



ORGANIC FARMING RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Fostering the improvement and widespread adoption of organic farming.

Testimony Submitted by Jane E. Shey Policy Associate,

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to the House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies

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Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member Farr, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) to detail our fiscal year 2017 funding requests for USDA programs of importance to the organic farming sector.

USDA/ National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

Organic Transitions Program Request: \$5 million

The Organic Transition Program, is a critical research grant program that helps farmers address some of the challenges of organic production and marketing.

The demand for research on organic agriculture is outpacing the available funds in this program. According to NIFA, only 38% of the applicants to this 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. An increase in the Organic Transition Program would allow the

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NOSB to address some of the research issues that limit the growth of the organic industry. And given the innovative nature of organic agriculture, many of these research projects benefit all farmers, not just those in the organic sector. The Organic Transition Program was funded at \$5 million in fiscal year 2010, and about \$4 million for Fiscal Years 2011 through 2015. We are seeking \$5 million to restore the program to its FY 2010 level to in order to address the current low funding rate for this program.

USDA/ Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

National Organic Program Request: \$15 million

The National Organic Program is the regulatory program housed within the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service responsible for developing national standards for certified organic agricultural products. These standards assure consumers that products with the USDA organic seal meet consistent, uniform standards. The 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 globally, to continue to develop international equivalence arrangements to expand the market for American organic products worldwide; and to develop organic standards for emerging sectors.



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USDA/ National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) - Agriculture and Food

Research Initiative- Public Cultivar and Breed Development - Report Language

Section 7406 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 specifies priority areas with the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative [AFRI], including an emphasis on conventional (classical) plant and animal breeding. The Committee strongly concurs with the intent of this section, and notes the importance of having publicly available cultivars and breeds that are specifically bred to be adapted to the soils, climates, and farming systems of farmers of all regions. The Committee reiterates the request made in the Fiscal Year 2016 Senate report, and strongly urges NIFA to make public cultivar and breed development an increased priority for funding within the AFRI program and to create a separate priority area for this important work. The Committee further requests a report from the agency as to its plans for implementing this important requirement.

USDA/ National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) - Agriculture and Food

Research Initiative- Organic Research

As in recent years, the Committee continues to prioritize funding for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), as the flagship competitive grants research program for agriculture. However, in doing so, it is critical that the agency take actions to ensure that AFRI meets the needs of the full spectrum of the U.S. food and agriculture sector. The Committee notes that only about 0.1 percent of AFRI funding was used for research to address challenges of the U.S. organic sector during the period of Fiscal Years 2010-2014. As the organic sector struggles to boost domestic production in order to respond to the growing consumer demand for organic



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products, funding for organic research is critical, and the AFRI program should be part of that solution. The Committee urges the agency to execute a plan to incorporate organic research needs into the AFRI program more fully, and requests a report on the progress toward that goal.

USDA/Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)

Request: \$30 million

The SARE program is another valuable research program with a focus on environmentally sound practices and systems, with organic production research as one of the beneficiaries. Consistent with the increased demand for organic research, as well as the challenges presented by a changing climate, we are requesting \$30 million for the SARE Program to assist farmers as they try to improve and adjust their growing practices.

USDA/Rural Business Cooperative Service - Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA)

Request: \$2.75 million

ATTRA, a national sustainable agriculture information service, is an important source of information and technical assistance for farmers, ranchers, Extension agents, and educators on sustainable agriculture.

USDA/Conservation Technical Assistance

Request: \$760.7 million

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA), a subset of Conservation Operations, is the backbone of USDA's conservation programs. Through CTA, NRCS field staff work with farmers to develop and implement conservation plans to conserve resources on their farms. NRCS also



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uses CTA funds to assess conservation practices and systems, and to collect, analyze, and disseminate data on the condition of the nation's natural resources. The President's FY 2017 budget request proposes to increase CTA funding by 2.5 percent from \$741.6 million to \$760.7 million. We urge you to approve this increase, which will help more producers develop site-specific plans to conserve water, prepare for extreme weather, and address natural resource concerns on their land.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.