# The organic

Organic Farmers Association – No 13 • June 2024

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## **From Our President**

#### This is my first letter as president of OFA's

**Governing Council.** I'm extremely grateful for the trust placed in me in this role. Working together with Kate and all the OFA members, staff, and leaders I hope to contribute to OFA's further growth and success.

It's the middle of spring here in western Oregon, which prompts me to write about hope. Organic farmers must be the most hopeful people in the world. Our livelihoods depend on weather, geopolitics, and other events that are entirely outside our control, and we face them without the assistance of synthetic interventions like pesticides and fertilizers. Yet we persist—every year planting, tending, harvesting, and planning for later seasons and years. Spring is the most hopeful season for farmers, with fall-planted crops developing fast, vegetable starts going from greenhouses into the ground, trees flowering and setting fruits and nuts, and animals growing by leaps and bounds. If you really want to know about hope in the face of uncertainty—in the face of difficulty—talk with an organic farmer. Or... talk to a politician about the Farm Bill.

In past decades, the Farm Bill offered one of the best examples of Congressional bipartisanship and bridging the urban-rural divide, balancing consumers' interests in having plentiful, healthy food, producers' interests in a predictable and supportive environment, and the interests of food processors, importers and retailers. The Farm Bill is supposed to be passed this year, but the political paralysis of this Congress has greatly delayed it. Still, there is hope. The USDA's National Organic Program is governed by the Farm Bill, so it's especially important to organic farmers and OFA has been working hard on a number of proposals. One proposal, spearheaded by OFA member Amy Bruch of Nebraska, is to have the Farm Bill require testing of imported organic feedstuffs for residues that indicate noncompliance with organic rules—i.e. fraud. Her proposal has excited strong interest from both Republicans and Democrats in both the Senate and the House. We hope that Amy's initiative will result in legislation that strengthens the integrity of organic grain imports and increases consumer confidence in the USDA's organic seal. (Read more on page 26.)

OFA has written policy positions that spell out the legislative and regulatory goals of U.S. organic farmers. Every year we update those positions, adding new ones, revising existing ones to reflect recent developments, and (occasionally) removing ones that have been achieved or are obsolete. Having chaired the OFA Policy Committee for a number of years, I have witnessed firsthand how many hours of thoughtful discussion, precise writing and careful review goes into the crafting of these positions.

As I write this letter, the farmer members of OFA are voting on which policy positions to approve. (See page 16 for the final positions.) I offer my sincere thanks to all involved with OFA who have worked to formalize policies that reflect what organic farmers need and want from Washington, D.C. And I offer my hopes that, through hard work and participation from everyone around OFA, we will achieve them. I'll have more to say about the critical importance of organic farmers engaging in the messy arena of politics in the next issues of the Organic Voice.

Let me close with hope. For progress on the Farm Bill and its organic provisions. For political agreement and bipartisanship at all levels of politics from the local soil and water conservation districts to the U.S. Congress. And most especially, for success and satisfaction in your own organic endeavors.

Take care. Be well. Do good.

Sincerely,

Pry A Game

Pryor Garnett OFA Governing Council President Garnetts Red Prairie Farm Sheridan, Oregon





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### **Movement on the Farm Bill** Plus Other Organic Policy News & Updates

#### By Lily Hawkins

Each quarter, OFA brings you an update on organic policy happenings in Washington D.C. After many quarters of waiting for movement on the next Farm Bill, we are thrilled to finally share some news and analysis of Farm Bill proposals from both House and Senate majorities. Read on for all the details and other news from D.C.

#### FARM BILL MOVEMENT

The 2018 Farm Bill expired on September 30, 2023, creating uncertainty for farm and nutrition programs. Congress eventually passed an extension to extend the 2018 Farm Bill through September 2024, and included a provision to maintain programs lacking baseline funding—including organic certification cost share. Since then, stakeholders have waited for more news on movement of the next Farm Bill.

#### MAJORITY SENATE FARM BILL FRAMEWORK RELEASED

Finally, after months of delay, this spring has brought progress on that key food system package. On May 1, 2024, Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Debbie Stabenow released a Farm Bill proposal titled the "Rural Prosperity and Food Security Act," which includes policies that will help move more U.S. agriculture to organic methods and make a positive impact for organic producers by providing authorization of funding that will allow the National Organic Program (NOP) to keep pace with the growth in the organic sector. This proposal can advance OFA's Farm Bill priorities in numerous ways including:

- Directs the NOP to solicit public input on the prioritization of organic regulations to be promulgated or revised;
- Directs the USDA Secretary to publish an annual report regarding recommendations received from the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), all regulatory and administrative actions taken, and justifications on why actions were or were not taken on those recommendations;



Sen. Stabenow Unveils the Rural Prosperity and Food Security Act. Photo via Senate Stabenow YouTube channel.

#### OFA's Farm Bill Priorities cont.

- Directs the Government Accountability Office (GOA) to conduct a study on the efforts of the NOP to improve organic standards and provide recommendations on how the NOP can ensure that organic program standards evolve in a timely manner to meet consumer expectations and benefit organic producers;
- Directs the USDA to improve collection of organic dairy market data;
- Clarifies the calculation of Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) payments for income forgone by a producer transitioning to an organic resource-conserving system;
- Continues funding for the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI);

ORGANIC FARMERS

- Provides enhanced coordination of organic agriculture research within USDA;
- Provides mandatory funding for organic production and market data initiatives (ODI);
- Provides stable funding for the Organic Certification Cost-Share Program and increases the maximum payment to a producer or handler from \$750 to \$1,000;
- Directs research and development on ways to increase participation of organic producers in Federal crop insurance;
- Authorizes an Organic Market Development Grant (OMDG) program;
- Increases the EQIP payment cap for organic producers to \$450,000, making the organic cap equal to the conventional payment cap

## **Farm Bill Marker Bill Tracker** Watch OFA's Farm Bill Marker Bill Tracker to

keep track of marker bills that may impact organic farming in the next Farm Bill. Check the OFA website regularly for updates as Farm Bill conversations continue in D.C.

### Get the Tracker 🗲

#### HOUSE FARM BILL PASSED OUT OF COMMITTEE

Shortly after the Senate Majority proposal was introduced, the House Agriculture Committee Chair released his Farm Bill proposal, titled the "Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024." On May 23, 2024, the House Ag Committee passed the bill. With a Republican majority in the House, Republican wins included increases to farm safety net programs.

The Democratic minority cited several red lines that were crossed, including Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) of 2022 funds moved to the Farm Bill baseline, but with climate guardrails removed; nutrition programs will be limited; and new restrictions placed on the Secretary of Agriculture's discretion to use Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) funds to address urgent threats to the food system.

Democratic efforts to address these issues through amendments during the markup were unsuccessful.

OFA sees wins and losses in the House bill. OFA is thrilled that provisions for improved data collection for organic dairy were included, along with increased payment limits under the EQIP Organic Initiative, increased funding for the Organic Data Initiative (ODI), and incentives to develop regionally adapted plant cultivars and animal breeds.

However, the bill does not go far enough to provide resources for the growing organic sector, with largely level funding for organic programs. Specifically the bill:

- Maintains mandatory funding for the OREI at \$50 million per year;
- Continues support for organic production through the NOP, Organic Production and Market Data Initiative (ODI), and Organic Certification Cost-Share Program.
  - Adds a requirement to collect and publish costof-production data for organic milk through the ODI inspired by H.R. 6937;

- Provides \$10 million in mandatory funding for the ODI based on a request for increased funding in H.R. 2720.30;
- Directs the Secretary to provide technical assistance, outreach, and education to support organic production through existing programs at various agencies throughout the Department;
- Provides \$5 million in mandatory funding for the continued NOP database maintenance and technology upgrades;
- Continues mandatory funding for the Organic Certification Cost-Share Program at \$8 million per year;
- Reauthorizes the authorization of appropriations for the NOP with essentially level funding

#### NEXT STEPS FOR FARM BILL COMPLETION

It's encouraging to see progress at last on the long awaited Farm Bill, but there is still a long way to go to pass a final bill by the September 30 deadline. The House Agriculture Farm Bill must still pass on the Floor—sure to be a difficult passage due to the inclusion of Democrat's red line components. We are still awaiting the Senate Republican response to the Majority Senate Farm Bill Framework, as well as the full Senate text. The Senate Agriculture Committee will then have to pass a consolidated Senate version. Once both chambers have passed their own version of the bill, leaders from the House and Senate will work to combine the two bills into one bill, which can then be voted on by the full chambers.

