

## **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: Senator Elizabeth Warren**

January 2020

#### **Question 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?**

Instead of subsidizing industrial agriculture, my [plan](#) for a new farm economy will build on the principles of regenerative agriculture to put family farmers, farmworkers, and rural communities in the driver's seat to help achieve the goals of the Green New Deal. A Warren administration will put an end to the USDA's harmful "fence row to fence row" mindset and instead move to a "feed the soil" mindset that centers family farmers and healthy soil. By making this shift, we can raise farm incomes, expand economic opportunities for family farmers of all backgrounds, and protect our land and water by combating the existential threat of climate change.

Farmers are the stewards of our land. That's why a Warren administration will lead a full-out effort to decarbonize the agricultural sector by investing in our farmers and giving them the tools, research, and training they need to transform the sector – so that we can achieve the objectives of the Green New Deal by 2030. That means paying farmers for embracing sustainable farming techniques and conservation practices on working lands by expanding federal funding for the Conservation Stewardship Program from around \$1 billion per year today to \$15 billion per year. A Warren USDA will also expand the types of practices eligible for compensation. Direct payments for conservation on working lands can aid the transition to regenerative agriculture that climate change demands.

Research and innovation will be essential in supporting a transition to sustainable farming. I will dedicate resources from my \$400 billion Green Manufacturing plan to create a farmer-led Innovation Fund that farmers can use to pioneer new methods of sustainable farming that build soil health and fight climate change, and that will pair farmers with land grant researchers to test and scale these practices. A Warren administration will make sure these opportunities are open to all farmers – especially those that have historically been excluded from USDA programs – by dismantling systemic discrimination in USDA and creating dedicated programs for diverse farmers.

Our land grant universities will play a critical role in developing the regenerative farming practices of the future – and training a new generation of farmers to bring them to life. That’s why my administration will reinvest in our land grant universities and focus public research in part on evaluating farmers’ ideas to decarbonize the agricultural sector, including on breeds, seeds, and methods of farming that will empower us to meet benchmarks in the Green New Deal. This starts by reclaiming our land grant universities from Big Ag. I will also require states to fulfill the Congressional mandate to provide equal funding for 1890 land-grant universities that support the flourishing of Black farming communities, but that have been underfunded compared to other land-grant institutions. And I’ll reverse the Trump administration’s exile of ERS researchers so our scientists can better support data analysis on regenerative farming.

Finally, rural communities should be able to access the local food that family farmers grow – and farmers and their communities should be able to benefit from the economic opportunities that come with that. My administration will invest in building local and regional food systems, including local food hubs, small-herd meat processors, distribution centers, and points of sale – so that organic and regenerative farmers can thrive. I’ll power this transformation by increasing funding for the USDA’s Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) ten-fold to half a billion dollars a year. And we will use the full power of federal and state procurement to ensure access to local, sustainable food in all communities. That’s why I’m calling for an expansion of the successful Farm-to-School program into a billion-dollar “Farm-to-People” program that will open federally-supported public institutions – including public schools, hospitals, military bases, and prisons – to local and regionally grown products.

## Question 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?**

As president, I will lead a full-out effort to decarbonize the agricultural sector and rebuild our soil and water by paying farmers for using sustainable farming practices, expanding research and development in regenerative techniques, and building demand for locally-grown, sustainable farm products. I’ll start by ending the broken system of subsidies that rewards overproduction and monoculture. Instead, I’ll replace it with a system of supply management that guarantees farmers a fair price while encouraging them to bid land into conservation programs to discourage overproduction. I will make it economically feasible for farmers to be part of the climate change solution by increasing funding for the Conservation Stewardship Program fifteen fold. I’ll also expand funding and support for organic research and transition programs, and invest resources from my \$400 billion green R&D commitment towards decarbonization initiatives, including a farmer-led Innovation Fund that farmers can use to test and scale new regenerative methods. Land grant universities also have a critical role to play in setting the direction of our conservation policy, which is why I’ll fight to reclaim them from Big Ag’s influence and refocus them on their public research and extension mission. These big, structural changes to our

agriculture sector will improve soil health and accelerate the adoption of regenerative agricultural practices.

### Question 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?**

Today a farmer can work hard, do everything right — even get great weather — and still not make it. Big Ag profits are soaring, but our independent farmers are getting less than 15 cents of every dollar that Americans spend on food — the lowest amount since the Department of Agriculture began tracking that figure in 1993. This didn't happen by accident: bad decisions in Washington have consistently favored the interests of multinational corporations and big business lobbyists over the interests of family farmers.

I have a plan to tackle the consolidation in the agriculture sector that is leaving family farmers with fewer choices and thinner margins, including by appointing antitrust regulators that will review and reverse mergers that have spurred agricultural consolidation and squeezed out family farms. I'll also break up big agribusinesses that have become vertically integrated and that control more and more of the market. The Department of Justice has not revised its guidelines on vertical mergers in 35 years. And in that time, we have seen merger after merger linking together every aspect of the chain in farming. My administration will bring vertical integration cases to break up integrated agribusinesses.

