

# ORGANIC VOICE



ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION

NO. 8 • MAR 2023



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# President's Letter

OFA is headed back to Washington DC. As I write this letter, I'm preparing to make the trip from Maine to DC for meetings of the OFA leadership and to make visits to USDA government and Congressional offices. I don't really enjoy traveling much, I like to be on the farm or at least in my home state of Maine. It's difficult to be away, especially in the winter as we can have storms, power outages or just the usual challenges of owning farmland and buildings that need to be tended. Plus, the fact that I haven't gone anywhere in the last three years! My last time on a trip out of New England was to D.C. for the last in person OFA fly-in just before the Pandemic shut everything down.

Why do I go? Because OFA has a unique roll to play in representing organic farmers and their concerns to the policy makers in Washington. OFA's policy process takes time and has several steps but I believe because of our grassroots process OFA speaks directly for the 19,000 certified organic farmers who may not have the time to travel to the capital or engage with the USDA or follow the ins and outs of the US Farm Bill.

Members of OFA's Policy Committee will take a whole day to discuss the policy proposals submitted to OFA by organic farmers and farm organizations. While I'm not actually on the Policy Committee I sit in on this meeting as I appreciate the perspectives and thought processes of the different farmers and organizational members taking part in the discussion. From that rich day of debate and discussion, a slate of proposed new policy positions will be submitted to the OFA farmer membership for a vote before they are included in OFA's official policies.



The next day members of the Governing Council will join the Policy Committee for visits to the Farm Services Agency offices and National Organic Program offices. This will be followed by individual constituent visits to our various House and Senate members where OFA members will present our concerns and solutions farmers like you have prioritized through our policy process.

The last couple of days, the Governing Council will discuss the future direction of OFA, our budget and resources needed to accomplish our work. It's a pretty intense week of work but I'm looking forward to seeing OFA farmer members I've known for years and getting to know those members I've only interacted with on the phone or computer. OFA attracts impressive organic farmer leadership, who are elected to represent you at the national level.

I appreciate all of you who have sent in proposals for inclusion in OFA policy. **It's your voice we aim to represent on this trip to DC; we couldn't do it without you.**

Sincerely,

David Colson, President  
New Leaf Farm, Durham, Maine





## ORGANIC FARMERS ASSOCIATION

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Dave Campbell, Lily Lake Organic Farm, IL  
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David Colson, New Leaf Farm, ME  
Eve Kaplan-Walbrecht, Garden of Eve Farm, NY

#### Organization Representatives (Advisory)

Phil LaRocca, California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF)  
Amalie Lipstreu, Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA)  
Lori Stern, Marbledseed (formerly MOSES)  
Becky Weed, Montana Organic Association (MOA)  
Brooke Gentile, Organic Association of Kentucky (OAK)  
Ed Maltby, Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA)  
Sam Malriat, Rodale Institute

### STAFF

**Executive Director** Kate Mendenhall  
**Policy Director** Lily Hawkins

### CONTRIBUTORS

**Writers:** Lily Hawkins, Allison Johnson, Cathy Day, Ariana Taylor-Stanley  
**Editor:** Kate Mendenhall

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#### Send comments & inquiries to:

Organic Farmers Association  
PO BOX 709, Spirit Lake, IA 51360 USA  
202-643-5363  
[info@OrganicFarmersAssociation.org](mailto:info@OrganicFarmersAssociation.org)

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# SPRING POLICY UPDATE

Lily Hawkins, Policy Director

## STRENGTHENING ORGANIC ENFORCEMENT FINAL RULE RELEASED AT LAST!

National Organic Program enforcement and stopping organic import fraud have been top priorities for Organic Farmers Association members since our founding. After several years of advocacy, the new Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) rule was finally released in January, with an implementation date set for March 19, 2024. Our full 2020 comments on the rule can be read [here](#).

