

Organic Advocates Have Policy Power: You can make a positive change!

It may seem that your elected officials are out of touch with your needs and concerns. Many lack knowledge of businesses that support agriculture, food systems, or farmers. Even fewer legislators understand what it takes to run a small or midsize business, like a farm, or what drives consumer preferences, like choosing organic products. However, you can bring about policy change through clear and concise interactions with the local, state, and federal elected officials.

As a constituent and a voter, politicians are interested in knowing what motivates you to support a candidate. Very few government offices receive constructive feedback on pending legislation or specific issues with clear suggestions. No need to join a political party or attend meetings; instead, emails, and phone calls can build a relationship. Over time, you may find it worthwhile to visit their offices in person. By working with the Organic Farmers Association and our organization members, we can provide you with the tools to contribute to the change you want to see!

WHAT MOTIVATES YOUR LEGISLATOR

What issues did they highlight in their campaigns?

- Improving the economic situation for their constituents?
- Enhancing the vitality of rural areas for businesses and to attract young families?
- Environmental concerns and sustainable infrastructure that supports businesses into the future?
- Fighting for families and small or midsize businesses to have a chance at success?
- Using taxpayer dollars where they can have the most direct positive effect in their districts/states?
- Improving health outcomes for constituents?

PREPARING FOR YOUR INTERACTION

- Find your legislator's office here. Every legislator has staff that relays information to them. Building a relationship with them can help get your opinion heard and acted upon. Call the legislator's office and ask for the name and email of their agricultural liaison.
- Depending on the type of communication, you can prepare "talking points" and methods to increase your effectiveness. Review the policy you want to promote, and be prepared to discuss how it can benefit your business or community. Tie your solutions to the policy priorities that your legislator has championed.
- Always include your name, address, and email to illustrate you are a constituent; these carry more weight.
- Be polite, yet firm and concise in what you are asking to be done. Don't say they might consider supporting a bill or policy, state you need them to support the bill, and you are willing to help them understand how it meets the legislator's own priorities. Always thank them for listening to you, especially when they respond to your request.



Phone Call

Use this communication to support a policy that needs quick action.

- Ask for the agricultural liaison; if they are not available, speak with the receptionist.
- If no one answers, leave your phone number and ask for a return call.
- Give them a one-sentence summary of who you are, where you live (so they know you are a constituent), and why you are calling.
- Prepare to ask for support for a specific bill or policy currently being discussed in the legislature.
- Have a few talking points stating why this is an important policy or law for your business or community. Use your own words, even if following an organization's action alert. These personal communications have the best impact.
- Send the agricultural liaison a short follow-up email, stating you called the office about a specific policy.
- The staff keeps track of their constituents' support of pending legislation. Not many people call, so your communication can have a significant impact! Make sure they can reach you if needed.

Email

Use this communication to advocate for a specific policy. Keep it short; they have many emails to read.

- Put the policy request in the email subject line so the staff can find it later.
- State your name and the type of concerns you'd like to discuss. Add a sentence about yourself and include any relevant community work you're involved in.
- State what policy or bill you are supporting and how it directly affects your community in two or three sentences. Let them know you are available to serve as a resource and ask for a response.
- Thank them for their response. If there is no response after a week, call or send a second email.

Letter

Use this method to describe a detailed issue or a specific problem your business or community is having with the current law or a USDA agency. Use this for important and detailed personal issues.

- Very few people send hand-written letters, and these have a personal touch.
- This provides a chance to provide extra information on a subject and to become a known and trusted resource on a subject.
- Be specific about what the problem is and what you feel the solutions might be, especially those issues that are currently being discussed in the legislature.
- Be descriptive of your concerns and explain how the requested policy is needed for your community.
- If you have a friendly legislator, ask if their staff is willing to draft a policy to help solve your problem.

In-Person Visits

Visiting your legislator or staff builds a relationship. They may reach out to ask your opinion! Attend town halls or other meetings and/or set up an in-person office visit, and bring a specific issue to discuss.

- Make an appointment in advance and ask to speak with both the staff and the legislator. Your visit will be about 15 minutes. Often, the legislator is busy but may have just enough time to snap a photo. Share the photo with the local newspaper; the office will be happy to see the photo in the local press.
- Practice your talking points with friends or family (3-5 issues) so you can be clear and concise. Make sure you have a strong understanding of these issues so you can answer questions.
- If you can't answer a question, say you will get back to them—and do that. Never make something up.

TAKE ACTION!

Send an email to your legislators using OFA's current Action Alerts!

START NOW