



OFA 2023 Farm Bill Priorities

The Farm Bill is a huge package of federal legislation that influences most aspects of the food system. The bill determines what kinds of programs exist to support farmers, what kind of agriculture research gets government funding, how forests are managed, and what types of support are provided for regional food system infrastructure, to name just a few. The biggest program in the bill focuses on nutrition called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which determines how much assistance low-income families get to buy food. The programs created and modified by the Farm Bill affect not only existing organic farmers but could also encourage more farmers to transition to organic or use organic methods. The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition does a great job of outlining the different sections of a typical Farm Bill – [click here](#) to read more about the bill's structure.



Every five years, the farm bill expires and needs to be updated and passed again. Congress goes through an extensive process of drafting, debating, and passing a new bill that is then signed into law by the President. Each version of the farm bill has a unique title. The current bill is called the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018. It was enacted into law in December 2018 and expires in September 2023.

Organic Farmers Association will focus our advocacy efforts during the Farm Bill process on programs that support organic farmers and improve organic integrity. The Farm Bill is a massive package covering many issues and is the subject of huge amounts of lobbying. To best channel our resources, OFA will partner with many other allied organizations to help fight for broader improvements we want to see, like support for local food system infrastructure, land access, addressing longstanding problems of discrimination in USDA

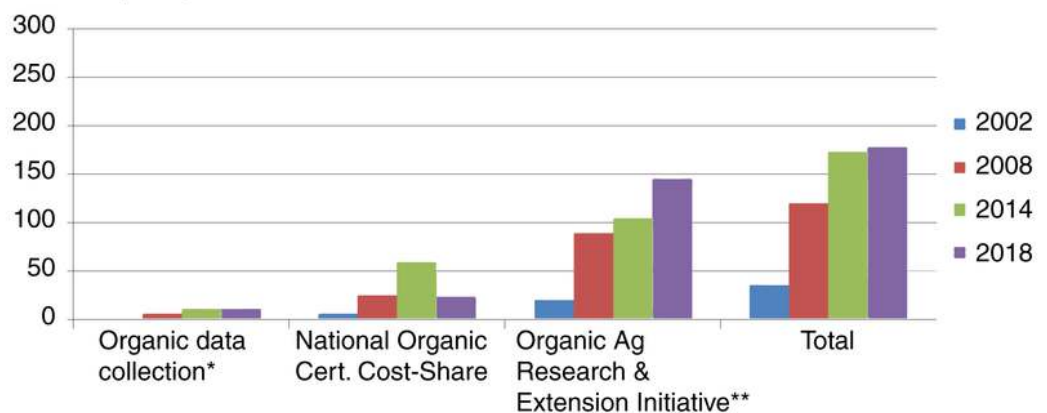
programs, and improving competition in agriculture markets.

The midterm elections will inform our strategies and specific proposals in preparation for the new Congress when the Farm Bill debate will begin in earnest. Election results will not change our priority issues, but may inform the choices and strategy we use based on how the new composition of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, where the bulk of the bill will be drafted. Organic Farmers Association will always advocate for USDA to improve how the National Organic Program operates, much of which they can already do without changing the law. (Many of the priorities identified by organic farmers are actually changes that USDA could make now, without using the Farm Bill process to alter the text of the Organic Foods Production Act that created the USDA Organic program.)

USDA ERS data shows spending for organic over the last four farm bills. The organic market is growing at a much faster rate than the USDA spending commitment to the organic industry. OFA hopes to diversify and expand organic funding in the 2023 Farm Bill.

Total inflation-adjusted mandatory spending on organic agriculture, 2002-2018 Farm Acts

\$ million (2017)



* Includes \$5 million in 2018 to improve organic import tracking and verification.

** Does not include intramural organic research funds in USDA's Agricultural Research Service.

Source: USDA budget summary data (2002); Congressional Budget Office (2008); 2014, 2018 Farm Acts.

UNDERSTANDING THE FARM BILL TITLES



TITLE 1: COMMODITIES

Price and income support for farmers who raise commodity non-perishable crops (corn, cotton, rice, soy, etc.) & dairy. And agricultural disaster assistance



TITLE 7: RESEARCH, EXTENSION, AND RELATED MATTERS

Farm & food research, education, and extension programs research that supports innovation & training for farmers & ranchers.



TITLE 2: CONSERVATION

Programs that help farmers implement natural resource conservation efforts on working lands, land retirement, and easement programs.



