



ORGANIC FARMING RESEARCH FOUNDATION

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Written Statement of the Organic Farming Research Foundation By Mark Lipson, Senior Policy Analyst

Submitted to the
**Senate Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA, and Related
Agencies**
March 20, 2008

RE: FY 2009 Appropriations Requests

The Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) appreciates the opportunity to present our funding requests for the Fiscal Year 2009 Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill. OFRF is a grower-directed, non-profit foundation working to foster the improvement and widespread adoption of organic farming systems. Organic agriculture plays an important and growing role in U.S. agriculture. Relatively modest investments in organic research and education can significantly increase the economic benefits and environmental services provided by organic systems. As a result, we urge the Subcommittee to provide additional resources for organic agriculture in FY 09.

As the Subcommittee begins to fashion an FY 09 Appropriations Bill, we ask that the Subcommittee take note of a new report and recommendations by the USDA National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education and Economics (NAREEE) Advisory Board. The Advisory Board has noted and endorsed the initial efforts of the REE agencies to address organic research and education needs, and “encourages further development of [these] programs.”¹ A number of specific recommendations are made, including the creation of a National Program Leader for Organic Agriculture within USDA-CSREES. The recommendations have been transmitted to Secretary Schafer and the Agriculture and Appropriations Committees of both the Senate and House for further consideration and action.

Unfortunately, the President’s FY 09 budget submission for emerging organic REE programs is completely at odds with the NAREEE Advisory Board’s recommendations for greater investigation and development of organic agriculture. Not only does the Administration’s budget not include an increase in resources for organic research, but it actually proposes severe cuts to current funding levels for

¹ “Report and Recommendations from a Focus Session on Organic Agriculture Conducted at the Advisory Board Meeting held in Washington, D.C. on October 29-31, 2007”. Page 3. National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education and Economics Advisory Board. Transmitted to the Agriculture Secretary and Senate and House Committees on Agriculture, and Appropriations, March 5, 2008.

organic research, including zero funding for the two main organic research grant programs. As the current funding levels for organic research are already severely inadequate to begin with, we urge the Subcommittee to reject the Administration's proposed cuts and allocate modest increases for organic research in FY 09.

Organic product sales are rapidly approaching 4% of the domestic food retail market, yet USDA-REE expenditures directed explicitly to research and information programs for organic agriculture in FY 07 reached only slightly above 1% of total REE spending. This discrepancy in the share of research funding spent on organics is detrimental to an industry that relies intensively on management and information for its success. By rejecting the Administration's proposed cuts to organic research and providing modest increases as outlined below, the Subcommittee can help address this discrepancy and promote progress towards the "fair share" benchmark for organic research.

USDA-Cooperative State Research, Extension and Education Service

Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI)² **Request: Protect mandatory funding.**

OREI is USDA's premier competitive research and education grant program specifically dedicated to investigation of organic agriculture. Due to its success, the program is slated to receive an increase in mandatory funding in the 2008 Farm Bill and we ask that the subcommittee protect the funding level prescribed in the final bill. Even if OREI were to receive the highest number proposed in the Senate Bill (\$16 million) the program would still be less than 0.7% of total USDA-REE expenditures in FY07, but would mark an important step towards reaching the fair share benchmark.. If the program receives a mix of mandatory funding and an authorization for appropriations, or receives only an authorization for appropriations we ask that the Subcommittee provide discretionary funds to the program.

Organic Transitions Research Program (ORG)³ **Request: \$5 million**

The Organic Transitions Research Program is one of only two USDA competitive grant programs dedicated to organic research and education. This competitive grants program funds integrated (research, extension, and higher education) projects that specifically focus on helping farmers overcome the production and marketing challenges of transitioning to organic production. ORG-funded projects are currently underway in fifteen states. The program is working to deliver the knowledge farmers need to

² The Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) is authorized by Section 7218 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 which amended Section 1672B of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 5925b).

³ The Organic Transitions Program (ORG) is authorized by Section 406 of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (AREERA) (7 U.S.C. 7626)

successfully transition to organic production, but the number of funded projects still falls far short of meeting the needs of producers across the country.

After reaching its highest level of funding of \$2.1 million in FY 03, the Organic Transitions Research Program has suffered a sustained cut over the last five years. The House of Representatives recognized this imprudent treatment of the Organic Transitions Program by approving \$5 million for the program during FY07 appropriations deliberations. The Subcommittee should begin with this figure in formulating its FY 09 legislation.

USDA – Agricultural Research Service

Organic Agricultural Systems Research

Request:

- **Restore funding to specific organic research projects proposed for elimination.**
- **Direct ARS to continue increasing the size and breadth of its organic systems research portfolio.**
- **Provide \$100,000 to disseminate research results through the National Agriculture Library's Alternative Farming Systems Information Center.**

Although Agricultural Research Service spending on direct organic research reached 1.5% in FY 07, it is still far short of achieving the fair share goal of matching the organic share of the domestic food retail market, which is now approaching 4%. In FY 09, instead of closing this gap, the President's budget would actually widen it by cutting funding to some of the most important ARS research being conducted on organic systems, as part of an overall 7.5% cut in the ARS budget. Specific organic research projects marked for elimination in the President's proposal include: the Pasture Systems and Watershed Management Research at University Park, PA; Invasive Weed Management Research at Urbana, IL, and the New England Plant Soil and Water Research at Orono, ME. We request that the Subcommittee include continued funding for the organic research projects/units that are slated for cuts; and include strong report language directing the agency to continue the growth of its research activity directly focused on organic agriculture.

Subcommittee efforts to direct increased ARS spending on organic research will likely be supported by a Sense of Congress provision set to be included in the 2008 Farm Bill, encouraging ARS to spend a fair share of its research dollars on organic research. Intent to increase funding for the National Agriculture Library's Alternative Farming Systems Information Center will also likely be part of the provision. As a result, we urge the Subcommittee to act upon the intent of Congress and include strong report language directing ARS to increase its expenditures towards a fair share for organic research, with a portion of the increase for usage by National Agriculture Library's Alternative Farming Systems Information Center to disseminate research results. This recommendation is also included in the NAREEEAB report in recommendation #4.

USDA – Economic Research Service/National Agricultural Statistics Service/Agricultural Marketing Service

Organic Data Initiative⁴

Request: \$1 Million

Data on prices, yields and markets are vital to farmers who are planning what to plant, accessing markets, and applying for crop insurance. Unfortunately, the organic sector is still without vital comprehensive data on par with what is provided by USDA for conventional agriculture, putting organic farmers at a great disadvantage. Despite the growing demand and need, funding for organic data collection has remained stagnant. Although the final 2008 Farm Bill may include some mandatory funding for organic data collection, we urge the Subcommittee to provide additional discretionary funding to help address the large backlog of work that is needed to provide a fair playing field for organic producers.

The data collection and analysis is a cooperative effort among various agencies. For purposes of the Organic Data Initiative, allocation of funds among agencies should be at the discretion of the Secretary.

Organic agriculture is one of the fastest growing segments of American agriculture, but it has not received the level of support that it deserves. The 2008 Farm Bill will likely provide important increases to organic programs, but it will still fall far short of providing a fair share for organic agriculture. It is our hope that the Subcommittee will work to close the fair share gap by protecting any gains made in the 2008 Farm Bill, rejecting the President's FY 09 proposed budgetary cuts to organic programs, and providing long overdue increases in the organic programs under the Subcommittee's purview for Fiscal Year 2009.

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⁴ The Organic Data Initiative is authorized by Section 7407 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002.