

2019 PRESIDENTIAL FORUM

COMBATING CLIMATE CHANGE WITH ORGANIC AND REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

Hosted by Organic Farmers Association and Iowa Organic Association

December 5, 2019 in Story City Iowa

Written Responses to Questions Asked by Iowa Organic Farmers at the Forum Submitted by Presidential Candidate: Pete Buttigieg

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- 1. Organic regenerative farming practices are essential for fighting climate change and they provide environmental services that support clean air, water, and healthy food for our communities. We need more organic farmers. How will your agriculture policies incentivize more family farms to adopt and continue organic and regenerative farming practices?**

I will provide structures to incentivize organic and regenerative farming practices and also support markets and people who see value in purchasing these products. We can support these farmers by making payments for the environmental value that these production practices bring, as described below. My USDA can also provide support for market structures by helping farmers increase direct to consumer sales and develop cooperative arrangements to help aggregate services and products.

- 2. Healthy organic soil can sequester large amounts of carbon. If elected President, how would you assure that the USDA makes healthy soil a high priority for all farmers and a requirement for certified organic crops?**

To improve soil health, I will double USDA R&D investments over four years, committing nearly \$50 billion over a decade to research that the country needs to put healthy food on our plates. My administration will also improve soil health and promote policies to keep our environment safe and healthy. As described in my [climate change plan](#), I will provide opportunities for farmers to get paid for sequestering carbon in their soil, including through reduced and no tillage of soil, cover crops, precision nitrogen management, improved grazing systems, and science-based crop rotation plans. I will also support market-based approaches that incentivize soil management methods and technologies.

- 3. For years farmers have been squeezed by low prices, vertical integration of agribusiness, and monopolies of markets, while much of this has been happening in the conventional sector, it is now also affecting the growing organic market. How will you use existing antitrust legislation to curb vertical integration and monopolies and ensure fair pricing to family farmers?**

As described in my [rural economy plan](#), I will double funding for antitrust enforcement and halve the reporting threshold so that firms cannot skirt the law and our laws can be properly enforced. I will also reopen antitrust field offices closer to rural America and re-invigorate the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration as a standalone office in USDA. Furthermore, I will launch investigations of the seed market's recent mergers for anticompetitive behavior and protect family farm rights for seeds.

- 4. Iowa organic farmers work hard to produce high-quality commodity crops with high organic integrity, yet the USDA has failed to prevent fraudulent imports and domestic fraud from undercutting our markets. What would your administration do to protect American organic farms from being undercut from fraud?**

Fraudulent organic imports have presented a serious problem. We must ensure that standards are upheld because high standards for domestic production have limited impact if we allow imports with little or no documentation that those standards have been met. As a part of USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, the National Organic Program establishes international organic import and export policy. I will strengthen the National Organic Program so that foreign farms and businesses are all required to meet our standards.

5. Farmers are still the backbone of America. We need a Secretary of Agriculture who stands WITH sustainable family farmers, not corporate interests. Will you appoint a Secretary of Agriculture who understands and will support vibrant organic and regenerative family farms?

I will appoint a Secretary of Agriculture who understands the importance of organic and regenerative farms.

6. Organic integrity is the number one priority for organic farmers; yet, corporate interests have lobbied to weaken our organic standards. The USDA failed to implement animal welfare standards requested by organic farmers, has not enforced the dairy grazing standard, and has disregarded the requirement for soil in organic production. What would you do to bring the organic standards back into alignment with the high organic integrity that organic farmers and consumers expect?

Any effort to restore integrity to the organic system begins by listening to organic producers and understanding their needs and issues. Where USDA can reverse or fix these issues on its own, I will push it to do so. Where the fixes require Congressional action, my Secretary of Agriculture will develop specific recommendations for Congress.

Aside from the specific policies and issues, this question raises a larger matter. Continued growth in and demand for organic foods by consumers is an incredibly important part of the agricultural and rural economies. I understand--as any Secretary of Agriculture in my administration will also understand--that the relationship to the consumer is absolutely critical for organic markets to succeed. And that relationship has to be built on real integrity, otherwise organic labeling and the entire system will fail. Corporate interests or those who do not have the best interests of organic producers and consumers in mind have no business influencing these matters or getting involved. They will not have that influence in my administration. Instead, a significant part of the work of my administration will be restoring integrity across the board, including at USDA and for the organic program.