TITLE 8: FORESTRY

Forest-specific conservation programs that help farmers and rural communities steward forest resources.



TITLE 3: TRADE

Food export subsidy programs and international food aid programs



TITLE 9: ENERGY

Programs that support growing and processing crops for biofuel, installation of renewable energy systems farms, and research related to energy.



TITLE 4: NUTRITION

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) & other nutrition programs to help low-income families afford food.



TITLE 10: HORTICULTURE

Farmers market & local food programs, research and infrastructure for fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops, and organic farming and certification programs.



TITLE 5: CREDIT

Federal loan programs to help farmers access financial credit (direct loans, loan guarantees, etc.) to grow and sustain their farm businesses.



TITLE 11: CROP INSURANCE

Subsidies to farmers & private companies who sell federal crop insurance for losses in yield, crop revenue, or whole farm revenue. Also Risk Management Agency.



TITLE 6: RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Programs that support rural economic growth through rural business and community development, rural housing, and infrastructure.

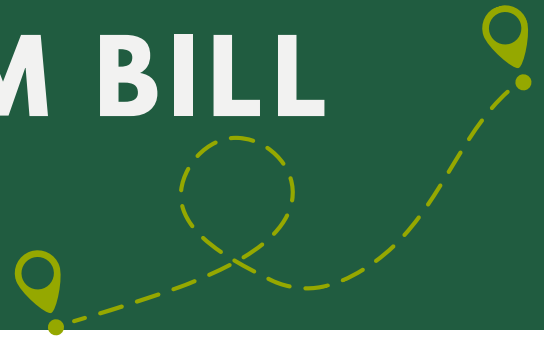


TITLE 12: MISCELLANEOUS

Includes programs for beginning, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers and ranchers, ag. labor safety and workforce development, and livestock health.



2023 FARM BILL ROADMAP



Based on the input from OFA members and allied organizations from around the country, here are the priorities OFA will focus on as the next Farm Bill is written.



ORGANIC INTEGRITY

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN ORGANIC

- Require USDA's National Organic Program (NOP) to periodically review and update organic practice standards (beyond the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Materials) to ensure continuous improvement in organic standards.
- Set a timeframe for the NOP to do rulemaking after receiving a National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) recommendation when the recommendation is supported by 2/3 of the board. Require the NOP to clearly state how their rulemaking relates to NOSB recommendations.
- Authorize funding for the NOP to keep pace with organic industry growth and direct specific resources towards standards development.

OVERSIGHT AND ENFORCEMENT

- Require the NOP to accredit third-party material review organizations that review agricultural inputs for compliance with the organic standards.
- Grant the NOP the authority to take enforcement actions against false organic claims on agricultural non-food products.

NATIONAL ORGANIC STANDARDS BOARD

- Allow USDA to expand the definition of reimbursable expenses for farmer members of the NOSB to cover substitute labor on their operations during their Board service.
- Restore the NOSB procedure for sunset review of National List materials, to require a 2/3 vote to **re-list** a material (as opposed to the current standard of 2/3 vote needed to de-list.)

Photo credit: Thorpe's Organic Family Farm





ASSISTANCE FOR ORGANIC DAIRY FARMERS

Organic dairy farmers across the country are facing severe economic challenges. The NOP can increase enforcement of the organic standards (including access to pasture and the updated Origin of Livestock rule) with no changes to the Farm Bill. In addition, the next Farm Bill could provide long-needed support for the organic dairy market, similar to what conventional dairy has received for many years:

- Investment in regional organic milk processing infrastructure around the country to spur the entrance of new buyers for organic milk.
- Immediate support to address dramatically increased organic input costs for organic dairy farms.
- Support for regional programs to collect and publish cost of production data for organic milk (including all costs, not just organic feed).
- Require USDA to regularly publish regional reports on:
 - Receipts of Organic Fluid Milk Products and Cream
 - Utilization of Organic Fluid Milk products and Cream by pool plants
 - Receipts of Organic Milk produced, by state.
- Creation of a safety net program for organic dairy farms, such as organic-specific margin coverage.



CLIMATE & CONSERVATION

- Organic must be prioritized in all climate programs developed for agriculture in the Farm Bill.
- Target Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds for livestock practices to advanced grazing management.
- Eliminate the separate, lower organic payment limit in EQIP.
- Expand Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) practices specific to organic production or transitioning to organic production (based on new programs announced by the USDA in the fall of 2022).
- The Natural Resources Conservation Service should quantify the multiple benefits of organic practices (not limited to carbon sequestration).