It is possible that both chambers will complete this process before the deadline at the end of September. However, the closer we creep to the 2024 election process the greater the likelihood that the Farm Bill may be extended again until 2025.

A new Farm Bill is essential to maintain key agriculture programs and to provide certainty for farmers as they make important business decisions. OFA will continue to advocate for the inclusion of the important policies from the Senate and House proposals and **key marker bills** in the final Farm Bill.

#### **OTHER ORGANIC POLICY UPDATES**

### In-District Meeting with Representative Max Miller in Partnership with OEFFA

On Earth Day, OFA and Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA) welcomed Congressman Max Miller for in-district farm visits at Woodlyn Acres Farm and County Line Family Farm to discuss organic agriculture, the Farm Bill, and leveling the playing field for organic.

Since that visit, OFA has learned that Rep Max Miller signed on to cosponsor two Farm Bill marker bills that we have endorsed, the Crop Insurance for Future Farmers Act, HR 3904 and the Continuous Improvement and Accountability in Organic Standards (CIAO) Act, HR 5973.



Rep. Max Miller at County Line Family Farm with Renee Ramunni.

#### More Organic Development Grants Awarded

The Organic Market Development Grant (OMDG) program supports the development of new and expanded organic markets to help increase the consumption of domestic organic agricultural commodities. The program focuses on building and expanding capacity for certified organic production, aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storing, transporting, wholesaling, distribution, and development of consumer markets.

This spring, USDA announced a second round of funding through the program that will provide \$40.5 million for 60 grant projects. A description of all projects funded so far can be found **on the USDA's website**. The request for proposals for the 2024 grants have not yet been posted, but you can follow this **website for more information**.

Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Representative Ann Kuster (D-NH-2) are working to make this grant program permanent through the Organic Market Development Act **(S. 2936/H.R. 5763)**, a bill OFA supports.

#### Proposed Changes to Mushroom and Pet Food Standards

On May 10, 2024, the public comment period closed for the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) proposed rule on Mushroom and Pet Food Standards in the Federal Register to amend the USDA organic regulations. The rule proposes specific standards for organic mushroom production and organic pet food handling, aiming to create more consistent standards for these markets.

For organic mushrooms, this proposed rule would:

- Clarify that mushrooms should be certified under the crops scope.
- Clarify which existing crop production standards apply to organic mushroom production.
- Create a mushroom-specific standard for organic compost production.

#### Mushroom and Pet Food cont

- Require operations producing organic mushrooms to:
  - Use organic materials for the uncomposted portions of production substrate when commercially available.
  - Use organic spawn media when commercially available.
  - Use organic mushroom spawn when commercially available.

For organic pet food, the rule would:

- Clarify how existing organic labeling requirements should be applied to organic pet food.
- Allow organic meat and slaughter by-products in organic pet food.
- Describe what ingredients can be used in organic pet food.
- Add synthetic taurine (an amino acid) to the National List and allow its use in organic pet food to meet some pets' nutritional needs.

The minimal changes proposed to the pet food portion of the proposed rule are not of concern to OFA, rulemaking in this area could expand organic markets for domestic farmers. However, OFA strongly recommended in our comments that AMS review comments from this proposed rule and then quickly release a second proposal centering the National Organic Standards Board's 2001 recommendation on mushrooms and positioning mushroom standards under a new scope for Fungi. Fungi are neither animals nor plants, and certifying them under either Crops or Livestock scopes does not allow for consistent organic regulations; mushrooms and other fungi like yeast and mold should be given their own scope. Read OFA's full comments **online**.

If you would like to receive monthly organic policy updates from OFA, **please consider joining as a member**. When you join, you'll receive OFA's monthly e-news with policy updates, education opportunities, and timely organic topics all in one place.



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

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## Help OFA Grow



#### Join OFA as a Member

Since 2024 is unexpectedly another Farm Bill year, it's even more important we keep our organic farmer community powerful and focused. We have big plans underway this year, and we need your help!

We've set a goal to bring more organic farmers' and supporters' voices to the table in 2024 because we know there's power in numbers. If you're not a member, join us this year and help us grow the organic movement.

#### See OFA's Members Benefits

Already a member? Share this magazine with a friend or family member and ask them to join. FEATURED STORY

## Unlocking Funding for Organic Practices: How NRCS Supports Climate-Smart Agriculture

By Harriet Behar

It's no secret or surprise that extreme weather conditions caused by climate change are greatly impacting agricultural production. Crop and economic losses due to statewide straight-line winds, record rainfalls, and persistent drought affect all regions of the U.S. On the positive side, farmers, ranchers, and forest owners can incorporate "climate smart" activities on their land that lessen CO<sub>2</sub> entering the atmosphere and increase carbon sequestration in the soil. Organic farming is based upon improving the soil resource and increasing organic matter and already incorporates many of these practices. Regardless of what you may or may not think about the term "climate smart" as an organic farmer, the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) has a special pool of money to aid landowners as they incorporate these activities on the land. All sizes and types of farms can contribute to mitigating and even reversing the negative effects of climate change.

Row crop farmers, livestock producers of all types, specialty crop growers (fruit, nut, vegetables) and those involved in agroforestry or silvopasture can all receive funding to help install practices they already want to implement! The NRCS practices you'll read below all lead to more resilience on the land. Practices such as building organic matter in the soil, encouraging perennial covers, protecting both ground and surface waters, lessening wind-caused erosion, and using manures in ways that hold onto the nutrients, are all environmentally beneficial measures and lead to an economically sustainable operation. Whether you will be farming your land for many more years, or are planning to pass it on to the next generation, making the investment to protect your natural resources longterm is a smart move! Congress passed the legislation funding this program because they recognized that private landowners can make a significant contribution to mitigating climate change as well as enhancing the current and future productivity of working lands.

#### SOIL HEALTH PRACTICES

The NRCS offers cost share funding to improve soil health, including *Conservation Cover, Contour Buffer Strips, Stripcropping, and Field Border*, which install permanent vegetation that could also include pollinator habitat. *Conservation Crop Rotation* changes a continuous row crop rotation to one that includes one or more cropping years of a sod crop of a grain or legume for forage. The organic no-till system of roller/crimping standing rye in the spring and planting soybeans or other crops into that mechanically terminated mulch could be eligible for funding under the *Residue and Tillage Management* practice. Adding compost, biochar, or other carbonbased materials to your land is covered under the *Soil Carbon Amendment* practice.

If you are already using *Cover Crops*, but have not incorporated them on some of your fields, or have only used a grain without an added legume, you could still be eligible for funding to improve your cover cropping and/or increase the locations where they are used. *Filter Strips and Grassed Waterways* prevent soil erosion with a permanent grass cover, and sequester carbon, so if you have sloping land with an erosion issue, this would be a good practice to add. For specialty crop growers, there is cost share available for *Mulching* your crops with plant materials, since this sequesters carbon and builds soil health. *Planting Vegetative Barriers, Herbaceous Wind Barriers and Tree/Shrub Windbreaks* along the buffer zone between your organic land and a nonorganic neighbor are also included in this pool of money for climate smart practices.

The NRCS encourages farmers to pay attention to their nitrogen management as well, using the 4Rs – Right Source, Right Rate, Right Time, and Right Place. Working with NRCS staff or a Technical Service Provider (TSP) to develop a climate smart *Nutrient Management Plan*, can be beneficial both for soil health and for your bottom line.

