

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 4, 2019

The Honorable Sanford Bishop  
Chairman  
Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Agriculture, Rural Development,  
FDA, and Related Agencies

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Agriculture, Rural Development,  
FDA, and Related Agencies

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Fortenberry:

As you draft the Fiscal Year 2020 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we ask you to invest in organic agriculture by funding key programs that underpin the sector's strong growth at the levels needed to make them successful as well as ensure that the USDA is enforcing clear and consistent standards for organic production. The organic agriculture sector is a growing industry that keeps over 19,000 American family farmers on the land, profitably producing food that is increasing in demand. After experiencing double-digit growth for a decade, the sector continues to experience positive growth and grew by over 6 percent in 2017 to nearly \$50 billion.

Ensuring the continued growth of organic agriculture requires continuing the modest but important federal investment in organic agriculture. There is a critical set of national programs that work synergistically to provide the research, information, and regulatory oversight so that the industry can flourish. These programs are:

- **Organic Transitions Integrated Research Program (ORG) - \$8 million**  
ORG is a competitive research, education, and extension program that funds research that organic farmers need to improve and increase production. Funding ORG would help bridge the gap between organic sector growth and research investment at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- **National Organic Program (NOP) - \$18 million**  
NOP enforces the national organic program standards, accredits certifiers, develops equivalency agreements, handles complaints – in essence, NOP performs regulatory oversight of the organic label, ensuring its integrity. Funding NOP would ensure that NOP keeps pace with the sector's strong growth.
- **Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE) \$45 million**  
SARE has helped turn farmer-driven research, education, and extension initiatives into profitable and environmentally sound practices for over two decades. Funding the program

would jumpstart the Federal-State Matching Grants program and continues important on-farm research.

- **Organic Production and Market Data Initiatives (ODI) - \$1 million**

ODI is a multi-agency organic data collection initiative that collects information vital to maintaining stable markets, creating risk management tools, and negotiating equivalency agreements with foreign governments. Funding ODI would allow for continued price data collection and dissemination through Market News Reports.

### **Origin of Organic Livestock - Bill Language**

The USDA National Organic Program (NOP) develops rules and regulations for the production, handling, and labeling of all USDA organic products and requires that organic products meet uniform, consistent standards. The current lack of uniform enforcement by USDA regarding the origin of livestock regulations has resulted in direct economic harm for organic dairy farmers. The organic industry has been requesting clear rules surrounding the transition of livestock to organic production since 2002. In 2015, USDA issued a proposed rule that clarified the regulations around origin of livestock while still allowing a one-time transition of a conventional herd to organic. The comments from the organic industry reflected widespread support for the rule yet USDA failed to publish the final rule. We request that USDA issue a final rule on the origin of organic livestock based on the 2015 proposed rule without further delay in order to prevent further disruption of the marketplace.

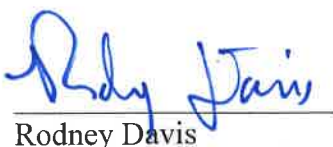
**Requested Bill Language:** Not later than 180 days after enactment of this section, the Secretary of Agriculture shall issue a final rule based on the proposed rule entitled “National Organic Program; Origin of Livestock,” published in the Federal Register on April 28, 2015 (80 Fed. Reg. 23455). The final rule shall incorporate public comments submitted in response to the proposed rule.

Funds invested in organic agriculture programs have accounted for less than one percent of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's budget in recent years, but the return on that investment has been substantial. Organic agriculture is a growing industry that provides jobs throughout the supply chain – from farm fields to businesses. We ask that you support its growth by funding the programs listed above and ensuring that USDA is applying uniform, consistent standards for organic production.

Sincerely,



Peter A. DeFazio  
Member of Congress



Rodney Davis  
Member of Congress



Ron Kind  
Member of Congress

Mark DeSaulnier  
Member of Congress

Juan Vargas  
Member of Congress



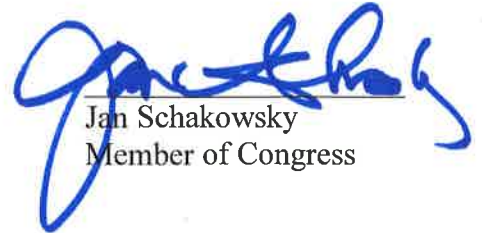
Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress



Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress



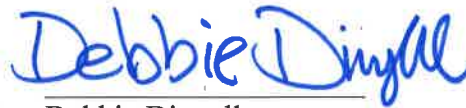
Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress



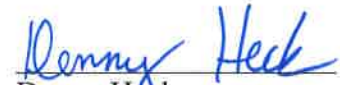
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Denny Heck  
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Jim Costa  
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Cindy Axne  
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Kim Schrier, M.D.  
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Jamie Raskin  
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Ilhan Omar  
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Antonio R. Delgado  
Member of Congress



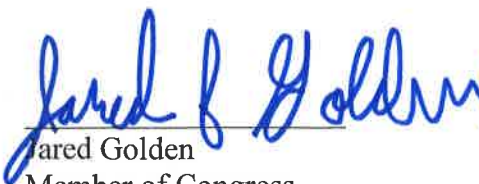
Cedric Richmond  
Member of Congress



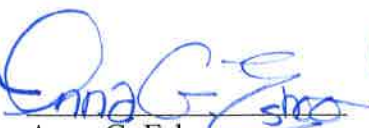
Sean Patrick Maloney  
Member of Congress



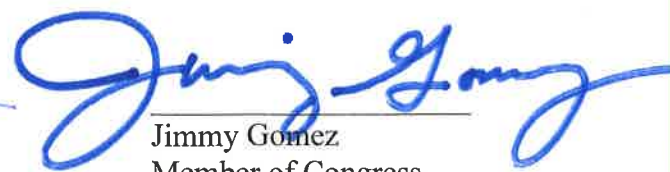
Angie Craig  
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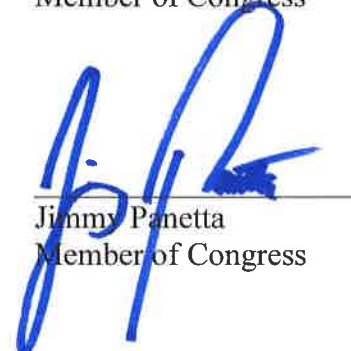
  
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