

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 4, 2012

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Chairman, House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member, House Committee on Agriculture
1305 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Lucas and Ranking Member Peterson:

As you draft the 2012 Farm Bill we ask you to continue key investments in organic agriculture to further the success of an industry that grew by nearly 10% last year and reached \$32 billion in sales. Organic is one of the most promising and fastest growing sectors in U.S. agriculture today, with over 17,000 operations that keep family farmers on the land and provide jobs and opportunities in rural America.

There is a critical set of national programs that work synergistically to provide the research, data analysis and regulatory oversight so that the organic industry can continue to flourish. The National Organic Program (NOP) is the flagship program that performs regulatory oversight and maintains the integrity of the USDA organic label. NOP enforces the national organic program standards, accredits certifiers, develops equivalency agreements with foreign governments, handles complaints, and investigates cases of fraud. It is essential to maintain this program to hold producers accountable to the high standards of the organic label and to ensure consumers can have confidence in the organic products they purchase. We urge you to reauthorize NOP in the upcoming Farm Bill and include the one time technology upgrades as well as the authorized funding levels that are contained in the Senate bill that passed out of committee.

We also ask that you reauthorize the National Organic Certification Cost-Share Program and fund it at the levels that were included in the Senate Farm Bill. The Cost-Share Program assists small farmers and handlers in offsetting a portion of the costs of annual certification. Obtaining organic certification can be expensive for small producers and without this assistance, being certified organic may become unattainable for many farmers and handlers.

In addition to the basic programs that maintain and oversee the organic standards, we urge you to invest in critical research needs for organic farmers. The Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) is USDA's only competitive grants program solely dedicated to the growing needs of the organic community. As you know, organic farmers face many challenges that can't be addressed through research geared towards conventional crops. Organic farming is a unique system that requires different solutions to pest and weed management, seeds, and production. We ask that you reauthorize OREI and fund it at the levels included in the 2008 Farm Bill.

Like conventional agriculture, the organic industry cannot continue to thrive and maintain stable markets without good data collection. The Organic Production Market and Data Initiative (ODI) is USDA's multi-agency organic data collection initiative that collects information vital to maintaining stable markets, creating risk management tools, and increasing exports. Organic producers must continue to be included in the Census of Agriculture so that policy makers and farmers alike can assess the size and scope of the industry in the U.S. We ask that you reauthorize ODI and maintain funding at the levels included in the 2008 Farm Bill.

Additionally, there are a few no cost policy changes that should be made that would impact the organic industry in the upcoming Farm Bill. As you know, risk management is an important tool that serves as an essential safety net for farmers and we should not continue to unfairly penalize one sector of agriculture. Today, organic farmers currently pay a premium surcharge on crop insurance policies but are only reimbursed at conventional crop prices for any losses. Everyone can agree that is unfair. We ask that you include language in the Farm Bill to direct the USDA Risk Management Agency to charge a premium based on actuarially sound data, rather than the current arbitrary 5% organic surcharge. RMA should also complete their organic price series so that organic producers can be reimbursed at organic market prices.

Lastly, organic producers and handlers should not be forced to pay into conventional marketing promotion or check-off programs. Currently producers who are 100% organic and only farm or handle organic products can qualify as exempt from check-off programs. This definition doesn't accurately represent the organic industry as many producers and handlers may have conventional as well as organic products or are 95% organic which still is considered organic under the USDA label. It is unfair and costly for organic producers to contribute to check-off programs that only promote conventional products. A simple language change in the definition of organic operations that can qualify for exemption under traditional check-off programs would save the industry money. We also request that you grant authority to the organic sector to create a multi-commodity check-off program.

Although organic programs are a very small part of the hundreds of billions of dollars that will be invested in this Farm Bill, they must not be overlooked. Organic agriculture is a growing industry that provides jobs throughout the supply chain – from farm fields to Main Street

businesses. We ask that you support its growth by reauthorizing the key programs and making the small investments listed above. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress



Richard Hanna
Member of Congress



Ron Kind
Member of Congress



Reid Ribble
Member of Congress



Sam Farr
Member of Congress



Peter Welch
Member of Congress