#### **ENERGY EFFICIENCY PRACTICES**

Energy use is addressed by the NRCS as well. Seeking to improve efficiencies in irrigation, planning for improved farm facilities such as switching to *Efficient Lighting Systems* or installing a "*Building Envelope*" around a heated space to lessen heating costs are all covered projects.



Cover cropping at Woodlyn Acres Farm, Dalton, Ohio.

#### LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION PRACTICES

There are numerous practices tied to livestock production as well, addressing methane emissions and dealing with livestock manure. The NRCS helps fund *Composting Facilities* and their expertise in engineering comes for free when you are contracted with them to install this practice. Compost can be used exclusively on the farm or it can become a side business, selling to home gardeners or other farmers. If you are interested in moving to a compost-bedded pack system under *Waste Storage Facility* for your animal housing, know that this has the added benefit of lessening methane release into the atmosphere over other systems.

*Roofs and Covers* can be funded over existing manure lagoons, to capture biogas and reduce odor. There is funding, for both mammalian livestock as well as poultry operations, to work with a livestock nutritionist to modify dietary nutrients in the livestock feed to lower methane, under the *Feed Management* practice. Improving pastures through *Brush Management*, *Prescribed Burning*, improved seeding within *Pasture and Hay* ground, and setting up a *Prescribed Grazing* plan (along with walkways, watering areas, fencing, etc.) are all highly encouraged.

#### AGROFORESTRY, FORESTRY, WILDLIFE HABITAT PRACTICES

For those interested in agroforestry, forestry, and wildlife habitat, NRCS funding can help you improve these resources on your land and increase their capability to support climate change mitigation. *Alley Cropping* (interplanting crops between trees or shrubs) and Silvopasture (allowing livestock to graze between trees and shrubs) provide for multiple farm enterprises (fruit or nuts with livestock or crops) to be installed in one area. The perennial nature of these systems provides significant carbon capture. For those who might be harvesting from their forests (such as for maple syrup) as well as the understory (wild ramps or medicinal herb wild harvest), *Forest Farming* could be applicable to your operation as an NRCS practice.



#### Agroforestry cont.

Preventing erosion by installing permanent vegetation in areas where animals or traffic can cause erosion or is subject to periodic flooding, is covered under Critical Area Planting or Riparian Herbaceous Cover. Planting Hedgerows, Windbreaks, or Establishing Trees and Shrubs in a larger area are also encouraged, and can provide homes for beneficial birds and insects, as well as providing some protection against chemical drift. Restoration of Rare or Declining Natural Communities helps the landowner install native prairie areas for wildlife and beauty, as well as help restore streams and associated floodplains. Wetland Restoration can provide many benefits including better drainage for the agricultural fields, filtering water before it enters surface waters, providing for wildlife, and carbon storage.

This long list of practices briefly illustrates the many opportunities farmers, ranchers, and landowners have to contribute positively to the ecosystem healing needed to address climate change. Ready to discuss your farm's climate smart goals with your county NRCS agent? Reach out today for assistance.

If you'd like to have a conversation with OFA's Farmer Services Team before you reach out to your agent, we'd be happy to brainstorm with you! Email us or give us a call.



Harriet Behar is OFA's Farmer Services Consultant, and was one of OFA's founding members. She has been involved with federal, state, and local policy advocacy for over 30 years. She runs organic Sweet Springs Farm in Gays Mills, Wisconsin.

#### **CLIMATE SMART NRCS PRACTICES**

Alley cropping Brush Management Energy Efficient "Building Envelope" **Composting Facilities Conservation** Cover **Contour Buffer Strips** Cover Crops Critical Area Planting Efficient Lighting Systems Feed Management Filter Strips and Grassed Waterways Forest Farming Herbaceous Wind Barriers Nutrient Management Plan Pasture and Hay Planting Hedgerows **Planting Vegetative Barriers** Prescribed Burning Prescribed Grazing plan **Residue and Tillage Management** Restoration of Rare or Declining Natural Communities **Riparian Herbaceous Cover** Roofs and Covers Silvopasture Soil Carbon Amendment Stripcropping and Field Border Tree/shrub Windbreaks Trees and Shrubs Waste Storage Facility Wetland Restoration Windbreaks

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 For more information about NODPA, NODPA Field Days, Odairy discussions, what's happening in Washington, and other resources available for organic dairy family farmers, visit www.NODPA.com

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

The futures of organic family farms across the country are at stake, but so is consumer trust and the integrity of the organic seal. No matter the miles between our dairies, the challenges are the same. NODPA will ensure there is consistent implementation of organic regulations to ensure a fair and level playing field for all dairies. **FEATURED STORY** 

## Heading Toward the Farm Bill: New OFA Policies for 2024

By Lily Hawkins

Organic Farmers Association's advocacy work flows from a unique farmer-led grassroots process that allows OFA to provide a strong and unified national voice for domestic certified organic farmers in D.C. Each year, OFA casts a wide net, conducting a survey open to all U.S. certified organic farmers and organic farm organizations to gather input on policy priorities and policy positions.

This distinct and intentionally inclusive process puts farmers at the forefront of our policy priorities and processes from the first step. The **OFA Policy Committee** then reviews the results and OFA members make comments on the proposed policies to begin to narrow the priorities into actionable and high-impact priorities. Finally, OFA farmer members vote to accept or reject these policy positions.

For OFA to officially adopt a policy proposal it must receive 60% of the national farmer member popular vote and 60% popular support in at least two-thirds of the six regions. Newly adopted or revised policies will go on to become part of the Organic Farmers Association Policy Platform.

This year, all of the proposed policies and revisions received the votes needed for adoption and will guide our advocacy work going forward, including into the rest of this extended Farm Bill cycle. While we expected a Farm Bill to be completed in 2023, we are now using this extra time to advocate for our priorities and marker bills that can still have an impact on the final bill.

Two years ago, OFA began work to set Farm Bill priorities using a similar process to the annual policy process. The Farm Bill policy priorities organic farmers identified are as follows:

- Organic Integrity
- Assistance for Organic Dairy Farmers
- Climate and Conservation
- Organic Research
- Making USDA Programs Work for Organic Farmers
- Increasing Organic Infrastructure
- Working with Allies to Build a Better Food System

Many of the new policy positions for 2024 are in alignment with those priorities, and are reflected in **marker bills that OFA is supporting** for inclusion in the upcoming Farm Bill. Other new policy positions represent newly emerging issues, or policy improvements that can be implemented by USDA without action by Congress.

Read on to learn about OFA's new and policy positions, and see how they fit in with organic priorities in the Farm Bill.

#### TWO NEW POLICIES REFLECT OFA'S PRIORITIZATION OF ORGANIC INTEGRITY

#### New Policy:

OFA supports clear recognition by the USDA that CRISPR and other gene-editing techniques of seeds and breeds are genetic modification and that USDA require that genetic modification must be disclosed at the time of sale.

Without clear recognition by USDA that CRISPR and other gene-editing techniques are genetic modification, the current USDA rule allows geneedited seeds to be used on organic land, possibly be saved for seed, and then sold as organic seed. Seed companies and livestock breeders are not currently required to be transparent when their breeding is done using gene-editing.

The USDA has stated that genetic modification occurs only when the resulting organism could not have occurred during a "mutation," so only genes from other species inserted into another species are now considered by the USDA to be GMO or "bioengineered."

Canada has the same rule and now the EU is considering this as well. It is important that the global organic community call for transparency in all types of genetic engineering.

#### New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS USDA funding of organic workforce development programs to improve training for and recruitment of organic professionals, including but not limited to inspectors, certification staff, and technical service providers.

Farmers have complained that there is a need for better training of on-site inspectors, especially for those inspecting livestock operations. Organic certifiers have called for more organic inspectors to be trained and join the workforce, and it is expected with the implementation of Strengthening Organic Enforcement, certifiers will need more qualified staff.

