



2023 FARM BILL RECOMMENDATIONS

#1 - OPPORTUNITIES IN ORGANIC PROGRAM

Organic agriculture provides many economic, environmental, and human health benefits. Consumers have recognized these benefits, resulting in a significant increase in sales of organic products annually, outpacing domestic organic production. The Farm Bill is an important policy tool to address this supply-demand imbalance, and to help build a more resilient food and farming system. NOC is highlighting four top priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill.

The Opportunities in Organic Program will offer a **suite of flexible, easy-to-access tools to reduce barriers to organic agriculture**. It will modernize reimbursements for organic certification, to ensure cost does not deter producers. It will increase technical expertise and support within public institutions and NGOs, so producers in any part of the country will have access to professional assistance with building healthy soil, natural pest management, and protecting ecosystems and natural resources. And it will help new producers transition to organic through a program that expands NGO capacity and activities and provides flexible funding to small- and mid-sized and socially disadvantaged producers.

The program will:

- **Expand organic practices** like cover cropping, composting, crop rotation, biological pest management, and more;
- Promote **farmer-to-farmer mentorship** and expanded skills for agricultural advisors;
- **Reduce barriers** to organic certification;
- Provide **culturally and regionally relevant** technical assistance;
- Invest in **scale-appropriate equipment and processing infrastructure**;
- Support **business and market development** and strategies;
- Increase **financial flexibility and land access**;
- **Advance research** to address technical, market, and supply chain challenges; and
- **Strengthen partnerships and marketing collaboration** with public institutions.

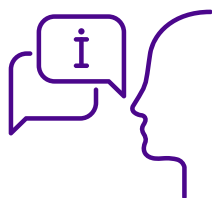
#1 - OPPORTUNITIES IN ORGANIC PROGRAM

The program will leverage relationships between farmers and ranchers and trusted NGOs to deliver support across the country quickly and successfully, while also building new expertise to support organic at the public institutions that shape U.S. agriculture. The program has three components:



INCREASED REIMBURSEMENT FOR COSTS RELATED TO THE ANNUAL ORGANIC CERTIFICATION PROCESS.

- Reimburse up to \$1,500 annually to address rising costs of certification.
- Increase flexibility to address barriers to certification for underserved producers and regions.



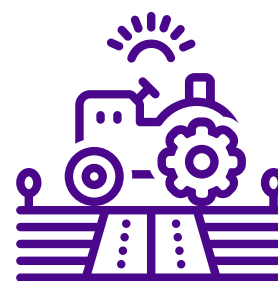
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR ORGANIC FARMERS

- Provide technical assistance that is appropriate for organic farming systems.
- Allocate funding for USDA to work with qualified organizations, colleges, universities, tribal institutions, and others with the necessary expertise.



TRANSITION AND RESILIENCE GRANTS

- Direct funds to qualified nonprofit organizations to help farmers transition to organic, using mentor-to-mentor training programs and other avenues.
- Create a network of organizations collaborating to address key regional, technical, and social barriers to transition.
- Build on USDA's recently launched Organic Transition Initiative.



Marker bills on this topic will soon be introduced.



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#2 - STRENGTHENING ORGANIC INTEGRITY

Ensuring continuous improvement of USDA Organic Standards

Organic is a voluntary program that depends on continuous improvement, high standards, and regular updates to the organic regulations to meet consumer expectations and achieve success in the marketplace. One of the major frustrations of the organic community has been the many bottlenecks associated with the rulemaking process at USDA and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). One of those bottlenecks is the clearance process within USDA for draft rules. To minimize this problem, NOC is recommending Farm Bill language to:



CODIFY "CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT" AS A BASIC TENET OF ORGANIC STANDARDS

Congress should make a clear statement that "continuous improvement" is a basic tenet of organic agriculture, and that regular updates to organic standards through the rulemaking process are necessary to achieve that goal.



REQUIRE TIMEFRAMES FOR UPDATING THE ORGANIC STANDARDS

Based on input from the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB).



