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June 24, 2015

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Hon. Dan Glickman
Chairman, Foundation for Food and Agricultural Research
Food Research and Action Center
1200 18th Street NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Chairman Glickman and members of the Foundation for Food and Agricultural Research Board Members,

Congratulations on the inception of the Foundation for Food and Agricultural Research (FFAR) and installation of an outstanding Board of Directors. As you are developing the FFAR staff capacity and program infrastructure, the Organic Farming Research Foundation is writing to offer our support and ideas for fulfilling the Foundation's missions and mandates. We look forward to having a productive relationship with FFAR as a stakeholder and co-funder in stimulating advanced agricultural innovation for the global challenges that must be solved.

We urge the FFAR founding Board to chart a course of catalytic research investment premised on integration of systemic, multiple-solution approaches to the profound pressures on our food systems. The existing public research system is not well-structured for such approaches, but FFAR has a unique opportunity to help overcome this significant long-term institutional funding gap.

The essential challenge for all of agriculture is to make rapid advances in resilience and harm reduction despite the pressures of intensification. The most developed (or the least underdeveloped) extant systems integrating economic success with ecological performance and stable productivity are in fact certified organic systems, especially the most advanced/longest established production systems. This is the case despite the historic underinvestment and nascent success of USDA organic research efforts compared to funding for conventional agriculture. Organic agricultural systems are by far the most easily leveraged platform for the rapid progress that must be made specifically in terms of soil carbon/health, pollinators, water pollution, drought resistance and other biological and climatological imperatives for this century's agriculture.

Government research and policy initiatives often play a key role in the adoption of new farming technologies and systems, which is why the work of FFAR is so important. USDA has a current goal to increase the number of certified organic operations and is expanding programs and services for organic producers and handlers. Organic agriculture offers a number of pathways to meeting consumer demand, building environmental resilience, increasing the balance of trade and improving economic opportunities for our farmers.

Consumer Demand for Organic Products

It is a well-known fact that U.S. consumer demand for organically produced products has grown continuously since USDA established national standards for organic production and processing in 2002. U.S. organic food sales exceeded \$39.1 billion in 2014, up 11.3 percent from the previous year. According to the “United State Organic Food Market Forecast & Opportunities 2018” the US organic food market is expected to experience a compound annual growth rate of 14% until 2018.

Additional Benefits of Organic Agriculture

In addition, to growing consumer demand for organic food products, increased domestic organic production would improve water and soil quality. USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) studies show that organic farming builds organic soil matter better than conventional no-till farming and water quality is improved by a reduction in non-point source pollution. While U.S. organic exports totaled \$537 million in 2013, the value of U.S. organic imports was a staggering \$1.4 billion in 2013. Ironically, many of these products such as wine, soybeans and corn could be produced or grown in the United States. With growing consumer demand for organically produced goods, the market is providing economic incentives for U.S. farmers across a broad range of products but barriers to this transition remain due to a lack of research.

Increased Demand for Organic Research

The demand for research on organic agriculture is outpacing the available funds in this program for researchers and the need for information on the part of organic farmers. According to the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), only 38% of the applicants to the Organic Transitions Program receive funding. USDA’s National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) has identified a number of organic research priorities that cannot be funded due to a lack of resources. Increased funding for the research priorities identified by NOSB would address some of the issues that limit the growth of the organic industry.

The research topics we would like to highlight:

- Organic and sustainable farmers need access to germplasm that is unique to their management systems and to our changing climate. Unfortunately, in recent years, there have been fewer resources available for development of cultivars through public institutions. In Section 7406 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, the National Research Initiative was merged with the Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems to become the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). Congress included language within AFRI to make “conventional” plant and animal breeding a priority for AFRI research grants, consistent with the concerns expressed by the Appropriations Committee in preceding appropriations cycles. Unfortunately, USDA has made only modest progress toward addressing the classical breeding Farm Bill and appropriations directives. We ask that the FFAR place a high priority on classical breeding and public cultivar development within their research programs.
- Based on surveys and meetings conducted by OFRF with organic farmers, there are a number of critical research areas that include: soil quality the biology and microbiology; soil nutrient cycling (including carbon), economic performance of organic systems; crop quality; organic food nutrition; weed population dynamics and management; livestock wellness and disease control.

OFRF has been devoted to the scientific advancement of organic agriculture since 1990, and been a primary partner and integrator of both USDA and the private sector. We believe that FFAR’s emergence marks an auspicious opportunity to continue that role at a new level. We also believe that the organic economic sectors are realizing the need and reaching the capacity to contribute substantially to the types of public-private strategies FFAR should present.

We soon be publicizing and publishing the results of three projects nearing completion related to the state of organic research and the expressed needs of organic farmers and ranchers that will be relevant to your strategic planning. We would be glad to provide next generation research and educational opportunities to FFAR that will fill in gaps from previous governmental and private funding efforts which would lead to improved capacity of the organic industry to fulfill the needs of consumers and producers.

We look forward to continued exchange of priorities, requests and proposals. Thank you for your service in this important new institution.

Sincerely,



Meg Moynihan, OFRF Board Chair



Brise Tencer, OFRF Executive Director



Diana Jenkins, PhD., OFRF Research Director



Heather Darby, PhD., OFRF Board Member

Cc: Secretary Vilsack
Katy Raymond, FFAR
Ven Nerala, Acting COS, USDA-REE