-NY News  
1986 Fall  
NOFA-NY News  
1993 Mar-Apr  
"Organic Farms, Folks & Foods"  
1999 Winter  
"NOFA-NY's 2000 Organic Food Guide"  
2000  
*Organic Choices*

Box 1: 10  
NOFA 16th Annual Summer Conference booklet  
1990  
NOFA 17th Annual Summer Conference booklet  
1991  
*Proceedings of the Northeast Farmer to Farmer Information Exchange*

Box 1: 11  
Apple Meeting 1992 and 1993  
1994  
Greenhouse Meeting 1992 and 1993  
1994  
*Proceedings of the Northeast Farmer to Farmer Information Exchange*

Box 1: 12  
Livestock Meeting 1992 and 1993  
1994  
Sweet Corn Meeting 1992 and 1993  
1994  
*Standards for Organic Land Care*  
2004

Box 1: 13  
*The Natural Farmer*  
1977 Aug-1978 Apr

Box 1: 14  
*The Natural Farmer*  
1978 July-1978 Dec

Box 1: 15  
*The Natural Farmer*  
1979 Jan-June

Box 1: 16  
*The Natural Farmer*  
1979 July-Aug

Box 1: 17  
*The Natural Farmer*  
1980 Jan

Box 2: 1  
*The Natural Farmer*  
1980 June-1981 Spring

Box 2: 2  
*The Natural Farmer*  
1990 Fall-1991 Winter

Box 2: 3  
*The Natural Farmer*  
1991 Spring-1992 Fall

Box 2: 4  
*The Natural Farmer*  
1992/1993-1993/1994

Box 2: 5  
*The Natural Farmer*  
1995 Summer-1995/1996

Box 2: 6  
Audio and Visual Recordings

Box 3  
1980s Update Number 1  
1983 July 3  
1980s Update Number 2  
1983 July 3  
Bioregions #1  
undated  
Bioregions #2  
undated  
"Early Warnings: Voices from TMI"  
undated  
Sides 3 and 4.

Gershuny, Grace #1  
undated  
Hall-Beyer, Bart  
undated  
Houriet, Robert: NOFA history #1  
undated

Houriet, Robert: NOFA history #2

undated

Houriet, Robert: NOFA history #3

undated

Kaymen, Samuel: NOFA history

1998 Dec

"NOFA: Building Regional Food Systems" and "NOFA: Bureaucracy in Small Town Development"

undated

Sides A and B of the same tape.

NOFA Keynote Addresses

1982 July 30

Organic Debate #1

undated

Organic Debate #2

undated

"To M. Harding, Marketing"

undated

Unmarked videotape

undated

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## Administrative information

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Acquired from Bill Duesing, Executive Director of CT NOFA, May 2007.

### Processing Information

Collection was processed by Alex Lent, June 2007.

### Related Material

For additional material related to the Northeast Organic Farming Association, see:

NOFA Massachusetts (MS 461)

### Other formats available

Digitized issues of *The Natural Farmer* from 1999-2005 are available on the SCUA web site.

### Language:

English

### Copyright and Use (More information )

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## Search terms

### Subjects

Agriculture--Connecticut

Northeast Organic Farming Association

Organic farming

Organic gardening

Sustainable agriculture

### Contributors

NOFA Connecticut [main entry]



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