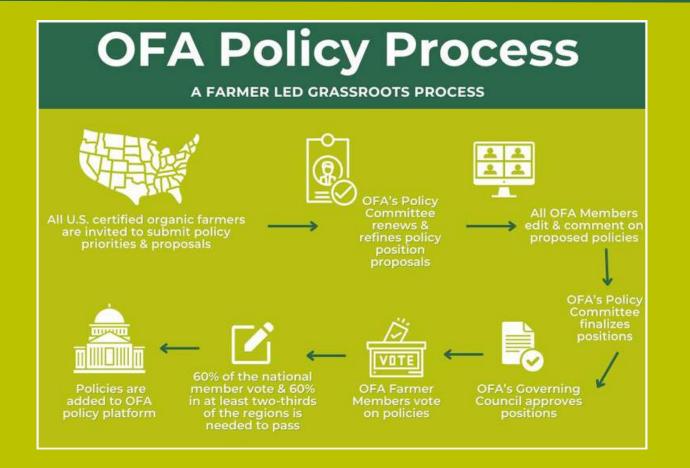
OFA is also advocating for the Continuous Improvement and Accountability in Organic Act (H.R. 5973). This marker bill proposes a two step transparent and predictable process over a five year basis, utilizing both public and stakeholder input and consultations with the National Organic Standards Board, to prioritize and update organic standards. NOP would use current sources of data and information to guide these updates including current practices, consumer and market information, as well as environmental and ecological data. Updating rules for organic production in a timely manner will allow the National Organic Program to keep up with a growing organic industry.

### TWO POLICIES RELATED TO CLIMATE AND CONSERVATION HAVE BEEN UPDATED

To emphasize organic practices in climate change solutions and recognizing organic certification in climate change labels OFA has updated and revised the following. **(The revisions are bolded.)** 

#### **Updated Policy:**

OFA SUPPORTS addressing the pressing need to address climate change by providing targeted support, including payment programs, to farmers for **organic** practices that **mitigate climate change**, **prioritizing prioritize** the multiple benefits of organic practices including building soil organic matter, soil health, and other ecosystem services; and that these programs provide a fair way for farmers who have already adopted these practices, small farms, diversified farms, and farms in all regions of the country to participate **in climate values claims or labels** without burdensome or expensive validation methods. (Revision to policy adopted by the farmer membership in 2021.)



OFA members are concerned that certified organic is losing ground to catch phrases such as "Climate Smart" and "Regenerative," that do not require verification in the same way as USDA organic. The message that certified organic agriculture is climate smart and regenerative needs to be broadcast more broadly. Farmers do the work to improve soil health and provide important ecosystem services through organic farming system stewardship and climate and environmental policies should incentivize organic farmer participation.

#### **Updated Policy:**

OFA SUPPORTS the vision of a Green New Deal policies that recognizes and promote the essential vital role of organic agriculture and the knowledge of organic farmers as a part of the solution to climate change and asks that Organic Farmers Association has a seat at the table. (Revision to policy adopted by the farmer membership in 2019.)

OFA is also working to protect the climate and promote conservation in the Farm Bill by supporting the Agriculture Resilience Act. (S.1016, H.R. 1840), a comprehensive bill intended to support farmers in addressing the climate crisis and adapting to changing weather patterns.

Of special interest to organic farmers, ARA would establish equitable conservation payment limits for organic farmers, rather than the current lower payment limits allowed through the EQIP Organic Initiative. OFA was happy to see this provision reflected in Senate Ag Committee Chair Stabenow's May Farm Bill proposal.

#### WORKING TO MAKE USDA PROGRAMS WORK FOR ORGANIC FARMERS

This year, OFA formed a farmer working group to bring a grassroots approach to identifying and advocating for policies to improve CROP INSURANCE for organic farmers. The new policies below reflect that work, and have been vetted by our policy committee and voted on by our farmer members. You can read more about important crop insurance policies and relevant marker bills **here**.

#### New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS the continued improvement of Whole-Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP), established in the 2014 Farm Bill. Specifically, OFA urges the following changes:

- 1. Share information among USDA agencies and organic certification agencies to help minimize the farmer's paperwork burden to participate in WFRP.
- 2. Recognizing the change in farm revenue after a farm has transitioned to organic, raise the cap to 50% on increased revenue protection under the expansion provision.
- 3. Better reward diversity in the WFRP system by removing the settlement deduction for other insurance policies when a WFRP claim is filed.

The Whole Farm Revenue Protection Program (WFRP) crop insurance can be a beneficial tool for diversified organic farmers, and it needs some important improvements to gain more farmer-interest and value. Diversity of crops needs to be better rewarded in the WFRP system. WFRP functions as catastrophic coverage, so it should be inexpensive, as the likelihood of a diversified farm having a WFRP claim is very slim. WFRP needs to work better with other insurance policies.

In WFRP, if a claim is filed, the settlement from any other insurance policy is deducted from the payment, but the WFRP revenue includes any other crop insurance in the total farm revenue. If a crop failure happens in one crop, other crops will have typical yields. This deduction from other insurance policies should be removed. If this were to change, WFRP would function less like catastrophic coverage and could be worth purchasing for more farmers.

If farmers transitioning to organic utilize WFRP, an uninsured gap occurs the first year of organic certification when the farmer receives organic prices for crops but transitional prices. The same challenge occurs if a farmer is moving from lower-value to higher-value crops. In 2023, revenue expansion due solely to certified organic production and market pricing had a limit of the higher of 35 percent of total farm revenue or \$500,000. These financials were an improvement to years prior, but the cap should be increased to 50% to accommodate premium contracts or market organic prices.

#### *New Policy:*

OFA SUPPORTS the sharing of information and tools across USDA agencies to make programs accurately reflect the value and risk associated with various programs and forms of production. To achieve this, we support developing more organic prices for crop insurance and allowing organic farmers to use organic prices for all federal farmer programs including NAP and FSA Farm Storage Facility Loan Programs.

This policy replaces 2020 policy, "OFA SUPPORTS allowing organic farmers to use organic prices for all federal farmer support programs.

Organic price elections should be used for storage loans offered by Farm Service Agency so that producers can access working capital based on the actual value of their crops in storage to cash flow their operations. RMA should also utilize existing organic price data to establish storage loan prices for FSA.

#### New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS the development of more organic price elections and accurate pricing policies for crop insurance. Specifically, we urge USDA RMA to remove policies that artificially cap Contract Price Addendums at two times the conventional price election for a specific crop and utilize organic price elections across other USDA programs.

This policy replaces two policies from 2018: "OFA SUPPORTS Congress to direct the Risk Management Agency (RMA) to prioritize development of additional organic price elections for crop insurance coverage, and review policies that cap Contract Price Addendums at two-times the conventional price election for any specific crop," and "OFA SUPPORTS Congress to direct the Farm Service Agency to develop organic price elections for storage loans offered. Producers will then have the ability to access working capital based on the actual value of their crops to cash flow their operations. Utilize existing organic price data developed by RMA to establish storage loan prices.

#### **Updated Policy:**

OFA SUPPORTS allowing organic transitioning producers the option to calculate the Actual Production History Yield (APH) for new acres under organic transition using the APH of other organic acres on their farm, in addition to the county T-yield. rather than the county T-Yield for the acres under transition. (Revision to policy adopted by the farmer membership in 2018.)

Revised to more clearly articulate the challenges T-yield and APH cause for transitioning producers.

#### New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS allowing Annual Production History (APH) data from transition years 1-3 to be utilized as part of organic APH for land, which is managed according to organic standards during the transition.

Organic farmers are required to incorporate at least a three-season crop rotation and many farmers elect for longer crop rotations for improved soil health. However, many of the important rotation crops are not currently well supported by crop insurance. Because organic farmers are growing multiple crops in the rotation, it takes them years to build up their APH. The more robust the rotation, the longer it takes. They are thereby systematically disadvantaged by the APH system, which does not encourage diverse crop rotation. While written agreements are possible for rotation crops, they are complex, time-consuming, and rarely financially worthwhile.



