

May 24, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman, Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow,

On behalf of our millions of members, supporters, or customers, the undersigned organizations and companies are writing to urge you to fully support organic agriculture in the Farm Bill and to oppose any changes that would undermine the organic standards and the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB).

Consumer confidence in the integrity of the USDA organic seal is a key driving factor in the exponential growth in the organic sector. Making changes to the authorities or composition of the NOSB could harm the integrity of the organic program, undermine consumer trust in the organic label, and severely damage the reputation of the industry as a whole.

Organic farming is a bright spot in the U.S. rural economy. Data show that organic farms are 35 percent more profitable than the average farm and that rural counties with a high level of organic farms and businesses have higher household incomes and reduced poverty rates by as much as 1.35 percent, even more than major anti-poverty programs. Domestically, the organic sector is home to over 26,000 certified organic family farms and businesses.

A growing body of research demonstrates that organic farming systems provide an impressive range of conservation benefits. Organic farms support 50 percent more pollinator species, sequester carbon in the soil, and deliver greater resilience in the face of climate-related weather impacts like drought and floods by improving soil structure and soil water-holding capacity.

Research also shows that organic food and farming reduce human exposure to toxic pesticides for consumers, farmers, farmworkers, and rural communities.

The number of organic consumers is steadily growing. Data shows that over 80 percent of U.S. households buy organic food, and the demographics of organic buyers matches the diversity of the American population. Organic remains the fastest-growing sector of the food industry — while the overall food market experiences a stagnant 0.6 percent growth rate, organic sales grew 8.4 percent from 2016 to 2017.

Yet, domestic production is not keeping up with this booming consumer demand. The U.S. accounts for 44 percent of global organic sales, but just four percent of global farmland under organic production. Approximately 25 percent of organic corn and 75 percent of organic soybeans used in the country are imported. U.S. farmers are losing out on the chance to feed Americans' growing appetite for organic food.

At a time when so many farmers and rural communities across America are struggling, we need more policy support for organic agriculture.

First and foremost, the undersigned organizations and companies urge you to oppose any changes that would undermine the National Organic Standards Board in the Farm Bill.

We also urge you to:

Fully fund the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program (NOCCSP) and the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program which encourages small and mid-size farmers to transition to organic and helps farmers afford organic certification;

Increase funding for the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) to \$50 million annually. Organic and non-organic farmers alike benefit from this research. For example, cover cropping is standard practice on organic farms but has been widely adopted by non-organic farms as well;

Fully fund the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), the nation's largest conservation program by acreage and a critically important program that supports organic farmers. CSP is the only Farm Bill program focused on advancing conservation systems to comprehensively protect natural resources, including soil health, water quality, and wildlife habitat;

Equalize payment limits under the Organic Initiative within the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP OI), to ensure equal opportunity for organic farmers to participate in this key conservation program;

Devote \$50 million annually to public plant and animal breeding programs focused on developing regionally adapted cultivars and animal breeds that are suited to farmers' local growing conditions, changing climates, and farming systems. The funding should come from existing USDA competitive grant research programs and a coordinator should be appointed to oversee these efforts;

Create a level playing field for U.S. organic family farms by increasing funding for the National Organic Program, providing funding to improve import data tracking, and creating better mechanisms to ensure that all organic imports comply with U.S. standards; and

Provide \$5 million in one-time mandatory Farm Bill funding for the Organic Data Initiative to ensure consistent and reliable data about production and sales trends.

Organic farmers and businesses depend on consumer trust in the organic seal and support from the programs outlined above. We urge you to uphold the integrity of the organic standard by opposing any changes that would undermine the National Organic Standards Board and to fully fund the critical research, marketing, and conservation agriculture programs that are needed to grow the American organic sector.

