



# ORGANIC FARMING RESEARCH FOUNDATION

*Fostering the improvement and widespread adoption of organic farming.*

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Re: Testimony for Fiscal Year 2018 to House Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

The Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) is a national, farmer-led non-profit organization that fosters the improvement and widespread adoption of organic farming systems. Organic agriculture is one of the fastest growing sectors of American agriculture, creating jobs in rural areas and keeping farmers in business. Ensuring the continued growth and job creation ability of the organic sector requires upholding the integrity of the U.S. Department of Agriculture organic label and continuing the modest but important investment in organic agriculture.

The following requests are for national programs vital for the continued growth and success of American agriculture. The agencies included in the requests are all at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA): National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). The programs are the Organic Transitions Integrated Research Program (ORG) at \$5 million, the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE) at \$30 million, the National Organic Program (NOP) at \$15 million, the Organic Production and Market Data Initiatives (ODI) at \$500,000, Food Safety Outreach Programs (FSOP) at \$10 million, and the Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA) at \$2.75 million.



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## **Organic Transitions Integrated Research Program (ORG) – USDA-NIFA**

FY 2016: \$4 million; FY 2018 OFRF request: \$5 million

An investment in research underpins growth in any sector. One of the barriers to continued growth in organic agriculture is the lack of research and information that growers need to improve and increase production. ORG is a national competitive research, education, and extension program that provides research to the fast-growing organic sector. To date, the USDA's investment in organic research has not kept pace with the sector's growth and market share. Overall, the amount of dedicated organic research funding at USDA has not increased in the past eight year, yet the organic market has grown by double digits and is now 5% of the U.S. retail market. Funding ORG at \$5 million would help bridge the gap between sector growth and support much needed research investment. This increase would account for 20% of competitive organic research funding at USDA that is applicable to both organic and conventional producers.

## **Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE) – USDA-NIFA**

Farm Bill Authorized: \$60 million; FY 2016 Actual: \$24.7 million; FY 2018 OFRF request: \$30 million

SARE is a farmer-driven and regionally led competitive research and extension grants program that provides farmers with business, marketing, and production information to be successful. SARE has helped turn farmer-driven research, education, and extension initiatives into profitable and environmentally sound practices for over two decades. Funding the program at \$30 million would jumpstart the Federal-State Matching Grants program, continue important on-farm research, and build capacity at the state level for research and extension to address regional and local needs.



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## **National Organic Program (NOP) – USDA-AMS**

Farm Bill Authorized: \$15 million; FY 2016 Actual: \$9.2 million; FY 2018 OFRF request: \$15 million

NOP enforces the national organic program standards, accredits certifiers, develops equivalency agreements, handles complaints – in essence, NOP ensures the integrity of the organic seal. NOP performs regulatory oversight of the organic label and ensures that consumers are getting what they pay for when they choose foods with the organic label. These are essential functions to the survival and growth of the organic sector. The National Organic Program (NOP) is vital to meeting growing consumer demand for organic products. Recognizing continued growth of the industry, we ask for \$15 million, the full amount authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill. This amount reflects the strong growth rate of the sector. The industry currently returns over \$200 for every \$1 spent on the NOP, so an increased investment would garner a strong return for the federal government. Moreover, this would give NOP the resources it needs to fully enforce the organic regulations, particularly as they relate to imports, to ensure that domestic production is protected; to continue to develop international equivalence arrangements to expand the market for American organic products worldwide; and to develop organic standards for emerging sectors.

## **Organic Production and Market Data Initiatives (ODI) – USDA-AMS, USDA-NASS**

Farm Bill Authorized: \$5 million; FY 2016 Actual: \$0.55 million; FY 2018 OFRF request: \$0.5 million for AMS.

Every sector needs reliable, current data and statistics to function properly and grow. USDA has historically not regularly collected basic data and statistics on the growing organic sector. In the 2014 Farm Bill, Congress directed USDA to collect data for organic through ODI.



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As the industry surpasses \$43 billion, the information collected through this multi-agency initiative is vital to maintaining stable markets, creating proper risk management tools, and negotiating equivalency agreements with foreign governments. The request of \$0.5 million for AMS will continue the import data collection under ODI. However, we urge strong intra-agency cooperation on continuing and expanding organic price reporting and organic data collection.

## **Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA) – USDA-RBCS**

Farm Bill Authorized: \$5 million; FY 2016 Actual: \$2.5 million; 2018 OFRF request: \$3 million

The ATTRA program, also known as the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service, has provided practical, cutting edge information to millions of farmers, livestock operations, extension agents, conservation professionals and many others for the past 30 years. In 2016, ATTRA responded to nearly 60,000 technical assistance requests for resources and materials, and over 590,000 users accessed information about sustainable agriculture on ATTRA's website with more than 2 million page views. Sustainable agriculture workshops and presentations by ATTRA staff reached over 47,000 attendees. The requested increase of \$250,000 for FY 2018 will support the continued work and expansion of ATTRA's *Armed to Farm* program, which was created in 2013 and aims to train returning military veterans in farm production and business skills. The small increase in funding will enable ATTRA to expand its work and continue to meet the needs of aspiring veteran farmers across the country.

## **Food Safety Outreach Program (FSOP)-USDA-NIFA**

FY 2016 Actual: \$5 million; 2018 OFRF request: \$10 million

Training farmers and processors in food safety practices is a critical piece of ensuring a safe food supply and is critical for all agriculture. In 2010, Congress passed the Food Safety



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Modernization Act (FSMA), the first major overhaul to our nation's food safety laws since the 1930s. Recognizing the importance of training as a part of a food safety system focused on prevention, Congress created a competitive grants program in FSMA, the Food Safety Outreach Program (FSOP) to fund farmer and food processor training efforts focused on helping small and mid-sized family farms, beginning farmers, diversified, sustainable, and organic agricultural operations, and on-farm processors adapt to new regulatory pressures. Over 100,000 produce farmers will be impacted by FSMA. With even a modest increase in FSOP funding in FY 2018, the program will still only be able to meet the needs of roughly 16,600 farmers across the country. While a modest amount of funding relative to the anticipated need, is a critical step to ensuring that farmers across the country have the training they need to comply. Without this training, the final FDA regulations will hurt small and mid-sized producers and processors and fall far short of the goal of improving food safety.

## **No Cuts to Mandatory Program Spending**

Over half a billion dollars in cuts have already been made to mandatory Farm Bill programs (primarily conservation and energy), and we urge the Subcommittee to not make anymore. These cuts have negative impacts on the baseline funding available for the next Farm Bill and should not be unfairly targeted to certain sectors of agriculture.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. Organic agriculture is a growth industry, providing strong economic opportunities for American farmers and businesses. Making the modest investments in the key programs described above will help to ensure the continued growth and development of the organic sector, help businesses continue to grow, support American farmers, and help to meet the strong consumer demand for organic food.