

Opportunities in Organic

What's in the Next Farm Bill

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Organic agriculture offers broad economic benefits, safeguards our natural resources, provides resilience in our domestic supply chain, and positions farms and ranches to thrive, even in droughts and other extreme weather. The U.S. needs to invest in comprehensive and easily accessible tools that build markets and remove barriers for organic and transitioning producers, including:

- Ensuring certification costs and processes do not limit growth of organic agriculture;
- Providing underserved producers with support to access new markets & adopt beneficial practices; &
- Developing relevant technical assistance capacity for all producers on new marketing opportunities, building healthy soil, managing pests naturally, & protecting natural resources.



THE PROBLEM

Several existing programs support organic agriculture, transition, and research, but they do not adequately meet the unique needs of transitioning organic producers, especially from underserved populations. Organic certification costs and processes are ongoing barriers, and most producers have limited access to organic-specific technical assistance or mentorship, especially in regions with smaller organic sectors.

Variable incomes and thin margins make any risk – including exploring new markets or testing new practices – difficult to bear, and limited resource, socially disadvantaged, beginning, and smaller scale farmers and ranchers face unique barriers. As agriculture adapts to changing market conditions and weather patterns, producers need expanded market options and new resources to successfully transition to and maintain organic farming and ranching systems.



THE SOLUTION

Public investments in organic should be commensurate with the sector's growing share of the market. As a critical step, the National Organic Certification Cost-Share Program should be updated to include flexible organic transition support, technical assistance, and public reporting on program outcomes, building on networks and programs developed through USDA's Organic Transition Initiative:

Organic Certification Cost-Share

- Cost-share payments cover up to \$1500 in certification costs
- Discretion to ensure certification costs are not a barrier for underserved producers and regions with limited organic production where costs may be higher

Organic Transition And Resilience Funds

- Support for NGOs to build capacity to support organic transition, particularly for smaller scale and socially disadvantaged producers and underserved regions
- Pass through funding for producers to offset transition costs and reduce barriers to transition
- Investments in regional supply chains, including scale-appropriate equipment and infrastructure
- Farmer-to-farmer mentorship and expanded skills for agricultural advisors
- Expansion of organic farming systems with cover cropping, composting, crop rotation, biological pest management, and protection of natural resources

Organic-Relevant Technical Assistance

- Resources for capacity and partnerships at public institutions and NGOs to deliver organic-relevant, regionally appropriate technical assistance, including education and market development