Thank you,

CC Senate Agriculture Committee

Mitch McConnell
John Boozman
John Hoeven
Joni Ernst
Chuck Grassley
John Thune
Steve Daines

David Perdue
Deb Fisher
Cindy Hyde-Smith
Patrick Leahy
Sherrod Brown
Amy Klobuchar

Michael Bennet
Kirsten Gillibrand
Joe Donnelly
Heidi Heitkamp
Bob Casey Jr.
Tina Smith

Friends of the Earth

Accredited Certifiers Association
Albert Lea Seed
Beyond Pesticides
Beyond Toxics
BJE Poultry
Blue River Organic Seeds
Buckhaven Ridge Farm
Butterfly Brigade
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association
Catalyst Miami
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Environmental Health
Center for Food Safety
Central Florida Bread for the World
Central Maryland Beekeepers Association
Church Women United in New York State
Consumers Union
Cottonwood Creek Farms
Cuatro Puertas
Dammen Organic Farms
Diane's Market Kitchen LLC
Dietrick Institute for Applied Insect Ecology
Double M Dairy LLC
Dr. Bronner's
Dream Acres Farm
Eco Lips, Inc
Ecology Center
Edible Door
Edible East Bay Magazine
Edible Grande Traverse
Edible Indy

Edible Michiana
Endangered Species Coalition
Equal Exchange Inc
Fair Farms
Fair World Project
FairShare CSA Coalition
Family Farm Defenders
Farm Aid
Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance
FarmTable Procurement and Delivery
Farmworker Association of Florida
Farmworker Justice
Field & Fire LLC
Florida Immigrant Coalition (FLIC)
Florida School of Holistic Living
Food & Water Watch
Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT)
Friends of Miami-Dade Detainees
Gainesville Interfaith Alliance for Immigrant Justice
Garden on Garden
Global Justice Ecology Project
GMO Free NJ
Green Beacon Coalition
Green Vale Farm
Grow Ahead
Happy Homestead Farm
HEAL Food Alliance
Hidden Acres Organic
Hispanic Federation
Hudson Valley Biofuel
Hunger Mountain Cooperative

International Organic Inspectors Association
Iowa Organic Association
Kanalani Ohana Farm
Kovar Organic Equipment LLC
LaBella Associates
Lady Moon Farms, Inc.
Lenz Organic Farm
Leverett Village Co-operative
Levin Family Foundation
Local Food Alliance of Northern Michigan
Lyn Farm
Made Safe
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
Making Shade Farms
Marilla Field & Flora
Maryland Ornithological Society
Maryland Pesticide Education Network
Michigan State University Extension
Michigan Young Farmer Coalition
Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op
Midwest Organic Services Association
Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture
Narrow Gate Farm
National Organic Coalition
Natural Grocers
Nature's Path Foods Inc.
Neighboring Food Co-op Association
New Bee Apiaries, LLC
New England Farmers Union
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance
Northeast Organic Farming Association - Interstate Council

Northeast Organic Farming Association - Massachusetts
Northeast Organic Farming Association - New Hampshire
Northeast Organic Farming Association - New Jersey
Northeast Organic Farming Association - New York
Northeast Organic Farming Association - Vermont
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Nuestro Centro
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
Okoboji Organics
Old Mill Honey Company
OneCert, Inc.
OPINS Coop
Orchard On Sand Road
Oregon Tilth
Organic & Natural Health Association
Organic Aronia Farm
Organic Consumers Association
Organic Farmers Association
Organic Seed Alliance
Organic Seed Growers and Trade Association (OSGATA)
Organize Florida
Partnership for Community Development
PCC Community Markets
Perich Advertising and Design
Pesticide Action Network
Portland Food Co-op
Rachel Carson Council
Red Barn Organic
Redeemed Farms LLC
Regional Farm and Food Project
Reinert Farms Inc.

Ridgeline Meadows Farm
Rincon-Vitova Insectaries
Rural Coalition
SEIU Florida Public Services Union
Sierra Club
Sisters of Mercy South Central Community
Skinny Farm Co-op
Sleeping Bear Press
Songbird Farm
Stonebridge Ltd
Straus Family Creamery
Sustâne Natural Fertilizer Inc
Tamarack Camps Farber Farm
Thorland Organics, LLC
Three Springs Farm
Tigner Consulting
WeCount!
Wild Farm Alliance
Wild Oats Market