#### New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS the creation of new crop insurance tools that go beyond written agreements to better serve innovative practices (such as crop rotations, intercropping, relay cropping, etc.) and the development of diverse markets.

Organic producers often plant later than their nonorganic counterparts due to strategic organic systems management. The planting dates listed for crop insurance often pose challenges for organic growers.

#### New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS the establishment of a unique final planting date for certified organic crops in each region with a non-penalizing grace period so producers can maintain productivity and organic status.

New crop insurance options for transitioning to organic growers require an Organic System Plan, which creates challenges for growers because they may not have chosen an organic certifier yet, certifier deadlines for OSPs do not always align with when a producer must sign up for crop insurance, and they may be receiving transition technical assistance from a service provider but not a certifier because not all certifiers provide educational services.

#### New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS Risk Management Agency (RMA) providing transitional insurance to producers transitioning to certified organic status without requiring an Organic System Plan (OSP), and RMA accepting a statement from an organic service provider to affirm organic transition instead of an OSP.

USDA Agency personnel are not all knowledgeable, supportive, or willing to work with organic producers, which hinders access to USDA programs for these growers. Requiring organic education and training for USDA personnel and inter-agency data sharing would improve customer service, program development, and program implementation within USDA.



#### New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS an organic literacy requirement within RMA to help employees and agents be informed about organic insurance to better serve organic clients and grow the benefits of the organic industry.

#### New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS consistent organic production data. AMS, NASS, and RMA should work together to regularly compile and report organic production, yield, and acreage data.

#### NRCS PROGRAMS ALSO NEED TO WORK BETTER FOR ORGANIC PRODUCERS

#### New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS updating all NRCS programs (EQIP, CRP, CSP, etc.) to include and provide for the unique activities and diversity typically found in organic production, to include transitioning producers in organic programs, to make payment thresholds for organic and non-organic programs equitable, and to ensure that county- and state-level staff are trained and knowledgeable about organic production to ensure robust and consistent implementation of all applicable programs including NRCS practice 823 to these producers.

This policy replaces the following policies to consolidate these policies and include emphasis for the new NRCS Practice 823 designed for transitioning and organic producers:

#55: POSITION: OFA SUPPORTS updating organic practices included in the NRCS EQIP Organic Initiative and Urban Agriculture Program to provide for the unique activities and diversity typically found in organic production. (Adopted by the farmer membership 2023.)

#56: POSITION: OFA SUPPORTS raising the six-year payment limit from \$80K to \$450K under the Organic Initiative within the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) making these payments equal to the rest of the EQIP program, and thereby ensuring full opportunity for organic farmers to participate in the program. (Adopted by the farmer membership 2018.) #57: POSITION: OFA SUPPORTS Congress to direct USDA to recognize required organic practices within the full suite of conservation programs including the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and expand CSP organic bundles to transitioning organic farmers. CSP transition bundles will assist farmers with implementing organic practices, provide technical assistance during the transition period, and offset the financial costs of transitioning. (Adopted by the farmer membership 2018.)

#58: POSITION: OFA SUPPORTS reform of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to include organic producers and producers planning to transition to organic as additional allowed applicants to be eligible to participate in CRP Transition Incentive Payments (TIP). (Adopted by the farmer membership 2018.)

#### INCREASING ORGANIC INFRASTRUCTURE IS AN ONGOING PRIORITY

#### **Updated Policy:**

OFA SUPPORTS targeted outreach, training, information, technical assistance, **mentorship**, land access and ownership on organic farming systems, USDA organic certification and transition, and organic market development to historically underserved, minority and beginning farmers through USDA agency programs, land grant institutions and NGOs. (Adopted by the farmer membership 2019.)

Mentorship supports farm transition, keeping organic farms in the program as they pass from generation to generation.



#### **EMERGING ISSUES**

The following new policy positions are not directly reflected in OFA's priorities for this farm bill cycle, but they still reflect important planks of the policy platform. Expect these issues to be a focus in future advocacy, or in advocacy to USDA.

#### Contamination

The state-by-state regulations on pesticide and GMO drift leave many farmers across the country with no protections. Many organic farmers have either quit organic, or quit farming due to drift issues. OFA members recognize that pesticide drift and the economic harm it causes must be addressed. Two new policies reflect that urgency.

#### New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS federal policy that both recognizes that pesticide drift and carryover cause great harm and provides redress to those affected.

#### New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS a tax on the manufacture and sale of pesticides to pay for drift and carryover damages.



#### **Corporate Control/Consolidation**

This policy was revised to emphasize the need for a risk-based approach in organic certification, especially for operations with complex supply chains.

#### **Updated Policy:**

OFA SUPPORTS full and equitable enforcement of NOP standards: USDA should take immediate action to **adopt a risk-based approach to oversight of organic operations**, focusing first on high-risk operations **and those with complex supply-chains** and to bring non-complying operations and their organic certifying agents into compliance or exclude them from the program. USDA should be required to provide more transparency about the enforcement actions taken by NOP and their accredited certifying agents. Congress should use its oversight authority to ensure that USDA takes the necessary actions to tighten enforcement. (Revision to policy adopted by the farmer membership 2018.)

#### New Policy:

OFA SUPPORTS additional USDA AMS financial investment to promote the environmental, climate change, and health benefits of certified organic production and the integrity of the National Organic Program to consumers.

There are many add-on labels in the marketplace, which can lead to consumer confusion. Certified USDA Organic is the only label with strong standards, annual inspections and federal enforcement.

All these new and updated policies are a reflection of ongoing farmer policy priorities in the Farm Bill and beyond. To read more about the marker bills OFA is advocating for, follow our **marker bill tracker**. You can also read our full platform of **policy positions** on the OFA website.

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



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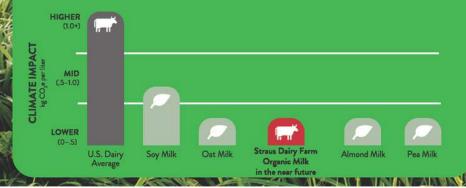


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#### **FEATURED STORY**

### **Residue Testing For Import Organic Compliance Verification** By Julia Barton

For the last decade, at least, a chief concern of domestic organic producers has been fraudulent "organic" grains being imported to the U.S. and undercutting their domestic production with lower prices for fraudulent organic products. Conversations on this topic have occurred at kitchen tables, farm gates, winter conferences, in Zoom rooms, at the National Organic Standards Board meetings, on the Hill, and at USDA. Unfortunately, this problem is unsolved and has big impacts on domestic organic farmers.

#### THE PROBLEM

The U.S. is a net exporter of conventional commodities and a net importer of organic Commodities, but the domestic demand for organic products, especially grains for livestock feed, has consistently grown over the past decade. Organic commodities, which typically command a price premium over conventional, based on increased production costs, encourage U.S. transition to organic, but the price premium has also lured fraudulent players into the marketplace based on economic incentive. This fraud has caused significant price fluctuations in recent years and an unstable organic market for domestic organic producers.

While import fraud appears across commodities in the organic sector, organic feedstuff commodities are hit the hardest. These products (such as whole soybeans, soybean meal, corn, cracked corn, rape, rape meal, whole sunflowers, hulled sunflowers, sunflower oil, and sunflower meal) often enter the U.S. market through high-risk, complex, and opaque supply chains.

In the past year, 1.3 million metric tons of organic feedstuffs, were imported via maritime vessels, 80% of which originated from countries with underdeveloped agriculture sectors, poor infrastructure, questionable organic enforcement, and corruption challenges. This influx of organic feedstuffs equaled 800,000 acres of organic production and almost \$1 billion lost by U.S. farmers.

The quantities of organic grain imports, matched with the supply origin growing capacity and organic certification oversight, heighten the risk of organic import fraud. This adds volatility to an already fluctuating system, harming U.S. farmers' ability to compete in the premium market and creating uncertainty for purchasers of organic feedstuffs.

