



Insight

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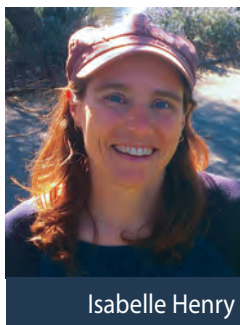
Varietal Improvement Project Progress 'Encouraging'

After several years of pursuing new mint cultivars with resistance to *Verticillium* wilt, that yield well and produce a high-quality oil, mint producers are probably still several years out from getting a new variety.

But, according to UC Davis geneticist Isabelle Henry, progress is being made.

"Many of the questions that we had at the beginning of the project have been answered positively," Henry said. "And that's really encouraging."

This summer, Henry's team will test several dozen new hybrid clones in the field. She is also working with Oregon State University plant pathologist Jeremiah Dung



Isabelle Henry

to assess the level of *Verticillium* wilt resistance in the clonal selections.

Henry, a project scientist at the UC Davis Genome Center, has been using Black Mitcham peppermint plants as the starting point of her breeding lines. "We have been able to produce peppermint Black Mitcham plants that are fertile, and that has been a big step, because Black Mitcham is the gold standard in terms of oil. And because oil composition is so difficult to recreate, being able to start with Black Mitcham is very helpful," Henry said.

Henry and her team are taking two approaches to advancing the breeding lines: One involves using seeds from the fertile Black Mitcham plants directly to produce new plants. A second approach involves crossing the fertile Black Mitcham plants with a spearmint clone that carries *Verticillium* wilt resistance.

"We hope that some of the progeny from these crosses will also be resistant. We put some of those clones in the field for the first time last summer, and they generated promising results," Henry said.

The field trials are being conducted at the University of California's Intermountain Research and Extension Center (IREC) in Tulelake, a site near the Oregon border about a five-hour drive from Davis.

Concurrently, Henry and her team will soon send breeding material from the crosses to Dung, who is further testing the plants for *Verticillium* wilt resistance in his Central Oregon greenhouses.

Henry noted that IREC, which has five pilot stills dedicated to mint, is an excellent and unique resource for mint research.

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“It is a really great setup,” Henry said. “There are very few of those around and we are really lucky that it is right there. And the people working at the station are wonderful.”

“That first population is doing very well in terms of what kind of oil it produces, but the yield is not that great.”

Isabelle Henry

The clones that came out of the crosses to spearmint are doing much better in terms of yield, Henry said. “And they are actually producing a peppermint type oil, as well,” she said. “It is a little different from Black Mitcham, but still in that realm. And, coming from the

Overall, Henry said the plants that were planted last summer are performing well, with some exceptions. “That first population is doing very well in terms of what kind of oil it produces, but the yield is not that great.”

spearmint parents, not surprisingly, they flower a lot earlier, which is good and bad. Depending on where you grow them, it can give growers a second harvest within a summer.”

Researchers plan to test the oil of the initial plantings at the Tulelake center for a second year, Henry said, which will give them a more thorough accounting of the oil quality, given that first year plants, called baby mint, often produce a less than stellar oil.

The researchers also are bringing new clones for testing at the Tulelake site this summer.

As for a timeline on when the industry can expect to see a new variety or two, Henry said that will depend on several factors.

“There is never any guarantee, but hopefully one of the fifty hybrids that we are testing this year fits the criteria,” Henry said. “So, it could be that we’ve done the crosses that we needed and that

there is a plant that is good enough to move forward.”

“The problem is that it takes several years to figure out if it’s good enough or not,” she said. “You typically need at least three years of field data just to see if the yield holds, depending on the climate. And then you usually will scale up. We’re doing tiny plots right now.”

Add in the time it takes to field test a variety on a commercial scale for yield, disease resistance and other agronomic factors, and to determine if its oil yields and oil quality are sufficient to pursue a plant variety patent, and you’ve got several more years to account for.

In a best-case scenario, she said the industry can expect it will take at least six years before the program is able to deliver a new variety to growers.

Judging from progress reports to date, it may be worth the wait. 🌿



Intermountain Research and Extension Center (IREC), Tulelake, CA

After 13 Years with MIRC, Ostlunds to Retire

Bryan Ostlund and his wife and business partner, Lisa Ostlund, have announced they are closing their office as soon as September 1 after more than 35 years of administering agricultural organizations, including 13 years with the Mint Industry Research Council.