The final rule is a long overdue step towards the robust enforcement needed to protect the integrity of the organic label and the economic viability of organic farms that rely on consumer trust in that label. It will address topics including: applicability of the regulations and exemptions from organic certification; National Organic Program Import Certificates; recordkeeping and

product traceability; certifying agent personnel qualifications and training; standardized certificates of organic operation; unannounced on-site inspections of certified operations; oversight of certification activities; foreign conformity assessment systems; certification of grower group operations; labeling of non retail containers; annual update requirements for certified operations; compliance and appeals processes; and calculating organic content of multi-ingredient products.

There is still more work to do to prevent fraud in the organic sector and provide a level and fair playing field for organic producers. OFA will continue to advocate before Congress to provide the National Organic Program (NOP) with the resources needed to increase the agency's standards of training, information sharing, and other enforcement activities, and the authority needed to address fraud in domestic or international markets, such as stop sale authority. [Click to read more about the rule.](#)







## USDA ANNOUNCES ASSISTANCE FOR ORGANIC DAIRY FARMS

Organic dairy farmers are in crisis due to drought, market consolidation, and skyrocketing energy and feed costs brought on by unstable global markets and inflation.

Organic Farmers Association (OFA) and allies have been calling on Congress to provide emergency financial relief to organic dairy farmers to help offset the high cost of production before more farms go out of business. Late last year, congress directed USDA to find sources of funding to help organic dairy farmers. USDA's Farm Service Agency moved swiftly, and, in January, announced its plans to distribute funding. USDA's full announcement is posted [here](#).

The details of the new Organic Dairy Marketing Assistance Program (ODMAP) are still in development, and OFA is working with organic dairy farmers and allied organizations to stay abreast of developments and to advocate for a strong program that will deliver the maximum payments directly and entirely to farmers. So far, USDA has said that the program will be administered by USDA's Farm Service Agency and will cover up to 75 percent of projected 2023 marketing costs for eligible organic dairy producers - targeting small and mid-sized operations.

While this aid is desperately needed, the amount of money earmarked for the program will not be enough to make organic dairy farmers whole. New programs specifically tailored to address increased cost of production for organic dairy are still urgently needed as part of the 2023 Farm Bill, and OFA will continue working with our organic dairy farmer members and Congress to advocate for strong long term solutions for organic dairy.

## A DIVIDED CONGRESS AND THE PATH TO THE 2023 FARM BILL

Conventional wisdom holds that the party in control of the White House will suffer major losses during the midterm elections. Despite this, Republicans didn't come away with the "red wave" they were hoping for last November; instead coming away with only a slim majority in the House while Democrats retained control of the Senate.

The majority party in each chamber nominates members for leadership and committee chairs, and the percentage of a party's representation in each chamber determines how many seats they will be assigned on each committee.

Representative Kevin McCarthy (California) was elected House Speaker in January after 15 rounds of voting. This was the first time in 100 years that multiple rounds of voting were required to elect a House speaker. Because the Republican majority is so slim, just 20 House members on the far right were able to hold up the election and eventually extracted concessions that will significantly weaken the speaker position, and empower the most conservative wing of the party.

Newly appointed House Agriculture Chair G.T. Thompson of Pennsylvania will have a challenge ahead in crafting a Farm Bill acceptable to both the far right Freedom Caucus in

the House and the Democratic-controlled Senate. In the opening weeks of the 118th Congress a slew of new legislators joined his committee. Republicans John Rose, Ronny Jackson, Marc Molinaro, Monica De La Cruz, Nick Langworthy, John Duarte, Zach Nunn, Mark Alford, Derrick Van Orden, Lori Chavez-DeRemer, and



Max Miller were added. And eleven new Democratic members joined the committee; freshman legislators, Yadira Caraveo, Andrea Salinas, Marie Gluesenkamp Perez, Don Davis, Jill Tokuda, Nikki Budzinski, Greg Casar, Jasmine Crockett, Jonathan Jackson, Eric Sorensen and Gabe Vasquez, as well as Elissa Slotkin, who is new to the Agriculture committee. There was intense competition for the seats left open for returning Democrats, but House Ag veterans Chellie Pingree, Salud Carbajal, Darren Soto, and Angie Craig all came away with spots.