The justification for prioritizing the creation of the USDA Strengthening Organic Enforcement Rule (SOE) was built on the fact that maritime imports represent the most significant risk by volume. A single ship of cracked corn can represent 1 million bushels or \$10 million of product. SOE provides enhanced supply chain traceability by requiring importers, brokers, and previously exempt handlers to obtain organic certification and provide import certificates for every imported load of organic commodity. While the SOE provisions will help, they are not enough.

Million metric tons of organic feedstuffs imported via maritime vessels

Acres of domestic organic production this influx equaled

800k

**Originated from** countries with organic enforcement

**S** Billion lost by U.S. organic farmers

#### THE IDEA: RESIDUE TESTING AT POINTS OF ENTRY

Legislation requiring residue testing for imported organic commodities via bulk transport could help to protect U.S. producers from this type of fraud. To start, the large quantities of organic feedstuff imports coming through high-risk supply chains should be classified as high risk since SOE allows for additional enforcement and verification based on risk. Because of the risk, testing to verify compliance on bulk<sup>3</sup> organic feedstuff imports should be prioritized.

### Every load should be tested, just as it is for domestic organic producers.

To prevent additional fraudulent grain from entering the U.S. supply chain, grain testing positive for prohibited substances should not be sold as organic, so imports would need to be tested before leaving the point of entry. Testing would need to take place quickly, so as to not disrupt supply chains, but such an effort could serve to curb volatility and help stabilize organic feed prices over time. These efforts would also support workforce development for organic import verification inspectors. While this seems like a new idea, it would actually be a typical stateside practice, newly applied to imported bulk shipments at the ports. Domestic grains are already being regularly tested at grain mills as required, not by the National Organic Program (NOP), but rather by mills and marketers. Furthermore, exported U.S. organic grains are undergoing similar residue testing at points of entry around the world. In the U.S., the USDA is legally responsible for ensuring the NOP has adequate regulatory standards, enforcement guidelines, and residue testing procedures.

Residue testing is already an essential and required tool for verifying compliance with organic regulations, with certifiers required to test 5% of the operations they certify each year. The Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) and USDA organic regulations include authority and guidelines for Accredited Certification Agencies (ACAs) to collect residue samples and respond to sample results. Organic certification is also already intended to be a risk-based assessment process and places scrutiny on high-risk operations. Additional compliance verification through residue testing of imported organic commodities would help to level the playing field which is the next needed step.



#### WHAT WE NEED

U.S. organic farmers need continuous improvement in oversight and enforcement to strengthen the integrity of the organic movement and marketplace, and continuous improvement beyond the SOE rule. We need risk-based enforcement that is practical, timely, and rigorous. Residue testing is a tool that, if conducted consistently and expeditiously at points of entry, could help in compliance verification for organic regulations and in the stabilization of organic markets. We also need to set up a system that ensures that the testing costs of international shipments do not fall on the backs of domestic organic farmers. Importers should bear the cost of verifying that the products they are bringing into the U.S. are actually organic.

Domestic producers have invested time and money into organic transition and production and deserve to operate in a stable and equitable marketplace. Residue testing of imported organic commodities would subject all farmers to the same testing, whether domestic or international organic producers, and further secure organic consumers' trust in organic integrity. By leveling the playing field, we can retain U.S. organic producers, rather than losing them to market volatility, and leverage the investments in the Organic Transition Initiative to grow the number of organic farms in the U.S.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Organic Farmers Association (OFA) was grateful to Amy Bruch of Cyclone Farms who shared her thinking and ideas about this proposed next step with OFA farmers on a webinar supported by the Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP).

This idea will evolve into a marker bill, which could then potentially be included in the Farm Bill. Watch the webinar, discuss it with your organic colleagues, and let us know your thoughts.



Julia Barton serves as the Farmer Services Director of the Organic Farmers Association. She loves working with farmers to identify challenges and find solutions.

- 1. Source: S&P Connect Global Trade and Commodity Analytics Suite/Maritime and Trade.
- 2. Maritime imports represent approximately 67% of organic feedstuff imports.
- Bulk: Loose feedstuffs in ship holds, containers, super sacks, etc., not packaged goods.
- 4. A marker bill is a bill introduced in Congress to signal policy ideas and gather support for those ideas, most often with a goal of inclusion in an omnibus bill like the farm bill.



Find out more about corporate partnership opportunities by contacting Amber Lippon at Amber@OrganicFarmersAssociation.org or download our sponsorship brochure online.

## Show OFA Your Farm Photos!

OFA is looking for photos of real farmer members and farms and supporters to feature in our Organic Voice Magazine, e-news, and membership and event materials. We know there's no better way to tell the story of organic than from the perspective of the hands, soil, and souls who do the work.

We're looking for a variety of perspectives of farms, farmers, farm families, products/crops, and supporter work—anything you think captures what it's like to be an organic farmer in the U.S. right now.

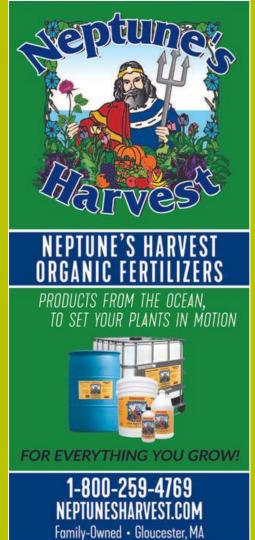
#### **How to Enter**

Please <u>upload photos to this form</u> with a few details including the name and location of the farm. Each entry can include up to 5 photos.

Why: Real photos tell real stories. OFA wants to showcase our members' journey to and through organic—for better or worse. Growing this movement requires us to share our experiences and engage with one another. This is one small way to do that.

#### **Upload Your Photos**

<sup>\*</sup>By submitting your photos, you agree to allow Organic Farmers Association to use your photos on our website, on social media, in print, and for any other future OFA promotion or marketing. Photo credit will be given to the photographer, farm, city, and state.





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**OFA FOLLOW UP** 

## Organic Farmers Unite: A Powerful Lobby Day in Washington D.C.

By Amanda Jones

#### **ORGANIC FARMERS UNITE**

In the heart of our nation's capital, a determined group of organic farmers and advocates recently converged for the annual Organic Farmers Association's Farmer Fly-In. This event, held on March 5, was not just a gathering; it was a powerful demonstration of grassroots advocacy in action.

Gathering under the banner of the Organic Farmers Association, 36 passionate individuals, including farmer members of OFA's Policy Committee and Governing Committee, embarked on a journey to Washington D.C. The goal was to make our voices heard by advocating the key marker bills to be considered in the upcoming Farm Bill that hold the promise of transforming the landscape for organic agriculture.

Before their day on Capitol Hill, participants spent time preparing for the pivotal moments ahead. Policy proposals were voted on, advocacy strategies were outlined, and our farmer members who typically gather virtually made new connections and solidified old friendships as they geared up to make their voices heard.

The preparation was not just about the future discussions with legislators and policymakers, it was also about the invaluable experiences shared by the farmers themselves. Pryor Garnett from Garnetts Red Prairie Farm in Oregon, a seasoned advocate, shared his insights on reviewing policy proposals with the group. "Reviewing the year's policy proposals is an invigorating, whirlwind of an experience," Pryor remarked. "The discussions are uniformly thorough, and I learn a lot every time we do this."

#### **GROUP MEETING AT USDA**

To start off a day of advocacy, a crucial meeting was held at the USDA building, where Jenny Lester Moffit, Under Secretary for the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), and Dr. Jenny Tucker, Director of the National Organic Program (NOP), engaged with our delegation. During this meeting our farmers gathered to share feedback about the Transitioning Organic Producers Program (TOPP). This program is aimed at assisting conventional farmers in transitioning to organic agriculture by providing technical support.