Additionally, I'll restore regulators like GIPSA to hold packing and stockyard operations accountable. And I'll un-rig the rules that benefit Big Ag by fighting to end abusive contract farming in the livestock sector, supporting a national right-to-repair law that empowers farmers, making the checkoff program voluntary, and closing the loopholes that CAFOs use to get away with polluting our air and water. I'll also work hand-in-hand with states to beef up enforcement of the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act, stop huge factory farms from accessing funds, like EQIP, that are intended to benefit family farmers, and ban companies that violate labor and environmental standards from accessing those funds, too.

Just like workers need a living wage, farmers need a fair price. I will start by replacing the broken system of blanket subsidies that rewards giant corporations by encouraging fence-row-to-fence-row farming and overproduction that squeezes farmers and erodes our soil. We'll replace this system with a new supply management program that guarantees farmers a fair price and encourages them to bid acres of land currently used for commodity production into conservation by paying them for the environmental benefit they provide. By building on the successful model of the New Deal, we can provide higher farm incomes, address overproduction, and save taxpayers billions — all while curbing the power of giant agribusinesses.

#### Question 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?**

For too long, Washington has bowed to powerful foreign interests instead of advancing the interests of American farmers. A Warren administration will combat domestic and international fraud by fighting for trade agreements that reward American farmers for their hard work, breaking up the monopolies in grain trading and meat packing, and protecting domestic markets to create stability for America's family farms. I'll also make sure our trade agreements require imported food to meet domestic food safety standards, including enhanced border inspection requirements. And I will impose Country-of-Origin Labeling rules to protect American producers and provide transparency to consumers. With these actions we can protect the hard work of our organic and regenerative family farmers.

#### Question 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?**

Yes. Hiring staff with lived experience in the areas they oversee is a priority in my campaign, and that continues in a Warren administration, too. I will appoint a Secretary of Agriculture who is committed to fighting for family farmers – including those who have traditionally been excluded from USDA's programs. My Secretary of Agriculture will not only be an advocate for family farmers, but an advocate for our climate, too. I also support staffing USDA's organic advisory positions to advance the principles of regenerative agriculture throughout USDA.

Tackling the legacy of discrimination against Black farmers and advancing a new generation of diverse farmers will also be a top priority of a Warren USDA. Seventy percent of farmland currently in operation will change ownership over the next two decades. But as giant agribusinesses and foreign interests continue to buy up farmland, new farmers are at a disadvantage. The federal government can – and should – play an active role in ensuring that the next generation of farmers reflects the diversity of our country. That's why I will establish a land trust dedicated to buying land from retiring farmers and selling it to new and diverse farmers interest-free, with specific benchmarks for sales to Black farmers. And I will support the next generation of new, beginning, and diverse farmers by requiring 10% of the Farm Credit Services' \$5 billion in profit to be dedicated to helping them get started.

I will also strengthen the USDA's focus on farmworkers. As president, I will make sure that farmworkers share in the benefits of our new farm economy. I'll start by fighting to pass the Fairness for Farm Workers Act to end the exclusion of farmworkers from our labor protections, and I will further direct the

USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) to include farmworkers and farmers of color more prominently in their research, so that we understand the challenges farmworkers face – and work to fix them.

#### Question 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?**

For too long, giant corporations have gotten in the way of defending the interests of family farmers and the communities that depend on them. That's why I will also use the tools at my disposal to stop giant agribusinesses from rigging the rules in their favor. I have released the most sweeping set of anti-corruption reforms since Watergate that will end lobbying as we know it, stopping agribusinesses from throwing money around to sway regulatory agencies and public officials in their favor. We will also expand the definition of lobbyists to include everyone who is paid to influence lawmakers, impose strict disclosure requirements on them, and shut the revolving door between government and K street.

Domestic and international fraud undercuts the organic label and hurts the organic producers who work hard and play by the rules. A Warren USDA will uphold organic label standards, and protect the interests of family farmers focused on organic and regenerative agriculture, including by holding imported food to domestic food safety standards and enforcing those standards through enhanced border inspection requirements.

We must also work to limit the number of pesticides we use in our agricultural system. I have been a vocal critic of Trump's EPA as they continue to expand the use of dangerous pesticides like Chlorpyrifos or the use of antibiotics like Streptomycin and Oxytetracycline as pesticides in citrus production. The EPA in a Warren administration will not be run by industry lobbyists who are only looking out for the interest of corporate profits. Instead, my EPA will work on behalf of everyone to protect the health and well-being of people and planet. That means making agribusinesses pay the full costs of the environmental damage they wreak and giving rural residents the tools to protect their families from pollution and fight back.