In addition to new members, there will also be an updated Subcommittee structure in the House. Organic policy will now generally come under the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee on Nutrition, Foreign Agriculture, and Horticulture, chaired by Representative Brad Finstad of MN. Some issues of importance to OFA, such as crop insurance and research will be covered by other subcommittees.

Meanwhile in the Senate, where Democrats retained the majority, Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-Michigan) will serve her last term as Agriculture Committee chair. She has announced that she won't seek reelection in 2024, leaving Democrats with a tough Senate race in battleground state Michigan. This



could motivate them to pass the Farm Bill on time, before the next election cycle. The committee has added two new Democrats. Senator Peter Welch (VT) served as US Representative since 2007 and is known as an ally to organic farmers. This is his first term in the Senate. John Fetterman (PA) is also a newly elected Senator. He formerly served as Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania, and focused on the need to fight consolidation in agriculture and implement anti-trust policies in meatpacking during his Senate campaign.

With committee membership largely decided, both House and Senate Agriculture Committees have kicked off their work on must-pass legislation. A divided Congress with narrowly held majorities on both sides means a challenging path for the 2023 Farm Bill. Leadership on both sides will need to work towards a bill that is bipartisan in nature, while also keeping the less centrist members of their own party on board.

## BRINGING ORGANIC FARMER PRIORITIES TO THE FARM BILL PROCESS

With both the House and Senate Agriculture Committees fully staffed and member assignments finalized, now is the time to educate new and returning members about organic farmer priorities. On March 7th and 8th dozens of organic farmers and representatives from organic farm organizations will visit Capitol Hill to educate U.S. legislators about the needs of organic farmers nationwide. OFA has identified seven key priorities from our grassroots

## OFA Farm Bill Priorities



**ORGANIC INTEGRITY**



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Farm Bill work with organic farmers during the past year.


**You too can help build a stronger voice for organic farmers in the creation of the 2023 Farm Bill.** Members of the House Agriculture Committee and Senate Agriculture Committee need to hear from organic farmers in their district about the issues they face. OFA needs your help in educating Committee members about the priorities organic farmers have identified for this important omnibus bill.

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Before farming season gets off to the races, now is a good time to reach out to your Senators and U.S. Representative via email or phone, especially if they are on the House or Senate Agriculture Committee. Introduce yourself as an organic farmer or organic supporter and share OFA's farm bill priorities, or pick a few you are really passionate about. Asking your elected officials to support organic opportunities in the 2023 farm bill is a great start, and does make a difference. Personal stories about why the issue is important to you are always recommended! If your Representative is not



OFA-member organic farmers and organic farm organizations will visit Washington D.C. March 6-9 to bring a strong organic farmer voice to Congress.

currently a member of the House Organic Caucus, you can ask them to join to stay up to date on issues that are important to organic farmers and consumers. 

Lillian Hawkins is Policy Director of Organic Farmers Association. She ensures the policy priorities of certified organic farmers are represented in Washington, D.C.



# HOUSE ORGANIC CAUCUS

The House Organic Caucus is a bipartisan group of U.S. Representatives that supports organic farmers and ranchers, processors, distributors, retailers, and consumers. The Caucus informs Members of Congress about organic agriculture policy and opportunities to advance the sector. When Representatives join the Organic Caucus they also stay up to date on the needs of organic stakeholders and are called on first to respond.