Farmers gave feedback on the recent implementation of the new Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE). This initiative focuses on enhancing enforcement mechanisms within the organic industry to ensure compliance with organic standards to prevent fraud. With some farmers' experiencing price increases and overwhelming paperwork, and others experiencing positive system reform, this was a productive meeting to give feedback and would lay the groundwork for the meetings to come on Capitol Hill.

#### ADVOCACY DAY ON CAPITOL HILL

After meeting with USDA officials, our advocates split off to meet with their respective legislators. Throughout the day, discussions revolved around the challenges faced by organic farmers and the policy solutions necessary to support the needs of organic farmers across the country.

Several marker bills poised to shape the future of organic agriculture were discussed. The O DAIRY Act (S.3097) emerged as a key policy position for organic dairy farmers like Zach Cahill from Cahill Dairy Farm in California.





OFA California members gathered in Washington, D.C. for the 2024 Lobby Day.

#### ADVOCACY CONT.

This comprehensive act encompasses crucial provisions aimed at enhancing the organic dairy sector. It promises improved data collection, the establishment of a functional safety-net program specifically tailored for organic dairy farmers, investments in regional organic dairy infrastructure, and immediate support to address rising input costs. Meanwhile, member Ed Maltby representing the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA) was a staunch advocate for the Organic Dairy Data Collection Act (H.R. 6937), which aims to provide better insights into the challenges facing organic dairy operations, ensuring that policymakers have the necessary information to enact meaningful change.

Seth Kroeck from Crystal Spring Farm in Maine, attending his second fly-in, reflected on his meetings on the Hill. "My last meeting was with Molly Ryan, agriculture staffer to Senator Collins," Seth recounted. Ryan shared that Senator Collins is "approached by every organic organization because [she is] the only Republican senator who will vote organic" and that she "like[s] OFA because it is just organic farmers." Reflecting on his experience, Seth added, "This year I was solo and felt comfortable to go through my talking points and have a back and forth looking for points to connect on." OFA farmer-member Scott Myers from Woodlyn Acres Farm in Ohio has sustained efforts to build a relationship with Rep. Max Miller's office. Miller's agriculture staffer had a background in specialty crops and was eager to discuss crop insurance reforms proposed in the Crop Insurance for Future Farmers Act (H.R. 3904). This act which seeks to extend critical crop insurance protections to beginning farmers was a hot topic for discussion. Scott and OFA team member, Julia Barton presented key points to promote a fair and functional crop insurance system. They also focused on the Whole Farm Revenue Protection Program Improvement Act of 2023 (S. 2593). If included, it will authorize research and reduce paperwork burdens to improve participation rates, ensuring that small, mid-size, and diversified farms can access crop insurance.

To conclude the meeting, Scott and Julia finalized plans for an in-district farm visit with Miller's office at Woodlyn Acres Farm which was held on April 22 in partnership with the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA).

Rep. Miller's visit served to deepen the dialogue on crop insurance policies and important conservation programs, and fostered collaborative efforts with the office and staff.



OFA Illinois members at the Capitol during Lobby Day.

#### ADVOCACY CONT.

As of this publication, Miller has cosponsored the Crop Insurance for Future Farmers Act, (HR 3904) and Continuous Improvement and Accountability in Organic Standards (CIAO) Act, (HR 5973) based on the conversations he had with farmers that day. Additionally, Scott Myers and Milo Petruziello (OEFFA Policy Director) now sit on Max Miller's Agricultural Advisory Committee.

#### **BUILDING BRIDGES**

Amidst these discussions, positive interactions played a pivotal role while advocating for the Strengthening Organic Agriculture Research (SOAR) Act (S.2720). The staffer for Rep. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez displayed knowledge and enthusiasm regarding the SOAR Act, and the Representative has since signed on as a cosponsor of the legislation. This act aims to enhance organic farming practices and research by providing funding for research initiatives, education programs, and extension services within the USDA. This bill seeks to address the unique challenges faced by organic farmers and promote sustainable agriculture practices. Conversations with Rep. Jared Huffman indicated his willingness to support the Organic Agriculture Research Act (H.R. 3650) as a co-sponsor. This legislation resonates with Huffman's commitment to advocating for organic producers and seeks to bolster research and innovation within the organic farming sector. Huffman expressed his determination to support organic producers fully and stated that he would regard the materials provided during the office visit as his "marching orders" moving forward.

#### **CONNECTIONS MADE**

As the day drew to a close, our group reconvened for the House Agriculture Committee meeting and the Senate Agriculture Committee meetings, reflecting on the progress made and the challenges ahead. Pryor Garnett summed up the essence of our collective effort, stating, "The biggest benefit from advocating on Capitol Hill in person is the personal relationships I develop with representatives, senators and their staff. Becoming a trusted source for information about organic farming allows me to bring forward issues and gain the staffs' insights into how best to proceed and advance proposals that will improve the livelihoods and lives of organic farmers."

Amidst the discussions and deliberations, his words resonated deeply, underscoring the importance of personal connections and informed advocacy in driving meaningful change. There was an undeniable sense of optimism among us—a belief that through collective action and unwavering commitment, real change is not just possible, but inevitable.

As we look towards the future, let this lobby day serve as a beacon of inspiration for all organic farmers. Together, we have the power to shape policy, champion our values, and build a brighter, more sustainable future for organic agriculture. Will you join us next year, as we continue our journey toward a better tomorrow?

To stay informed and participate in future endeavors, sign up for OFA notifications.



Amanda Jones is a passionate advocate for sustainable food systems and a recent policy advocacy intern for OFA. Fort Vee

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### Enforcement on Imports, Compost Regulations, and Sunset Materials

By Harriet Behar

The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) met April 29-May 1 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to discuss materials that will be voted upon this fall to remain or be removed from the National List, as well as other items on their work agenda. Dr. Jenny Tucker, Deputy Administrator of the National Organic Program (NOP), gave a comprehensive review of the roll-out of the Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) rule, and specific details relating to oversight of imported organic products. The current NOSB consists of four producers from Nebraska, Montana, Florida, and California; two handlers from California and Colorado; one retailer from California; three environmentalists from Alabama, Washington, and California; three public interest seats from California and two from New York; one certification agency from Pennsylvania; and one scientist from Tennessee. The board is chaired by Kyla Smith, the certifier from Pennsylvania.

This meeting was the first one in four years to include in-person oral comments in addition to the two days of virtual public comment via Zoom the week before the meeting. The NOSB's overall message encouraged the organic community to stay engaged with the process of decision making on new rules, as well as to continue to bring the NOSB diverse perspectives to help them achieve common goals and find comprehensive solutions.

#### STRENGTHENING ENFORCEMENT

Dr. Tucker discussed the challenges and successes of implementing the new SOE enforcement rule, with over 1,800 new entities certified as organic to oversee more handlers in the supply chain, and there are still more in process. Over 21,000 import certificates were issued, with 12,000 not yet arriving to our shores, since implementation in early March 2024. Tucker stated she has heard from brokers who have rejected purchase of some commodities because the newly required import certificates were not issued by the certification agency—illustrating that this new rule is working to keep out the most problematic shipments.

There's an overwhelming amount of information that accompanies the import certificates due to the amount of data required in order for the certifier to issue the import certificate, as well as the volume of certificates issued. The NOP hopes to be able to categorize this information to advise future activities. Overall, the NOP was pleased with how well the organic integrity database is functioning in allowing certificates so far. The NOP has also started a pilot project with the Federal Grain Inspection Service (FGIS) to conduct residue testing on NOP-designated high-risk import loads of organic grains to ensure organic integrity and a fair domestic marketplace.



#### What is the NOSB?

The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) is a Federal Advisory Board to the USDA National Organic Program (NOP). The NOSB was established by the 1990 law, Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA), to represent the organic community in the public-private partnership between the USDA NOP and organic community.

The NOSB consists of 15 public volunteers with designated seats representing the diversity of the organic community. Four seats are reserved for organic farmers.