UPDATE THE LIST OF EXPENSES FOR WHICH NATIONAL ORGANIC STANDARDS BOARD (NOSB) MEMBERS CAN BE REIMBURSED

NOSB membership is time consuming, and often requires farmers and other limited resource Board members to hire labor to look after their farms and other jobs during their service. NOC recommends that Congress clarify that these expenses can be reimbursed by USDA for Board members, which will enable a greater diversity of Board members to serve.



CREATE DEDICATED ORGANIC STAFF POSITIONS AT USDA'S OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL (OGC)

To work on National Organic Program (NOP) rules to reduce the bottlenecks for key organic rules.



HOLD USDA ACCOUNTABLE FOR ENFORCING CONSISTENT STANDARDS

To ensure consistent enforcement of USDA organic standards by organic certifying agencies.

Marker Bills on this topic will soon be introduced.

More information about NOC's Farm Bill recommendations:

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2023 FARM BILL RECOMMENDATIONS

#3 - EXPANDING ORGANIC RESEARCH

Tools to address production, marketing, and environmental challenges.

Research is key to tackling the many challenges facing farmers. Organic research benefits all farmers. In fact, many of the farming practices embraced by organic farmers, such as cover cropping and other regenerative agricultural practices, are now being adopted by conventional farmers. The ecosystem-based approach central to successful organic farming relies on research about ways to address multiple production goals and challenges based on natural systems working in concert.

A high priority should be placed on increased funding for organic research, to keep pace with the growing organic sector and to ensure that organic farmers have the tools they need to address production, marketing, and environmental challenges.

INCREASE FUNDING FOR THE ORGANIC AGRICULTURE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION INITIATIVE (OREI)

OREI is the flagship organic competitive grants research program with a proven track record in providing organic and conventional farmers alike with information about how to perfect their farming practices to maximize production using environmentally friendly farming systems. The Farm Bill should increase funding from \$60 million in FY 2024 to \$100 million in FY 2029.

FORMALLY AUTHORIZE THE EXISTING ORGANIC TRANSITION PROGRAM, WITH SOME UPDATES TO IMPROVE ITS OPERATION

The Organic Transition Program is currently funded as part of the NIFA “Integrated Activities” appropriated account. NOC recommends that the program be authorized in the Farm bill as the Researching the Transition to Organic Program (RTOP), with clear language focusing the program’s mission on research needs related to farmers transitioning to organic, to solidify the differences between it and the OREI program, which is focused on the research needs of existing certified organic farmers. The program should be structured to allow organizations to compete for grants, not just colleges and universities.



EXPAND THE ROLE OF USDA'S AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE IN ORGANIC RESEARCH

Require USDA to direct ARS to increase investments into organic agriculture research, through coordinating the ongoing and planned research while also increasing the amount of organically certified acreage ARS is operating.



REAUTHORIZE AND FUND THE ORGANIC DATA INITIATIVE TO PROVIDE SEGREGATED ORGANIC DATA FOR THE RAPIDLY GROWING ORGANIC SECTOR

Reauthorize the Organic Data Initiative (ODI) to expand segregated organic data collections and analysis by the National Agricultural Statistics Service, Agricultural Marketing Service, and the Economic Research Service. Provide one-time mandatory funding of \$10 million for ODI for the five-year cycle of the 2023 Farm Bill, as well as continued authorization for funding through the annual appropriations process.



ENSURE THAT FARMERS HAVE ACCESS TO SEEDS AND ANIMAL BREEDS THAT ARE REGIONALLY ADAPTED TO MEET THEIR SPECIFIC FARMING SYSTEMS, SOILS, CHANGING CLIMATES, AND MARKET NEEDS

Require USDA to dedicate \$75 million annually to fund the development of cultivars and animal breeds that are regionally adapted using conventional breeding methods to address farmers' unique soils, farming systems, market needs, and changing climates.

Require USDA to appoint a Seeds and Breeds Coordinator in the Office of the USDA Chief Scientist to oversee collaboration between existing USDA competitive grant research programs regarding regionally adapted cultivar and breed development activities.

Marker bills on this topic will soon be introduced.



2023 FARM BILL RECOMMENDATIONS

#4 - STRENGTHENING USDA CONSERVATION PROGRAMS FOR ORGANIC FARMERS

Recognizing organic farming as climate-smart and environmentally sound.