## Why should your U.S. Representative join the Organic Caucus?

- Organic is the fastest-growing sector of U.S. agriculture and surpassed \$63 billion sales in 2021.
- Domestic and global demand for organic products continues to grow, making organic a viable option for farms of all sizes.
- Organic agriculture creates jobs in rural America and is important for rural development.
- Currently, there are over 45,400 U.S. certified organic operations.
- Organic farming provides healthy food and provides environmental services crucial to combatting climate change.

**Organic Caucus Co-Chair**  
Rep. Pingree (ME)-D



**Organic Caucus Co-Chair**  
Rep. Newhouse (WA)-R



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# NATIONAL ORGANIC STANDARDS BOARD 2023 MEETINGS



## SPRING MEETING: ATLANTA

In early March 2023, all meeting materials, including Zoom information to join the live meeting webcast, will be posted on the NOSB Spring 2023 Meeting. Interested parties are encouraged to review the online meeting materials. Posted content will include the meeting agenda, subcommittee proposals, discussion documents and instructions on how to submit oral or written comments.

**Written Comments Due:**

April 5, 2023

**Requests to Make Oral**

**Comments Due: April 5, 2023**

**Online Comment Webinars:** April 18 & 20, 2023, Noon - 5:00 pm Eastern

**In-Person Public Meeting:** April 25 - 27, 2023, 9:00 am - 5:00 pm Eastern

**For More information:** <https://www.ams.usda.gov/event/national-organic-standards-board-nosb-meeting-atlanta-ga>



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**Fehr Family**  
West Bend, Iowa  
[fehrtrefflermm@gmail.com](mailto:fehrtrefflermm@gmail.com)  
+1 (712) 480-2496

**James L. Byers and Sons**  
Mercersburg, PA  
[Byersorganicdairyllc@outlook.com](mailto:Byersorganicdairyllc@outlook.com)  
+1 (223) 205-8171

**Matt Miller**  
Bristow, Iowa  
[mattmill2@netins.net](mailto:mattmill2@netins.net)  
+1 (515) 971-9707

**Nate Johnson**  
Trout Lake, WA  
[farmgateherbs@gmail.com](mailto:farmgateherbs@gmail.com)  
+1 (509) 637-4652

**Nathan Metzger**  
Eltopia, WA  
[nathan@victoryagllc.com](mailto:nathan@victoryagllc.com)  
+1 (509) 727-5073

**Jon Findlay**  
Caro, MI  
[jonfindlay1979@hotmail.com](mailto:jonfindlay1979@hotmail.com)  
+1 (989) 551-8393

**Derek Schrok**  
Tampico IL  
[dereks@fairfieldam.org](mailto:dereks@fairfieldam.org)  
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# THE 2023 FARM BILL SHOULD SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES IN ORGANIC

## WRITTEN BY

*Allison Johnson, NRDC*

As OFA members know well, organic producers build successful businesses that steward healthy soil, ecosystems, and communities, with significant public benefits. You protect the health of our food and farming system and the people and resources that make it work. Our public policies should reward your efforts – and entice more to join the organic movement. The U.S. needs to invest in comprehensive and easily accessible tools that remove barriers for certified organic and transitioning producers, and the 2023 Farm Bill is our next chance.



## WE NEED COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT FOR ORGANIC

Several existing federal programs support organic agriculture, transition, and research. However, they do not level the playing field for organic producers, nor do they adequately or holistically meet needs. Organic certification costs and processes remain a barrier for many, and most producers have limited access to organic-specific technical assistance or mentorship – especially in regions with smaller organic sectors.

Many producers of color and beginning, smaller scale, and limited resource farmers and ranchers also face unique barriers that further limit flexibility to transition to organic. This includes a lack of access to regionally and culturally relevant technical assistance, land access challenges, and thin fiscal margins that make any risk – including exploring new markets or testing new practices – difficult to bear. Mistrust of USDA due to longstanding patterns of discrimination exacerbates these challenges.

In addition, as agriculture adapts to changing market conditions and weather patterns, producers need new and flexible resources to successfully transition to and maintain organic farming and ranching systems.