In addition to the MIRC, the Ostlunds and their office administer several Oregon commodity commissions, including the Blueberry Commission, the Mint Commission, the Ryegrass Commission, the Tall Fescue Commission, the Fine Fescue Commission and the Clover Commission. In addition, their office serves as administrators of the Oregon Seed League, the Oregon Essential Oil Growers League and the Oregon Seed Research Institute.

When the Ostlunds launched their operation in 1989, they started as administrators of only two commissions, the Oregon Highland Bentgrass Commission, which has since rolled its assessment authority into the Oregon Fine Fescue Commission, and the Oregon Ryegrass Commission. The business at the time also included political campaigning. The Ostlunds soon, however, decided that politics wasn't their cup of tea and began focusing on agriculture.

"Politics just wasn't for us, and we really enjoyed agriculture," Ostlund said. "And then you start to develop a reputation and attrition happens, people retire, and people started contacting us, and so it just became a specialty for us."

Their business grew from four full-time employees to the six that work out of their office today. The Ostlunds also work with several outside contractors, including Steve Salisbury, research and regulatory coordinator for the MIRC, who spoke highly of the Ostlunds.



"Bryan and Lisa are the professional's professional," Salisbury said. "They understand not only the day-to-day working and the ins and outs of the mint industry, but also the underpinnings. And when you understand the underpinnings of the structures, and how it is all put together and what needs to be done behind the scenes to get things done, that is a big deal and that is going to be very hard to replace."

Asked what he will miss most when the Ostlunds retire, Salisbury said it is the friendship and support they provide. "I'm going to miss just the day-to-day friendship and the partnership, just knowing that they've always got my back," Salisbury said. "They've been nothing short of 110 percent supportive and helpful, and Bryan has been a friend and a mentor to me."

Ostlund said it wasn't any one thing pushing the couple into retirement but just the fact that they both will be turning 65 this summer and that they felt the time was right to pass the baton to the next generation.

"We just felt like it was the responsible thing to do, to facilitate this transition while we can," he said. "And that is really in the interest of our clients and our employees."

"It has been a phenomenal opportunity for Lisa and me to own our own business and work for a lot of groups and boards," Ostlund said. "It's just been a fantastic ride and a great career, working with a lot of great people, but time marches on."

Ostlund noted that the September 1 retirement date isn't set in stone and that he and Lisa will do what they can to facilitate the transition into new leadership for the different commissions their office administers and for their staff.

"We will see how this process goes and what is needed," Ostlund said. "We needed to pick a date and don't want to burden the whole process by going too far out there, but we are also in a position where there is no reason for us to leave anybody in a lurch." 🌿

North American Mint Production: 'A Good Story' for Branding

The MIRC is supporting efforts to get the word out that North American mint oil is superior to oil from other regions and is produced in a sustainable fashion. They do, however, need help from growers and, according to a past chairman of the MIRC, grower reluctance to share production practice information will only hinder those efforts.

Jeff Jonson, immediate past chair of the MIRC and vice president of Callisons, said he gets it. He understands why growers are reluctant to share information on production practices. But he believes this reluctance is unwarranted.

"I completely understand where they are coming from," Johnson said, "but we aren't asking because we think it is a bad story. We're asking because we think it is a good story, and we want to have it out there."

He added that if the industry isn't telling its story, others will, and the story told by others might not be positive.

"That story could be that the U.S. mint oil industry uses tons of pesticides, uses tons of water, uses tons of fertilizer. And it actually doesn't," he said. "We continually work with the MIRC to reduce pesticide use, reduce herbicide use and water usage. We work on a lot of great projects, and we need to get that messaging out there."

"We have a lot of great sustainable practices that aren't being showcased," said John Williams, chair of the MIRC Sustainability Committee. "And now,



Jeff Johnson

especially with social media and how consumer goods companies are having closer connections to end users, it's more important than ever to focus on branding."

Mint oil is a complex product involving sensory evaluations and other properties that make it unique from other food crops, Johnson said. And the industry should use those characteristics to differentiate itself from other crops. "It's not a wheat. It's not a corn. It has a story behind it, and it requires organoleptic evaluations and quality evaluations, much more so than any other crop. So, it's very different."

And, he said, North American mint oil excels over oils from other regions. As evidence, Johnson said he recently asked technicians from a couple of the major end users of mint oil to give him their perceptions of North American mint oil.

