



# ORGANIC FARMING RESEARCH FOUNDATION

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

**October 5, 2016**

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## **FFAR Open Board Meeting Washington, D.C.**

### **Comments Submitted on Behalf of Organic Farming Research Foundation**

#### **FFAR Progress**

Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) is excited to see the progress that the Foundation for Food and Agricultural Research (FFAR) has made in just one year. Due to the profound pressures on our food and agricultural system, agricultural research funding is necessary to improve and strengthen our response and resiliency. FFAR's systematic and multifaceted challenge areas will help to support a full and diverse approach to structuring a holistic agricultural research agenda.

We are encouraged that FFAR is taking a creative approach to fill in funding gaps that are not being addressed sufficiently due to traditional institutional funding sources. We urge FFAR to ensure that scientific and farmer driven inquiry is supported in light of the potential challenges to securing the required research funding. As we work together, we encourage FFAR to incorporate the consumer and farmer needs and interests in their selection process, which may require an incorporation of social and biological sciences in a holistic interdisciplinary research process. We support a balance of basic and applied research activities focuses on addressing the challenges faced by our food and agricultural systems.

#### **Addressing Organic Agriculture Issues**

OFRF looks forward to working with FFAR to address how organic agriculture is a critical component to address the food and agricultural challenges we face domestically and globally, both today and in the future. We urge FFAR to keep in mind the ways that organic agriculture research fits into the FFAR vision. Organic agricultural systems are by far the most easily leveraged platform for the rapid progress that must be made to address many of the challenge areas identified by FFAR, specifically in terms of Water Scarcity, Innovation Pathways to Sustainability, Healthy Soils, Thriving Farms and other biological and climatological imperatives faced by our agricultural systems.



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As we work together to address these issues and challenges, we encourage FFAR to consider the growing consumer demand for organic agriculture and opportunities for organic farmers and ranchers. Organic agriculture is rapidly expanding both in terms of production and booming consumer demand. Organic sales grew from \$3.6B in 1997 to \$43.3B in 2015. However, we are currently unable to meet this demand. Increased investment in organic research can help American farmers meet the demand for organic food currently being supplied by imports from foreign producers.

Organic and conventional agriculture face many of the same issues. Research on organic and sustainable food systems, management practices, and biological interactions ultimately benefits both organic and conventional agriculture. By increasing research funding for organic agriculture, issues critical to the improvement of both conventional and organic producers can be researched and solved. Investment in organic agricultural research that leads to adoptable practices and technologies is critical to building a sustainable organic food system, protecting the environment, and creating economic opportunity for rural communities.

OFRF recently completed two significant projects that identify future research needs based on farmer input and an analysis of research investments to date. These reports help to identify the research gaps and emerging needs of farmers and ranchers. OFRF looks forward to sharing this data and working with FFAR to address the research priorities outlined in these reports.

- The aforementioned *2016 National Organic Research Agenda (NORA)* provides recommendations based on OFRF's 2015 online survey of and nationwide listening sessions with organic farmers, as well as a review of key documents and recommendations by other organizations, including the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB).
- *Taking Stock: Analyzing and Reporting Research Investments, 2002 -2014*, provides a review of all projects funded by the USDA Organic Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) and Organic Transitions Program (ORG) between 2002 and 2014, and recommendations for future investment.

Based on feedback from survey respondents regarding high priority needs, OFRF recommends intensified research funding and attention in the following areas:

- Soil health and fertility management
- Weed management
- Nutritional benefits of organic food
- Insect management
- Disease management



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We would be glad to share the findings of these reports with FFAR as we continue to work together to advance the science of organic production systems. OFRF looks forward to working with FFAR to address the research priorities outlined in these reports, to advance organic agriculture and bring more organic acres into production.

Thank You

**Questions:**

- As a grant making institution, OFRF works directly with organic farmers to ensure that our research and funding is meeting the needs of farmers and that producers have input in formulating the research agenda. How will you FFAR obtain input and feedback from end-users to ensure that these groups have input and are being supported by the research?