ORGANIC RESEARCH

Investing in organic research has significant benefits that serve all farmers. Organic research should prioritize helping organic farmers adapt to climate disruption, quantify the multiple benefits organic production provides for the environment and public health, develop regionally-appropriate publicly available seeds and breeds, and address organic production challenges with methods that reduce the need for inputs.

- Direct ARS to create a new Organic National Program and dedicate \$100 million to organic research to bring to parity with the growth of organic market share.
- Authorize and fund a Long-term Agroecological Research network at \$50 million per year.
- Increase funding for the Organic Agriculture and Extension Initiative (OREI) at the National Institute for Food & Agriculture to \$100 million by year 5.
- Reauthorize the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE) with higher funding levels.
- Add climate resilience and regionally-appropriate cultivar development to the overall purposes of SARE.
- Reauthorize the Organic Production and Market Data Initiative to further understand the extent of the organic production. Add questions about impact of chemical and genetic drift on organic operations to data collection efforts from organic farms.
- Authorize and direct the Economic Research Service to do an updated economic impact analysis of the growth of organic agriculture, including assessing consolidation in organic markets.



MAKE USDA PROGRAMS WORK FOR ORGANIC FARMERS

COST SHARE & SUPPORT FOR NEW ORGANIC FARMERS

- Expand the Organic Certification Cost Share Program to better support small and underserved producers:
 - Increase reimbursement levels to \$1,500
 - Streamline the program to reduce the up-front cost of certification (instead of the current model of reimbursement later in the year.)
 - Provide such sums as are necessary to meet growing program needs.
 - Cover farms going through the organic transition process for expenses for certification services, education, and soil testing.
- Support transition to organic through grants to organizations (outside of USDA or the land grant university system) for technical assistance including farmer-to-farmer mentoring, financial planning assistance, outreach to under-represented groups and support for translation of training materials and organic certification paperwork.

CREDIT

- Increase the loan limit for USDA Micro Loan program to \$100,000 so that more farms can use the simplified application process.

CROP INSURANCE

- Streamline the application for Whole Farm Revenue insurance policies to address difficulties faced by new farms (or farms new to organic certification) in providing the historic production records required. Align requirements for farms transitioning to organic with records they can easily access (do not require farms in transition to produce documentation that is not available until after certification is complete.)
- Instruct USDA to increase education of Risk Management Agency staff and crop insurance agents on organic production methods.



INCREASING ORGANIC INFRASTRUCTURE

- Create new regional program to provide grants (administered by organizations) to farms for increasing organic production, addressing challenges for climate and supply chain resilience, and strengthening local food systems.
- Increase funding for the Local Agriculture Market Program (including Farmers Market Promotion Program, Local Food Promotion Program, Regional Food Systems Partnership Program, and Value-Added Producer Grants.)
- Provide additional incentives for processing plants that receive federal investment (new or expanding) to achieve organic certification.
- Require that USDA establish purchasing targets or set-asides for purchases of foods from independent regional producers, foods from socially disadvantaged producers, and foods from organic farms.



WORKING WITH ALLIES TO BUILD A BETTER FOOD SYSTEM

FOOD SECURITY: SNAP

- Protect critical investments in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) at a time of rising food prices and food insecurity.
- Create pathways to support land transition, apprenticeships, mentorships, and legacy planning work.
- Provide additional and culturally-appropriate technical assistance services (in multiple languages) so that beginning farmers can access USDA programs.

LAND ACCESS

- Support land transition to young, beginning, and underserved/underrepresented farmers, including programs that support farmland preservation and easements to reduce development of productive agricultural land and facilitate land access.

COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN LABELING (COOL)

- Require Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) on beef, pork, and dairy products. (It is already a requirement for poultry, fruits, and vegetables.)

COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN LABELING - CONTINUED

- Prohibiting meat products derived from imported animals from being labeled as “Product of U.S.A.”

COMPETITION IN LIVESTOCK MARKET

- Restore competition to livestock markets by ensuring that the USDA updates its rules for enforcing the Packers and Stockyards Act, creating a special




investigator for competition issues at the USDA, and requiring large meatpackers to procure more livestock on open markets. 



Photo: Harmony Fields (WA)