"These are tech people," he said. "They aren't purchasing folks. And their responses were: 'It's full-bodied, clean; It's a signature oil; It's consistent; It's safe; It's sustainable.'"

Sharing that information, as well as information on the sustainable production practices in place in North American mint oil production can only benefit the industry, he said.

Of late, he added, end users are asking suppliers about production practices, and suppliers have only limited data to pass along. Outside of some survey data from a FieldRise survey of North American mint growers that was completed in 2017, and information flavor houses get from buyers, the industry doesn't have much to pass along.

"Some of the requests we get are about water usage in mint oil production, fertilizer usage, questions like that," he said.

"And the data we can put together is all very positive. It shows that through the MIRC and programs we support, we're working hard at reducing water usage and fertilizer usage. We're coming up with better herbicides, better pesticides, better varieties, in some cases. But we don't have much in terms of verifiable data."

He urged growers to share information with buyers when asked, and said he supports industry participation in a second FieldRise study, which are surveys that showcase an industry's production practices.

In the meantime, the MIRC recently funded a research project that could provide data on the carbon sequestration that occurs in the perennial systems used in North American mint production and could be another tool for branding North American mint as sustainable.

Branding a product as containing North American mint oil has already been shown to be effective, Johnson said, and more opportunities exist to promote the brand if the industry is willing to embrace them.

Johnson noted that a leading toothpaste manufacturer today has come out with verbiage on toothpaste boxes stating the toothpaste is flavored with North American mint oil. "They had an initial ad campaign that included pictures of growers in in-store promotions, and it was one of their most successful campaigns to date, and so they have just kind of built on that," Johnson said.

"And so I think that we as an industry ought to be thinking of branding North American mint oil and explain that it's consistent, it's safe and it's sustainable and highlight all things that are positive in our industry," Johnson said. 🌿

IR-4 Project's Baron to Retire

One of the biggest supporters of the U.S. mint industry from the federal level, Jerry Baron, has announced he is retiring as Executive Director of the IR-4 Project.

Baron, who has been with the project for almost forty years and who oversaw its move from Rutgers to North Carolina State University in 2021, announced he will be stepping down during the fourth quarter of 2025.

"After forty years with IR-4 and with an outstanding team in place, I am ready to do something different," Baron said in his announcement.

Baron said he is "filled with gratitude for the IR-4 community" after seeing the project implement several efficiencies in the past year and support hundreds of new pesticide registrations for specialty crops.

"Our field, lab and quality assurance teams have gone the extra mile this year," he said.

He added that he is now confident that efforts to reshape the program after making the move from New Jersey to North Carolina have been successful.

"I can proudly say that the team I hoped for has come together, from headquarters to every regional office and laboratory," he said. "The new team is ready to guide the program into the future while maintaining the core value of supporting farmers in growing healthy food and quality ornamental crops."

Steve Salisbury, Research and Regulatory Coordinator for the MIRC, said Baron has been a stalwart supporter of the mint industry for many years, helping growers meet their pest management needs through registration of crop protection products.

"Jerry has been an exceptional partner for the U.S. mint industry," Salisbury said. "He has worked tirelessly to help our growers get the tools necessary to control pests and diseases in their mint

crops. He has been a good friend to the mint industry. Jerry has done an excellent job providing leadership for IR-4, and he will be sorely missed."



Jerry Baron

Baron told this Newsletter that working with the MIRC has been one of the highlights of his career. "The growers, dealers, end users and the MIRC Board have treated me as part of the mint family and have been so generous with their unwavering support," Baron said. "I will miss the connections with Steve (Salisbury) and other friends in the mint industry."

North Carolina State is expected to release the job announcement for his replacement in late May/early June. 🌱



Research Looks at Carbon Sequestration in Mint Cropping

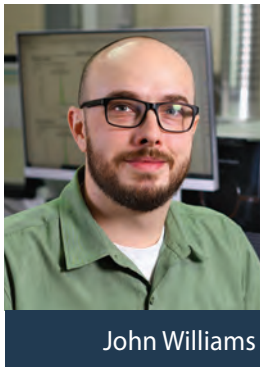
The MIRC Sustainability Committee hopes a research project the organization is funding will provide the industry data on the carbon sequestration that takes place in mint oil production. The results of this work, along with findings from a FieldRise study completed eight years ago that measured carbon emissions from mint oil production, are expected to provide a more complete carbon footprint of North American mint production and could be used by the industry to showcase the industry's sustainability.