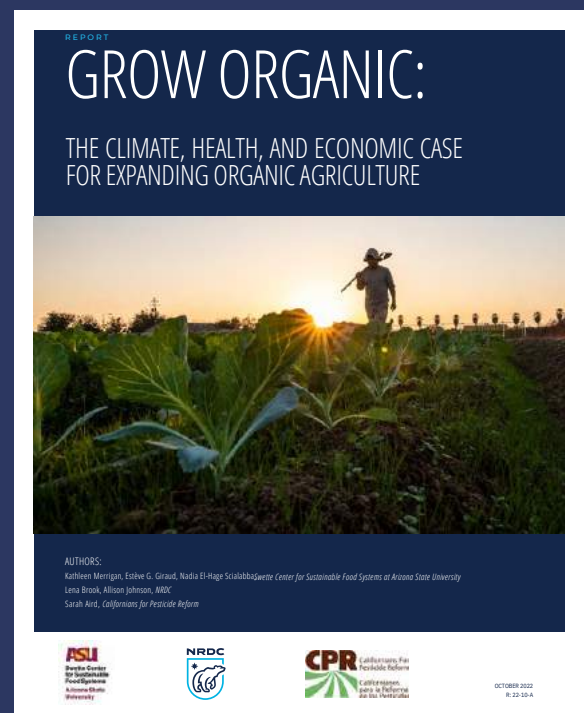
## A FIRST STEP: USDA ORGANIC TRANSITION INITIATIVE

Starting last summer, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) \$300 million Organic Transition Initiative jump-started a new proactive approach. The Initiative created a six-region Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) that will fund a wide range of activities and mentorship opportunities that help producers successfully transition. The Initiative will also make it easier for certified organic

## NEW REPORT ARGUES WHY POLICIES SHOULD HELP GROW ORGANIC FARMING

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)'s new report, published in partnership with the Swette Center for Sustainable Food Systems at Arizona State University and Californians for Pesticide Reform, distills the latest scientific research on the wide-reaching benefits of organic farming systems, and offers insights from more than a dozen organic farmers and ranchers around the country working at every scale of organic. It also explains the pitfalls of our current agricultural system and provides concrete policy recommendations on how to maximize the benefits of organic.

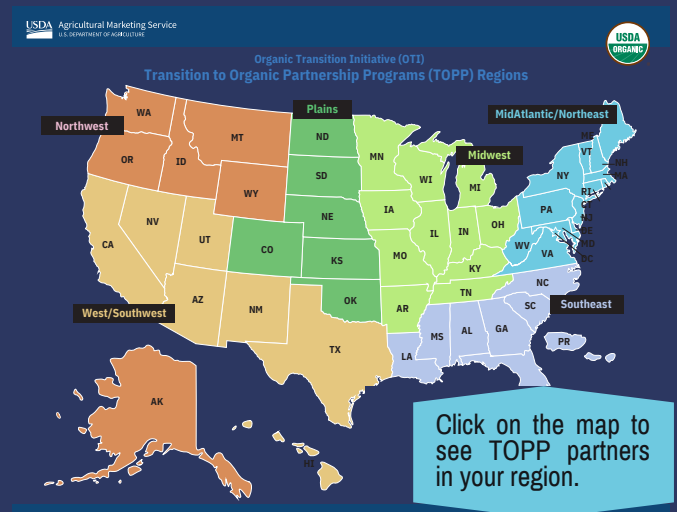
Public policies that support expansion of organic farming and ranching across America—including substantial investments in the next Farm Bill—can unlock this potential and deliver a critical triple win for our climate future, the health of farmworkers and consumers, and prosperity in farming communities.



The USDA's Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) is investing up to \$100 million over 5 years to support organic transition. Regional Lead Organizations in 6 U.S. Regions will partner with other organizations in their region to provide technical assistance and wrap-around support for transitioning and existing organic farmers.