The NOSB has been meeting since 1992 and helped develop the framework for the National Organic Standards and National Organic Program at USDA. The NOSB considers and makes recommendations on a wide range of issues involving the production, handling, and processing of organic products. The NOSB has statutory powers over the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances.

Each NOSB member is appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture for a term of one to five years. USDA publishes a call for nominations each Spring, and newly appointed members begin service in January of the next year.

The NOSB meets twice a year at a public meeting, typically in April and October, to discuss the items on its work agenda, vote on proposals, and make recommendations to the Secretary. These meetings invite public input via submitted written comments and virtual and in-person oral comments. All meetings are free and open to the public and streamed live online.

If an NOSB proposal receives a decisive vote (a twothirds majority) by Board members in favor of the proposed motion, it becomes a recommendation to the USDA Secretary and the NOP.

#### Want to get involved before the fall NOSB meeting?

Join OFA's NOSB Farmer Workgroup to work with others to form comments for the board and prepare to share comments. Learn more and fill out an interest form.



Sandy Syburg, White Oak Farms sharing comments in Milwaukee

#### **ORGANIC IMPORT TESTING**

Testing of imported grains was another issue brought up during public comment from farmers, brokers, and processors. The Organic Farmers Association asked the NOP to expand the import testing pilot program now in place at a few ports of entry to all incoming organic grains as soon as possible. With much of the current "organic" imported grains coming from countries with questionable organic and supply-chain oversight and production capabilities, it was clear to many that organic certifiers and the NOP have many risky shipments to review and verify as truly organic. OFA members requested that not only overseas shipments be reviewed, but also those coming in via railcar and truck overland from Canada and Mexico, as some of these loads came by boat from overseas originally.

#### SMALL & MID-SIZE FARMERS SHOULD NOT FEEL BURDEN

In numerous public comments from farmers, it became clear that some organic certifiers were adding significant recordkeeping burdens on small and midsize farmers to do extra paperwork or tracking to meet the new enforcement rules. The NOP made it clear that they will be overseeing the certifiers during their yearly accreditation audits and specifically addressing this issue. Farmers should not be over-burdened and the NOP wants to hear from farmers in order to direct certifiers to change any problematic oversight activities.

If you have experienced undue burden from SOE implementation, we want to hear from you! Please call the Organic Farmer Helpline: 833-724-3843.

#### **REQUIRING ORGANIC SEED**

The Organic Seed Alliance and others expressed concern over the stagnant sales of organic seeds, while the organic seed breeders and growers are providing more varieties and volume to organic growers. With the introduction of new gene-edited seeds (prohibited under organic rules) into the marketplace without clear labeling, there is great concern that organic crops will be grown from these gene-edited seeds unless growers plant certified organic seeds. This would put the grower at risk of having their organic certification lost on that crop, as well as less trust in the organic label by consumers. In Europe, each country has a list of what seeds are currently available as organic and growers must grow those organic varieties. The NOP showed resistance to this type of mandate.

#### COMPOST

The NOSB asked a panel of experts to discuss the composting requirements in the existing organic regulation, and whether the current requirements for time and temperature should be modified, as well as changing the allowed compost feedstocks to include "compostable" plastics. These synthetics are not currently allowed. A new law in California requiring municipal landfills to set up systems to compost food waste is the impetus for reviewing these new materials for inclusion in organic. There were questions on whether or not the compostable plastic forks, bowls, cups, and other materials are fully compostable, as well as whether or not they contain nano and micro-plastics or PFAS contaminants.

Correctly identifying whether or not a plastic cup is compostable is another issue once it is already incorporated into the waste stream. Discussion also addressed the small fruit and vegetable stickers, reviewing current research within the USDA to develop a fully biodegradable type of sticker and adhesive. OFA's comments stated that the risk of contamination from the compost proposal is too great and that the current compost definition, which does not allow these synthetics, should not be changed.



#### SUNSET MATERIAL REVIEW

There were no sunset materials that appeared to be headed for removal. In livestock, the NOSB is considering adding an annotation to the use of iodine to not allow NPEs (Nonylphenol Ethoxylates), surfactants which are toxic to aquatic organisms and are endocrine disruptors. Livestock materials reviewed included moxidectin, fenbendazole, DL methionine and vitamins, and minerals. Numerous dairy processors have petitioned to include the pain reliever Meloxicam, which will be reviewed at the fall meeting for addition to the National List.

In crops, the NOSB is working towards updating the way that inerts are reviewed and approved for organic use in pesticide formulations. Pheromones, ferric phosphate, horticultural oils, hydrogen peroxide, and ammonium soaps were among the sunset materials reviewed with no issues. The NOSB discussed at length the use of hydrogen chloride in the delinting of organic cotton seed, and whether or not this material is necessary.

In handling, the petition to allow nonorganic rye pollen extract, due to the lack of commercial availability of an organic source, was defeated unanimously, as well as the petition to allow Magnesium Carbonate as an anticaking agent for chicory powder due to the availability of alternatives.

The allowance for nonorganic celery powder for use in processed meats was discussed, and at this time, the research for producing organic celery powder with the same functionality of preserving meats is not yet completed. Dr. Erin Silva, University of Wisconsin, stated that there was some promise in growing organic swiss chard for this use.

In the certification subcommittee, there was discussion on mandating residue testing on imported organic commodities, improving crop insurance for organic producers, and removing constraints to increasing the capacity of the organic food system. These issues are expected to be presented as final proposals for a vote at the next NOSB meeting on October 22-24 in Portland, Oregon.

#### **GET INVOLVED**

The NOSB process is unique to organic agriculture. No other part of the food system has such a built-in, democratic process and series of feedback loops. In order for the process to work for us, we have to participate. The next NOSB meeting will take place in Portland, Oregon this fall, but the work preparing for that meeting is ongoing!

There are several ways you can get involved:

Serve on a Farmer Panel at the NOSB Meeting Are you an organic farmer in the Pacific Northwest? Would you be interested in sharing your experiences on a farmer panel at the National Organic Coalition's Pre-NOSB meeting? We will be working to organize panelists for that meeting between now and the fall, and we'd love to hear from you. If you're interested, please contact julia@organicfarmersassociation.org.

#### Serve on the NOSB

Each National Organic Standards Board meeting addresses important issues for the organic community, with stakeholders represented through the various members, as well as being informed by public comment. Five seats are open for the National Organic Standards Board. If you are interested in serving, please let us know! The OFA Farmer Services Team can give you more information and support your application process, or you can submit an application online.

#### Help Prepare OFA's Comments in the NOSB Workgroup

OFA launched its first NOSB working group ahead of this spring meeting. A small, but mighty group of farmer members reviewed materials and proposals, and their feedback formed the foundation of OFA's comments.

Six farmer members also commented to the NOSB representing OFA's NOSB Workgroup and Crop Insurance Workgroup. It was a great showing and farmer input at the meetings helps keep discussion grounded in the daily realities of organic farming.

We will have an NOSB Workgroup ahead of the fall meeting with work beginning in August and September. Join us in this group to help shape the future of the organic standards and ensure that farmer voices are at the center of the discussion. Please contact Julia Barton to get involved!



Harriet Behar is OFA's Farmer Services Consultant, and is a founding member of OFA. She has been involved with federal, state, and local policy advocacy for over 30 years. She runs organic Sweet Springs Farm in Gays Mills, Wisconsin.

## CALL OFA'S FARMER HELPLINE

Call the OFA Farmer HelpLine for support on organic practices, organic transition, and overcoming barriers to organic certification.

> HELPLINE: (833) 724-3834

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## **BE A PART OF FARMER-LED POLICY SOLUTIONS**

### **JOIN A FARMER WORKGROUP**

Farmer Workgroups are a way for us to work together to identify problems, brainstorm solutions, and amplify the voices of OFA farmer members.

Workgroups meet via Zoom on a monthly basis and are facilitated spaces. Participation is open to all farmers who are organic curious, in transition, or already certified. Learn more now!



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