"What the Sustainability Committee and the MIRC are trying to do is showcase and quantify some of the industry's great sustainable practices. We want to demonstrate these to the market and the consumer," said John Williams, Chair of the Sustainability Committee.

The research, being conducted by Dr. Jennifer Moore, a USDA-Agricultural Research Service soil scientist in Corvallis, Oregon, is

a one-year project looking at soils of three different mint growing regions representing three different soil types to establish a soil carbon baseline in mint fields and then looking at how that soil changes when adding mint slugs or biochar back into the soil.

In addition to providing information that the industry can use to tout its sustainable production practices, the research, particularly the biochar research, could provide the industry with information on how it can position itself to take advantage of soil carbon markets.



John Williams



"When it comes to carbon counting, carbon economies and how the North American mint industry could potentially benefit from that, it is a very difficult and very costly process," Williams said. "But with biochar, the industry can cut out a lot of the fat. So, the use and application of biochar can be beneficial both to the soil and in allowing the North American mint industry to potentially operate within carbon markets."

Soil carbon sequestration resulting from biochar projects constituted more than ninety percent of carbon removal credits delivered in 2023, according to an industry organization that tracks such investments.

"It has the potential for a different revenue stream for farmers," Williams said of soil carbon markets and the use of biochar, in particular.

Also, he said, a better understanding of the benefits of adding mint slugs back into the soil can help growers decide whether that practice is worthwhile.

The research could also provide datasets that the industry can use to show how North American mint production excels from a sustainability angle, as well as from a quality angle.

"I think the goal of this project is really to show how North American mint shines compared to its global competition," Williams said. "When it comes to carbon sequestration or carbon emissions, a lot of CO₂ emissions come from disrupting the soil, particularly tilling. And with mint, it stays in the ground typically at least three years, sometimes longer, as long as you don't get wilted out. And there is a lot of benefit to that. And when we're competing with India, where they take out the mint every single year, I think that the North American mint farmer really needs to get credit for this."

"And this (research project) is one of those unique situations where we're able to benefit all levels of the industry," he said. "Farmers can get better information on sustainable practices, which potentially allows them to operate within carbon economies. And the dealers and the end users can collect data that they are able to use for their different purposes in the supply chain to tell a story that really connects with customers."

"It's also very valuable to have this type of data for sustainability responses with the rise of carbon footprint reporting in the industry," Williams said. 🌱

OSU Pathologist Measuring Wilt Resistance of UC Davis Breeding Material

In a unique collaboration, Oregon State University Extension plant pathologist Jeremiah Dung is analyzing *Verticillium* wilt resistance of plant material that UC Davis geneticist Isabelle Henry is developing as part of varietal improvement trials for the MIRC.

The collaboration, put in motion by MIRC Research and Regulatory Coordinator Steve Salisbury, utilizes the strengths of both parties for the betterment of the mint industry.



Jeremiah Dung

“Steve brought us together,” Dung said. “He was familiar with both of our research programs, and it made sense to have us work together for the common goal.”

“It makes sense that if I do the pathology, that gives her more time to work on the breeding side,” he said.

In an interview in early spring, Dung said he was expecting to receive plant material in the form of rooted cuttings from Henry in the next few weeks and was going to plant and grow out the material in greenhouses at the Central Oregon Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Madras, Oregon.

Dung will be artificially inoculating some of the material in an effort to characterize the level of *Verticillium* wilt resistance in the breeding lines.

Verticillium wilt symptoms typically will express themselves within two to three weeks after planting, Dung said, but he plans to analyze the plants for six to eight weeks. “Typically, what we do is we at least take them to flowering,” he said.

In addition to checking for visual symptoms of wilt, Dung said his team also will be experimenting with two molecular-based DNA methods.

“We’re going to be using a quantitative PCR, as well as recombinase polymerase

amplification assay at an early stage of the trial to see if we can detect differences in pathogen levels in the different clones,” Dung said.

Dung said he has been told that preliminary testing done at a UC Davis lab shows that some of the lines are relatively resistant.

“If we were to compare the lines to a native spearmint, which is usually our resistance standard, versus Black Mitcham, which is our susceptible control or our susceptible standard, I think based on the data they’ve shared, we should see responses within those two ranges,” Dung said.