TOPP can provide organizations with funding to support:

- Organic farming workshops and field days
- Farmer-to-Farmer mentoring connecting transitioning farmers with farmer mentors
- Creation of technical assistance resources for farmers interested in organic production, organic transition, and organic certification
- Support for the organic workforce through training and education



- Help producers overcome technical, cultural, and financial shifts during and after organic certification
- Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the organic sector

and transitioning producers to access funding through Farm Bill conservation programs. It will also provide resources for market development in under-supported organic sectors, including grains and processing.

## THE LONG GAME: FARM BILL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ORGANIC

The USDA Organic Transition Initiative is building new vital partnerships and strengthening relationships between farmers, ranchers, and the organizations and institutions they trust, to deliver support across the country quickly and effectively.

We have a chance to make these types of investments permanent in the 2023 Farm Bill, by revamping the existing National Organic Certification Cost-Share Program (which reimburses a portion of certification costs) into a comprehensive program that includes transition support and technical assistance. Such a redesigned program should offer a suite of flexible, easy-to-access tools to reduce barriers to organic agriculture and ensure no farmer or rancher is left out of organic because they can't afford certification.



The National Organic Certification Cost-Share Program needs three core components to succeed:

## ORGANIC CERTIFICATION COST-SHARE UPDATE

- Cost-share payments that cover 100% of certification costs, up to \$1500 per scope.
- USDA discretion to exceed that cap, to ensure that certification costs are not a barrier to certification for underserved producers and regions.

## TRANSITION AND RESILIENCE FUND


- Flexible funding for organizations to support organic transition, particularly for smaller scale producers, producers of color, and underserved regions; these organizations may provide a wide range of services, including culturally and regionally relevant assistance with the certification process and recordkeeping, inspector training, and mentorship programs.
- Flexible funding for producers to offset costs and reduce barriers associated with the transition process, ranging from learning new farming and ranching techniques to business planning, equipment, and on-farm infrastructure.

**"Organic farmers and ranchers are uniquely powerful as we enter Farm Bill season."**

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- New resources for organic-relevant technical expertise, capacity, and partnerships at public institutions and organizations, including support for education, outreach, and market expansion, so producers in any part of the country will have access to professional assistance, to build healthy soil, manage pests naturally, and protect natural resources.

## WHAT NOW?

**Organic farmers and ranchers are uniquely powerful as we enter Farm Bill season.** You can help expand opportunities in organic by building relationships with your representatives and helping them understand how an organic operation looks, feels, smells, and feeds. Sharing your personal stories and experiences – of your transition process, plans and dreams for growing your operation, and challenges that you hope the next generation won't have to overcome – can help your leaders understand how impactful even small investments in organic can be. Together, we can build on organic's successful legacy, and transition toward a world where organic offers opportunities for everyone. 

Allison Johnson is Senior Attorney with The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)'s Health & Food, Healthy People & Thriving Communities Program. She also serves on the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB).



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***The Integrity of the USDA Organic Program Is in a Precarious Position***

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# Farmers Want Climate Action, the 2023 Farm Bill is Key

With the 2023 Farm Bill on their mind, farmers across the country have a message for lawmakers in Washington, DC: make climate change a policy priority.

Climate change is proving detrimental to agriculture and creating a range of new or increasing challenges. While these problems are predicted to worsen, farmers utilizing sustainable practices have demonstrated a tremendous capacity to decrease emissions and sequester carbon dioxide in the soil by turning to climate resilient agricultural practices like organic production, cover crops, rotational grazing, agroforestry, and more.

Working at the forefront of climate change mitigation, farmers are taking their demands to Washington March 6-8 for [Farmers for Climate Action: Rally for Resilience](#), a three-day mass mobilization where farmers, farmworkers, and allies will call on legislators to ensure that the next farm bill explicitly empowers farmers to address climate change via resources, assistance, and incentives that allow farmers to lead the way in addressing the climate crisis.

