

# Tell the USDA: You Support the Organic Exemption from Federal Check-off Programs

The 2014 Farm Bill allows all organic farmers and businesses to pull assessed monies out of conventional check-off programs. In December, the USDA issued proposed rules to set this process up.

**A strong response from organic farmers and businesses will let the USDA know this exemption is important to organic agriculture**, and these rules need to be put in place as quickly as possible. The instructions below will guide you on how to submit comments. Here are talking points:

- **These rules give the same opportunity to farms and businesses with split operations** (organic and non-organic) as **100% organic operations** were granted in the 2002 Farm Bill to request a refund on organic sales assessments. This change corrects unequal treatment of organic certificate holders set by the 2002 Farm Bill.
- **This exemption will provide a level playing field.** It allows organically certified farmers and handlers to use check-off monies to benefit their own operations and future, similar to the benefit that non-organic operations receive from being assessed under the Commodity Promotion Law.
- **Organics is less than 5% of agricultural production and requires very specific research and marketing.** Farmers and handlers carry out a high percentage of direct-to-consumer and other marketing, or conduct research on their own farms.
- **The exemption process should be as efficient as possible.** Information on certified organic operations is now available in real time so certificate holders should only need to apply once for an exemption from the check-off, not every year. Commodity boards can be informed by the NOP when the operation loses its organic certification.
- **Organics should have a blanket exemption from all Research and Promotion programs.**
- **For Marketing Orders, the organic exemption should be the marketing portion average of all AMS Marketing Orders.**

## Comments must be postmarked no later than February 17, 2015

They can be electronically submitted at: <http://www.regulations.gov/#!submitComment;D=AMS-FV-14-0032-0001>

**By Fax: (202) 720-8938**

*By mail: Submit comments to this address:*

Docket Clerk, Marketing Order and Agreement Division, Fruit and Vegetable Program  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
STOP 0237  
Washington, DC 20250-0237

***Example of how to start your letter:***

Re: Proposed Rule regarding Exemption of Organic Products From Assessment Under a Commodity Promotion Law: AMS-FV-14-0032-0001 (Dec. 16, 2014) (Federal Register Number 2014-29280) (79 Fed. Reg. 75006 et seq.)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on USDA's Proposed Rule regarding Exemption of Organic Products From Assessment Under a Commodity Promotion Law.

I fully support the proposed rule mandated by a bi-partisan vote by both houses of Congress.

***Example of how to close your letter:***

I thank USDA for the speed in developing this proposed rule and urge them to proceed to a final rule as quickly as possible, with immediate implementation.

Sincerely

Name  
Address