Dung said he expects to have data collected by July, at which time he and his team will begin to analyze the data. Reports on their research are due in November, he said. “So that is our target date to have everything summarized and ready to share.” 🌿



SAVE the DATE



Mint Industry Research Council Annual Meeting

JANUARY 21-22, 2026

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Make plans now for a 2026 getaway to Tucson and attend the 47th Annual Meeting of the Mint Industry Research Council where all segments of the mint industry gather.

The 47th Annual Meeting of the Mint Industry Research Council will be held on January 21-22, 2026, in Tucson, Arizona. The meeting will feature two days of special guests speakers from around the country, in addition to industry research reports and updates. The meeting comes to a close with a Thursday evening industry reception.

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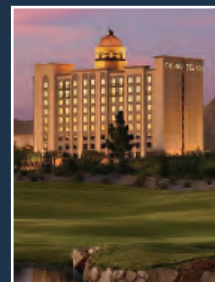
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The group rate will be available until Tuesday, December 30, 2025.



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THIS IS A MIRC MEMBERS ONLY EVENT

Chair's Report

A.J. Todd, Chairman of the Board

As I start my second go-round as Chair of the MIRC, I do so at a time of change.

As I'm sure all of you know by now, after thirteen years of leading the administration of the MIRC, Bryan and Lisa Ostlund have informed us of their plans to retire this fall.

First off, I want to thank Bryan and Lisa and their team for all they did for our organization. They have been a pleasure to work with and because of their commitment to our organization and their expertise, they leave the MIRC a better organization than it was on their arrival. They and their team have always done a great job for us and for that we are very appreciative.

Secondly, I want to let membership know that the MIRC Board and Executive Committee is committed to doing all we can to ensure that we bring in new Administration that is similarly qualified. And we want to ensure

you that we are working to make the transition as smooth as possible.

It is worth noting here that Bryan has informed us that they are committed to helping us with the transition and will stay on as needed to ensure we find the right fit for our organization. For that, we also want to thank the Ostlunds.

Our organization is sound financially and in a good position to meet the challenges ahead and so we enter this period of change with a positive outlook.

I will keep you abreast of developments in the search for a new administrator and we expect to have more information in the next MIRC Newsletter.

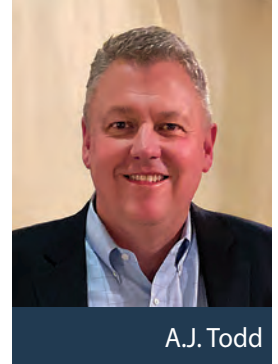
This year also marks a change in our approach to assessing and funding research proposals. In the past, it was normal for the MIRC to fund seven to ten projects in any one cycle. This year, in an attempt to spend our available funds as prudently as possible, we have

scaled that number down to just three projects.

We don't want to discourage researchers from bringing forward more proposals in the years to come.

And indeed we may find there are far more than just three projects worthy of funding in the next one or two cycles. But we are planning to ensure that projects we fund in the future are bringing tangible benefits to our members. The idea is to spend our available funds in a way that brings the best possible outcomes for our members.

With that, I will sign off with the promise of more news to come in the months ahead. 🌱



A.J. Todd

MIRC Executive Committee Set

The MIRC Executive Committee is set for 2025-26, with A.J. Todd of ADM-Mint serving as Chairman.

Marcus Smith of Norwest Ingredients has been selected as Vice Chair, and Dana Wendel of RCB International Ltd., was named Secretary/Treasurer. 🌱



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Research & Regulatory Update

Steve Salisbury

The 2025 MIRC research program was discussed and approved by the Board of Directors in January at the annual meeting in Memphis, Tennessee. The MIRC received several proposals that were aimed at addressing our four areas of priority for the industry. We appreciate all the researchers who submitted proposals for consideration.

This year there was much discussion about all the proposals and the Board really took a lot of time to examine and consider each proposal. The consistent evaluation criteria that both the Scientific Affairs Committee (SAC) and Board of Directors use include consideration of long and short-term needs, is the science sound and of quality, and what is and how significant is the value of the potential results to the mint industry. In the end, both the SAC and the Board acted with great diligence and made some difficult but responsible decisions that were extensively discussed.