Organic certification is voluntary. Those farmers and handlers who choose organic certification agree to meet strict standards. For example, to become certified as organic, farmers must have an Organic System Plan (OSP) that includes detailed activities for how the farmer will “maintain and improve their natural resources and integrate cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that foster cycling of nutrients, promote ecological balance, and conserve biological diversity.”

USDA organic standards also require organic farmers to use farming practices and systems to build soil health, such as crop rotations, cover cropping, and managed grazing for livestock, all of which are key climate-friendly farming practices. Despite the strong conservation requirements that underlie USDA organic standards, USDA Conservation Programs are not well tailored to organic farmers.

NOC is recommending the following Farm Bill Conservation Title provisions to address some of these concerns:

CONSERVATION PROGRAM PAYMENT LIMIT EQUITY FOR ORGANIC FARMERS

Reasonable payment limits should be reestablished under the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), and the same limits should apply to both the EQIP Organic Initiative (OI) and the larger EQIP program. Currently, the payment limit for the EQIP OI is significantly lower than the payment limit for the general EQIP program pool. This payment limit inequity has been a disincentive for organic farmers to participate in the EQIP OI.

ORGANIC LITERACY TRAINING FOR NRCS STAFF

Organic farmers are often frustrated at the lack of knowledge that NRCS personnel have about organic agriculture. This problem exists at all NRCS staffing levels. The 2023 Farm Bill should include a provision to require NRCS, in consultation with the AMS National Organic Program, to give organic agriculture literacy training to all NRCS staff over a five-year cycle for existing staffers, and it should be part of the on-boarding training for all new NRCS staffers. NRCS should be authorized to partner with organizations with expertise in organic agriculture to provide this training.

#4 - STRENGTHENING USDA CONSERVATION PROGRAMS FOR ORGANIC FARMERS



ORGANIC EXPERTS IN EACH NRCS STATE OFFICE

The Farm Bill should require NRCS to have an organic expert on staff in every NRCS state office. Many NRCS state offices already have designated Organic Champions, but there are still others without this resource. The Farm Bill should require each NRCS state office to have at least one Organic Champion, and the general parameters of the Organic Champion position should be spelled out in the bill. This should include coordination with AMS personnel to stay abreast of organic production standards and acting as a point person for other NRCS staff in the state to improve service to organic farmers.



CROSSWALK BETWEEN ORGANIC CERTIFICATION AND USDA CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

To become certified as organic, farmers must have an Organic System Plan (OSP) that includes detailed plans for how the farmer will “maintain and improve their natural resources...” Organic farmers develop and comply with these OSPs at their own expense, and in doing so provide ecosystems services and significant ecological benefits that accrue to surrounding communities and to society as a whole. While the NRCS has acknowledged the conservation benefits of organic agriculture, there should be a greater recognition of those benefits embedded into NRCS conservation programs, such as EQIP, by giving credit for farmers’ compliance with their OSPs.



REQUIRE THE NRCS TO ESTABLISH A PERMANENT CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD FOR ORGANIC MANAGEMENT WITHIN TWO YEARS OF ENACTMENT

An Interim Practice Standard for Organic Management was originated by Vermont NRCS. As part of the USDA’s new Organic Transition Initiative, this practice standard will be available as an option for all state NRCS offices, which can decide whether to make it available in that State. NOC recommends that the Farm Bill require that a permanent practice standard for organic management be established within two years of enactment of the Farm Bill, to ensure that organic farmers in all states benefit from this initiative. We also recommend that a provision be added to the Crop Insurance Title to specify that farmers complying with this practice standard be considered as using “good farming practices” under RMA crop insurance rules.



SUPPORT THE GRAZING LANDS CONSERVATION INITIATIVE (GLCI) AND INCLUDE ORGANIC GRAZING SYSTEMS

USDA organic standards require meaningful access to pasture for organic ruminant animals. The NRCS Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) is a nationwide collaborative process of individuals and organizations working together to maintain and improve the management, productivity, and health of the Nation's privately owned grazing land. This Farm Bill should provide \$50 million in mandatory funding for the GLCI annually, authorize additional appropriated funding, and require the program to include organic grazing management strategies and collaborations within the program.

Marker bills on this topic will soon be introduced.