



ORGANIC FARMING RESEARCH FOUNDATION

OFRF Recommendation for FY2007 Appropriations USDA-ARS Strategic Regional Programming for Organic Agricultural Research

Total Recommendation for ARS: \$10,000,000

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SUMMARY: For FY07 OFRF recommends a package of nine funding lines totaling \$10 Million, to be managed by the regional Area Offices of the USDA-ARS. This package moves away from earmarks for individual research stations, towards a national strategy of regional capacity building for organic research. Recommendations for each region are based on current potential for organic research capacity. A goal of “fair share” funding for USDA-ARS organic agricultural research, based on relative market size calls for at least \$20 Million explicitly allocated to organic research and development. This request moves towards bridging the gap between current funding (approximately \$3.6 million per year) and that goal. This funding would be distributed by Area Directors and the National Agricultural Library (NAL) Director to maintain and enhance existing projects explicitly focused on organic foods and farming. This funding would also be used to integrate organic components into other projects, where such capacity exists and when the objectives meet high-priority needs for the organic sector.

BACKGROUND: Organic production effectively serves USDA strategic objectives for agricultural productivity, environmental quality, human health and nutrition, rural development and agricultural trade. Federal agricultural research dollars dedicated to organic food and farming are disproportionately low in relation to the size of the industry. In FY 2005, USDA-ARS spent about \$3.5 million on organic-specific projects, or about 0.35% of ARS annual expenditures. The International Trade Center UNCTAD/WTO estimates that organic sales in the U.S. represent 2.0- 2.5% of total US retail food sales. A 2.0% “fair share” framework for research funding would have generated at least \$20 million for organic research in ARS in FY 06.

The 2005 appropriations omnibus bill contained language stating: *“The Committee is aware of the growing interest in the production, marketing, and consumption of organic products. By some accounts, the level of retail sales in the United States has reached 1.8 percent of the entire food market, yet the dedication of USDA research directed to organic is well below that figure. **The Committee encourages ARS, when appropriate, to direct research resources in a manner that reflects the growing interest in organic production and the need to provide enhanced research for this growing organic sector...**”* (Emphasis added.)

Despite this guidance from Congress, funding levels for ARS organic research have not increased. Funding mechanisms within ARS lack flexibility to adequately address the needs and of the organic sector, obliging a fresh approach.

ORGANIC RESEARCH NEEDS & POTENTIAL ARS CAPACITIES: ARS has the potential capacity for research supporting regionally appropriate, diversified organic systems, if funding were available. ARS scientists are interested in better serving the needs of the organic farming community, as demonstrated by the first ARS National Organic Workshop held January 2005 in Austin, Texas. There are approximately 140 ARS scientists located throughout the U.S. already conducting research potentially applicable to organic agriculture.

Much of the ARS research, however, is not yet conducted within an organic agriculture context. This doesn't negate the potential usefulness of the research to organic farmers, but it requires additional research to test its applicability within sophisticated organic production systems. Additional resources – particularly field infrastructure and operational capacity - are needed to conduct research that will benefit organic producers.

Research and development priorities for organic agriculture include:

- Food and Trade Security (e.g., resiliency to stress; product development for international demand).
- Nutrition (e.g., anti-oxidant profiles; crop rotations for animal nutrition).
- Environmental Benefits and Costs (e.g. quantify nutrient flows; measurement of biodiversity; water and air quality impacts; carbon management).
- Soil Health & Microbial Ecology (e.g., disease suppressive soils; optimization of cover crops.)
- Germplasm (e.g., breeding of plant and animal varieties suited to organic systems.)
- Organic System Technologies (e.g., ecological pest management; diversified/grass-based livestock management systems; reduced tillage organic weed control; post-harvest handling and storage).
- Information Management (e.g. National Agriculture Library's Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (AFSIC) bibliographic products, and the *www.OrganicAgInfo* database; collection and dissemination of international organic research.)

RECOMMENDATION: Accordingly, we recommend that \$10,000,000 be appropriated for “USDA-ARS Strategic Regional Programming for Organic Agricultural Research.” This total will be allocated among ARS' eight regional Areas and the National Agricultural Library. With appropriate stakeholder input (e.g. certified producers, public-interest groups) funding will be allocated by Area Directors and the Director of the NAL to address the following goals:

1. Maintain and expand existing CRIS projects with objectives explicitly focused on organic foods and farming, including: scientists, technicians, infrastructure, demonstration and informational projects.
2. Provide support to integrate organic agriculture components into other projects and partnerships, where such capacity exists and when the objectives meet high-priority organic production needs (such as those identified during the ARS National Organic Workshop held January, 2005).

The proposed distribution below is based on the relative potential capacity within each region, as identified by USDA-ARS through scientist surveys and the National Organic Workshop. The nine recommended funding lines are as follows.

Beltsville Area: \$1,000,000; National Agricultural Library: \$500,000; North Atlantic Area: \$1,500,000; South Atlantic Area: \$1,000,000; Mid-South Area: \$500,000; Southern Plains Area: \$750,000; Northern Plains Area: \$750,000; Midwest Area: \$2,000,000; Pacific West Area: \$2,000,000.

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