The MIRC has approved funding of three projects in 2025. This seems like a light load, but again, after great discussion the Board feels that the dollars are properly invested in these three projects for 2025. We are working with researchers to solicit proposals again in 2026 and certainly do not want to discourage proposal submissions.

The three projects funded include:

- 1) Advanced genomic tools for peppermint improvement;
- 2) Screening of *Verticillium* resistance in populations of doubled Black Mitcham hybrid clones; and
- 3) Mint slug residue – An overlooked C sink and N source.

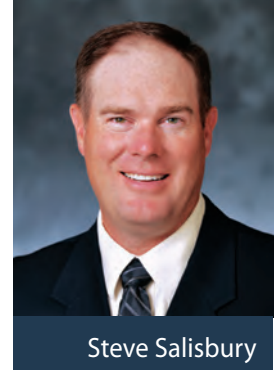
These three projects address the priorities of varietal improvement, integrated pest management and sustainability.

The varietal improvement research continues with Dr. Henry at University of California Davis as she and her team continue to make positive progress in this area. The 2025 objectives include field testing selections of doubled Black Mitcham clones for yield and oil composition as well as the impacts of harvest timing on yield, select new hybrid clones to evaluate yield and oil composition as well as agronomic traits in the field, associate those hybrid traits to the genomics and assess selfed Black Mitcham clones for variation in *Verticillium* resistance and identify any markers associated with this variation in resistance.

In an effort to build a more robust project surrounding the priority of discovering *Verticillium* resistance, the MIRC asked Dr. Jeremiah Dung at Oregon State University to provide his expertise to characterize *Verticillium* resistance in a breeding population of doubled Black Mitcham hybrid clones. The 2024 data indicated that the hybrids appeared to be the best candidates for moving forward toward developing resistant clones. Dr. Dung is considered as the mint industry's plant pathology champion, and we appreciate his partnership with Dr. Henry in carrying out this work. While this research project is associated with varietal improvement, it is truly an investment in IPM for mint with regards to *Verticillium*.

The third project is taking aim at the industry's interest in sustainability and filling some of the data gaps for mint. The purpose of this work is to characterize the carbon dynamics of mint production. Assessing the entire production systems carbon cycle would be a significant endeavor, so we asked to start with a "first step" project. The idea is

that this project is a piece of the overall picture in mint's carbon cycle. This research is being carried out by Dr. Jennifer Moore and her colleague Dr. Kristin Trippe, both with the USDA-ARS.



Steve Salisbury

The objectives here include quantifying mint slug decomposition rates to understand how different forms of mint slug residues and soil properties impact the loss of carbon and CO₂ and how the carbon moves to different soil pools that are relevant to soil carbon sequestration. Simultaneously, this study can measure the nitrogen mineralization potential of the mint straw which will provide plant available forms of nitrogen.

As with any of the nutrient cycles occurring in our crop production systems, the local and regional factors as well as soil types and crop management strategies influence the cycle. The carbon cycle dynamics are no different. Therefore, we are coordinating efforts to look at soil and mint straw samples from three different regions. This will provide some insight into differences in how the cycle processes in different regions. We appreciate the mint growers who have willingly volunteered to be a part of this study.

It is the intent of the MIRC that the findings from this study can be used by our members in some form that will provide value to the sustainability narrative surrounding North American mint production. John Williams, MIRC

Sustainability Committee chairman/RCB International, and I have had productive meetings with members to discuss this project and how it may be potentially used in the sustainability messaging to support our industry.

Back in 2017, the MIRC completed a FieldRise Industry Stewardship Assessment that included a look at the carbon footprint of mint production. From that assessment there was an estimate of CO₂ equivalence per kilogram of mint oil produced. However,

we feel that this estimate does not account for the fact that most of the crop produced is actually returned to the soil in the form of the mint slug/cooked mint straw. Intuitively, this should account for a substantial carbon credit in the grand scheme of mint oil production. We need to find out how big of a credit that is and how that works in favor of a balanced carbon equation in our system. That piece of knowledge is a critical part of the overall story that we want to tell our consumers.

In summary, the MIRC research program for 2025 may seem lean, but I assure you that the value is significant in the long run for the industry. Thank you to the SAC and Board members for their diligence and ability to have productive discussions to make these program decisions. As always, if anybody has questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me or your MIRC Board member. I'm always happy to hear from you. 🌱





Mint Industry Research Council

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