

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 27, 2013

The Honorable John Boehner, Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-232 The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Democratic Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-204 The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

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

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

Dear Speaker Boehner, Minority Leader Pelosi, Chairman Lucas, and Ranking Member Peterson:

As you prepare for Farm Bill Conference deliberations with the Senate, we are writing to thank you for your efforts to achieve a 5-year Farm Bill reauthorization, and to ask you to renew key investments in organic agriculture as part of any final Farm Bill legislation.

Organic is one of the most promising and fastest growing sectors in U.S. agriculture today, with over 17,500 operations that keep family farmers on the land and provide jobs and opportunities in rural America. Underpinned by a strong entrepreneurial ethic, the sector grew by over 10 percent last year and reached \$35 billion in sales. Currently, domestic demand for organic food and beverages exceeds domestic production.

There is a critical set of national programs that provide research, data analysis, farmer assistance, and regulatory oversight so that the organic industry can continue to flourish. Unfortunately, the short-term Farm Bill extension enacted on January 1<sup>st</sup> of this year failed to fund any of these important organic programs. The organic sector of agriculture was especially hard-hit by this funding hiatus, which makes renewed funding for these programs as part of the 2013 Farm Bill or any extension of current law even more critical.

We urge you to include the following program funding levels and provisions in any final Farm Bill legislation:

The **Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI)** is a USDA competitive grants program dedicated to the growing needs of the organic community. OREI has a proven track record of addressing the unique research challenges that organic farmers and processors face. In the 2008 Farm Bill, OREI was funded at \$20 million in mandatory funding annually. The House-passed farm bill maintains this level while the Senate-passed bill provides just \$16 million annually in mandatory funding. Particularly in light of the one-year gap in funding for fiscal year 2013 for OREI as a result of the short-term Farm Bill extension, *we are urging House conferees to insist on the House position on this matter to provide the full \$20 million in mandatory funding annually for the program.*

**Organic Certification Cost-Share Assistance** is critical to ensuring that domestic organic production does not go overseas by offsetting some of the cost of annual organic certification – a

growing cost faced by all organic farmers and handlers. Two federal programs provide organic certification cost share assistance – the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program (NOCCSP) and the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program – with each program serving different states and using different parameters. The House Farm bill repeals the NOCCSP, and leaves the organic certification portion of the AMA program, which has permanent authorization through the Federal Crop Insurance Reform Act, unchanged. The Senate bill streamlines the two programs under the umbrella of the AMA program, creating efficiencies in program management and delivery. *We strongly urge House conferees to adopt the Senate position with regard to Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA).*

The **National Organic Program (NOP)** performs regulatory oversight and maintains the integrity of the USDA organic label. 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. The Senate 2013 Farm Bill authorizes annual appropriations for the NOP, and also provides \$5 million in one-time mandatory funding for technology and database upgrades for NOP so that the program can keep pace with growth in the organic sector and provide improved domestic and international oversight. Although this funding was provided in the House Agriculture Committee's 2012 Farm Bill, it was not included in the 2013 House bill. *We are urging House conferees to adopt the Senate provisions with regard to NOP funding.*

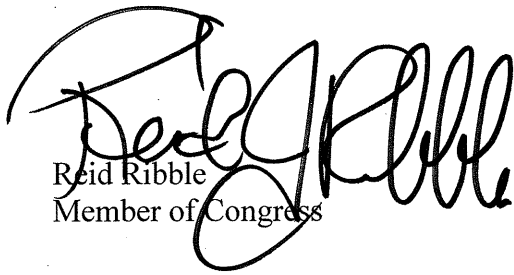
The **Organic Production Market and Data Initiatives (ODI)** is USDA's multi-agency organic data collection initiative that collects information vital to maintaining stable markets, creating risk management tools, tracking production trends, and increasing exports. Like conventional agriculture, the organic industry cannot continue to thrive and maintain stable markets without good data collection. The Senate 2013 Farm Bill authorizes annual appropriations for the ODI, and also provides \$5 million in one-time mandatory funding for the program. Although this funding was provided in the House Agriculture Committee's 2012 Farm Bill, it was not included in the 2013 House bill. *We are urging House conferees to adopt the Senate provisions with regard to ODI funding.*

Organic agriculture is a growing industry that provides jobs throughout the supply chain – from farm fields to Main Street businesses. Although organic programs are a very small part of the hundreds of billions of dollars that will be invested through this Farm Bill, they are critical programs that address unique needs. The failure to fund all of the Farm Bill organic programs and initiatives as part of short-term Farm Bill extension has placed these organic business at a gross disadvantage that must be addressed in any Farm Bill legislation enacted this year.

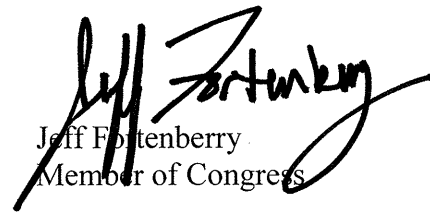
We ask that you support the organic sector's growth by reauthorizing the key programs and making the modest investments listed above.

Sincerely,

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|  |  |  |  |
| Peter DeFazio<br>Member of Congress   | Richard Hanna<br>Member of Congress   | Sam Farr<br>Member of Congress   | Ron Kind<br>Member of Congress  |



Reid Ribble  
Member of Congress



Jeff Fortenberry  
Member of Congress



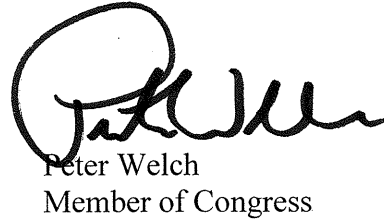
Joe Courtney  
Member of Congress



George Miller  
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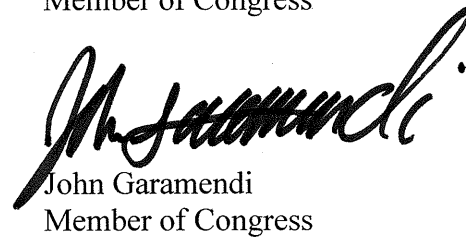
Louise Slaughter  
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Peter Welch  
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Chellie Pingree  
Member of Congress



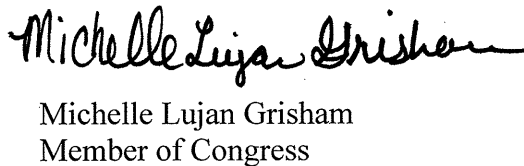
John Garamendi  
Member of Congress



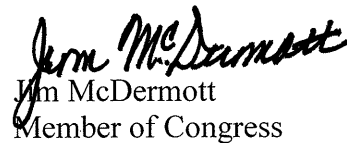
Suzan DelBene  
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Ann McLane Kuster  
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Michelle Lujan Grisham  
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Jim McDermott  
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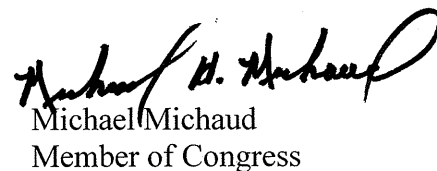
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