

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

CC The Senate

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.^{1,2} 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.^{3,4,5}

Research also shows that organic food and farming reduce human exposure to toxic pesticides for consumers, farmers, farmworkers, and rural communities.⁶

¹ Kantor, Sylvia. 2015. Organic agriculture more profitable to farmers. *Washington State University Insider*. June 1. <https://news.wsu.edu/2015/06/01/organic-agriculture-more-profitable-to-farmers/>

² Organic Trade Association. Organic Hotspots. <https://www.ota.com/hotspots>

³ University of Oxford. Organic farms support more species. 2014. February 4 <http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2014-02-04-organic-farms-support-more-species>

⁴ The Organic Center. Breakthrough study shows organic cuts agriculture's contribution to climate change. 2017. September 11. <https://www.organic-center.org/humicrelease/>

⁵ Ferris, Robert. 2014. Organic farming more drought resistant. CNBC. December 9. <https://www.cnbc.com/2014/12/09/rougt-resistant-report.html>

⁶ Bradman, A., et al., Effect of organic diet intervention on pesticide exposures in young children living in low-income urban and agricultural communities. *Environ Health Perspectives*. 2015.

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.⁷ 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 2017.⁸

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.⁹ Approximately 25 percent of organic corn and 75 percent of organic soybeans used in the country are imported.¹⁰ 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;

⁷ Organic Trade Association. Organic looks like America, shows new survey. <https://ota.com/news/press-releases/17972>

⁸ Organic Trade Association. Robust organic sectors stays on upward climb, posts new record in U.S. sales. <https://www.ota.com/news/press-releases/19681>

⁹ FiBL. 2017. The World of Organic Agriculture 2017. February 9. <https://www.fibl.org/fileadmin/documents/en/news/2017/mr-world-organic-agriculture-2017-english.pdf>

¹⁰ Demko, Iryna et al. 2017. U.S. Organic Trade Data: 2011 – 2016. A report for Organic Trade Association. https://ota.com/sites/default/files/indexed_files/OTATradeReport_10-30-2017.pdf

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,

Friends of the Earth	National
Accredited Certifiers Association	National
Beyond Pesticides	National
Blue River Organic Seeds	National
Center for Biological Diversity	National
Center for Food Safety	National
Endangered Species Coalition	National
Fair World Project	National
Family Farm Defenders	National
Farm Aid	National
Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance	National
Food & Water Watch	National
Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT)	National
HEAL Food Alliance	National
National Organic Coalition	National
Natural Grocers	National
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance	National
OneCert, Inc.	National
Organic & Natural Health Association	National
Organic Farmers Association	National
Organic Seed Alliance	National
Organic Seed Growers and Trade Association (OSGATA)	National
Pesticide Action Network	national
Rachel Carson Council	National
Rural Coalition	National
Sierra Club	National
Sisters of Mercy South Central Community	National
Wild Farm Alliance	National
Farmworker Justice	National
Grow Ahead	National
Organic Consumers Association	National
Nature's Path Foods Inc.	BC - British Columbia
Center for Environmental Health	California
Dietrick Institute for Applied Insect Ecology	California

Edible East Bay Magazine	California
Rincon-Vitova Insectaries	California
Double M Dairy LLC	California
Dr. Bronner's	California
Straus Family Creamery	California
Lady Moon Farms, Inc.	Florida, Georgia, Pennsylvania
Catalyst Miami	Florida
Farmworker Association of Florida	Florida
Florida Immigrant Coalition (FLIC)	Florida
Florida School of Holistic Living	Florida
Friends of Miami-Dade Detainees	Florida
Gainesville Interfaith Alliance for Immigrant Justice	Florida
Hispanic Federation	Florida
Latin American Coalition	Florida
Organize Florida	Florida
SEIU Florida Public Services Union	Florida
WeCount!	Florida
Central Florida Bread for the World	Florida
Kanalani Ohana Farm	Hawaii
Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America	Illinois
Edible Indy	Indiana
Buckhaven Ridge Farm	Iowa
Eco Lips, Inc	Iowa
FarmTable Procurement and Delivery	Iowa
Garden on Garden	Iowa
Green Vale Farm	Iowa
Hidden Acres Organic	Iowa
Iowa Organic Association	Iowa
Lenz Organic Farm	Iowa
Lyn Farm	Iowa
Okoboji Organics	Iowa
Red Barn Organic	Iowa
Redeemed Farms LLC	Iowa
Reinert Farms Inc.	Iowa
Stonebridge Ltd	Iowa
Thorland Organics, LLC	Iowa
Tigner Consulting	Iowa
Narrow Gate Farm	Iowa
Orchard On Sand Road	Iowa
Cottonwood Creek Farms	Kansas
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association	Maine
Portland Food Co-op	Maine
Butterfly Brigade	Maryland
Central Maryland Beekeepers Association	Maryland
Fair Farms	Maryland
Maryland Pesticide Education Network	Maryland
Maryland Ornithological Society	Maryland

Equal Exchange Inc	Massachusetts
Leverett Village Co-operative	Massachusetts
Northeast Organic Farming Association - Interstate Council	Massachusetts
Northeast Organic Farming Association - Massachusetts	Massachusetts
Wild Oats Market	Massachusetts
Dream Acres Farm	Michigan
Ecology Center	Michigan
Edible Grande Traverse	Michigan
Field & Fire LLC	Michigan
Happy Homestead Farm	Michigan
Local Food Alliance of Northern Michigan	Michigan
Making Shade Farms	Michigan
Marilla Field & Flora	Michigan
Michigan State University Extension	Michigan
Michigan Young Farmer Coalition	Michigan
New Bee Apiaries, LLC	Michigan
Perich Advertising and Design	Michigan
Skinny Farm Co-op	Michigan
Sleeping Bear Press	Michigan
Songbird Farm	Michigan
Tamarack Camps Farber Farm	Michigan
Edible Michiana	Michigan & Indiana
Old Mill Honey Company	Minnesota
Albert Lea Seed	Minnesota
Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture	Minnesota
Sustane Natural Fertilizer Inc	Minnesota
International Organic Inspectors Association	Montana
Organic Aronia Farm	Nebraska
	Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota,
	Kansas
OPINS Coop	New Hampshire
Northeast Organic Farming Association - New Hampshire	New Jersey
GMO Free NJ	New Jersey
Northeast Organic Farming Association - New Jersey	New Mexico
Cuatro Puertas	New York
Church Women United in New York State	New York
DRUM: Desis Rising Up and Moving	New York
Global Justice Ecology Project	New York
Green Beacon Coalition	New York
Hudson Valley Biofuel	New York
LaBella Associates	New York
Made Safe	New York
Northeast Organic Farming Association - New York	New York
Partnership for Community Development	New York
Regional Farm and Food Project	New York
Neighboring Food Co-op Association	New York & New England
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association	North and South Carolina
Nuestro Centro	North Carolina
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group	Northeast
Levin Family Foundation	Ohio
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association	Ohio
Three Springs Farm	Oklahoma

Oregon Tilth	Oregon
Ridgeline Meadows Farm	Oregon
Beyond Toxics	Oregon
BJE Poultry	Pennsylvania
Kovar Organic Equipment LLC	Pennsylvania
New England Farmers Union	Regional
Hunger Mountain Cooperative	Vermont
Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op	Vermont
Northeast Organic Farming Association - Vermont	Vermont
Diane's Market Kitchen LLC	Washington
PCC Community Markets	Washington
Dammen Organic Farms	Wisconsin
Edible Door	Wisconsin
FairShare CSA Coalition	Wisconsin
Midwest Organic Services Association	Wisconsin