Climate change is no surprise to farmers. "Climate change is actually happening," says Scott Myers of Woodlyn Acres Farm in Dalton, Ohio. "We've seen some heavy rain events here on the farm."

Located in Wayne County, Scott and his family use organic and no-till practices on 2,500 acres of hay, corn, soybeans, sunflowers, peas, and small grains. While costs of drainage tile rose alongside demand from flooded farmers in the region and snowplows were used to clear streets after summer storm damage, on-farm resilience has been integral to Woodlyn Acres Farm.

Scott started transitioning the farm to sustainable practices in 2000. “We started raising a lot of hay, and that put us down the path of building up soil health. We very quickly saw the benefits of having that perennial crop on our corn yields,” Scott says, adding that “we use cover crops on pretty much all of our acres now.” Scott has seen the success of federal programs like the temporary Pandemic Cover Crop Program among other farmers in the area.

Supporting farmers and sustainable agriculture is a solution to the climate crisis that both rural and urban communities can rally around. Participants in the Rally for Resilience will urge Washington lawmakers to center farmer-led three primary asks in the next farm bill, due to be reauthorized this fall. Participants will be collectively advocating for:

## **1 FARMER-LED CLIMATE SOLUTIONS**

Farmers must be supported in building systems that are resilient to climate change impacts, improve and sustain their economic bottom line, and increase biodiversity. This includes incorporating greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions and carbon sequestration into all the landscapes of U.S. agriculture.



Photo credit: Mike Shenk,  
The-Daily-Record.com

## **2 RACIAL JUSTICE IN THE FARM BILL**

The expertise of Indigenous and traditional communities must be valued and supported, and these communities must be engaged in the processes of developing farm bill policies and programs. Such policies and programs must prioritize their needs through maintaining and restoring or improving access to land, technical assistance, and funding. Such assistance is necessary to support the holistic approaches that, as a co-benefit to broader ecological benefits, reduce GHG emissions and build and maintain carbon sequestration.

## **3 COMMUNITIES, NOT CORPORATIONS**

It is time to address corporate consolidation and concentration and protect the livelihoods of small to mid-scale farmers. The farm bill must identify solutions that support effective rural and urban development and livelihood; support key areas of research and technical assistance, including collaborations with holders of traditional ecological knowledge to develop new climate solutions; and strengthen and enforce antitrust laws to take



**“It doesn’t matter which side of the political landscape you’re on, we all need to agree climate change is going to be a real issue that we have to deal with and our children need to deal with. It’s very important that we do something about it.”**

**- Scott Myers,  
Woodlyn Acres Farm,  
Dalton, Ohio**

on economic giants that dictate prices, because fair markets are critical to food sovereignty.

It is time sustainable food and farming activists have their voices heard and their actions seen. When provided with the right resources and tools to transition to sustainable, organic, and/or regenerative practices, farmers can rebuild soil health, reduce reliance on expensive inputs, boost yields and profits, grow healthier food, restore biodiversity, and sequester carbon. Congress must acknowledge farmers’ and ranchers’ pivotal role in addressing climate change, and ensure that the next farm bill supports their work to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to a changing climate, and ensure food security for generations to come. 🌱

From March 6-8, an alliance of grassroots organizations will converge on Washington for an unprecedented three-day gathering including a rally and concert, cultural events, and a demonstration of climate-friendly farming practices. Organic Farmers Association’s Farmer Fly-In will coincide with this event, and OFA will bring 25+ organic farmer voices to the rally. For more details and to join or support the Rally for Resilience, [click here](#).



Cathy Day is the Climate Policy Coordinator for the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and has long researched climate and agriculture issues.



Ariana Taylor-Stanley is the Grassroots Co-Director for National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. She also co-owns and operates Here We Are Farm in Trumansburg, NY, growing vegetables for CSA and farmers markets.





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