

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 8, 2024

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
Chair
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Hoeven
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Heinrich and Ranking Member Hoeven:

As you draft the Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, we request that you continue to invest in the rapidly growing organic agriculture industry by funding key programs outlined below. Organic agriculture provides environmental benefits and bolsters local economies by supporting nearly 28,000 family farms and businesses.¹ In 2022, total organic sales in the United States topped \$67 billion, nearly doubling 2013 sales of \$34 billion.² This trend is likely to continue as more consumers seek organic goods. However, federal support is needed to help current and future organic producers meet the growing demand.

Ensuring the continued growth of organic agriculture requires continuing the modest but important federal investments in organic agriculture. There are a critical set of national programs which work to provide the research, information, technical support, and regulatory oversight to permit the industry to flourish. These programs are:

National Organic Program (NOP) – Fund at \$29 million

NOP is a regulatory program responsible for developing and enforcing national standards for certified organic agricultural products. These standards assure consumers that products with the USDA organic seal meet consistent, uniform requirements. In a given year, NOP handles anywhere from 500 to 850 inquiries or complaints about violations of organic regulations. As funding has increased in recent years the average time needed to complete these investigations has fallen from 14 to 4 months.³ To sustain these efficiency gains, we support increasing funding

¹ <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/organic-certification/benefits>

² <https://ota.com/news/press-releases/22820>

³ <https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/2023NOPEenforcementReport.pdf>

from \$22.8 million in FY24 to \$29 million. From FY18 to FY23, authorization levels for this program trended upward from \$15 million to \$24 million; appropriating \$29 million for FY25 would be in line with that trend. As the organic industry continues to grow, it is essential that NOP receives the resources it needs to enforce organic regulations, develop international equivalency agreements to expand the market for American organic products worldwide, and develop organic standards for emerging sectors.

Organic Transitions Research Program (ORG) – Fund at \$15 million

Another challenge to the continued growth of organic agriculture is limited research into effective organic production methods. The Organic Transitions Research, Education, and Extension program (ORG) helps farmers fill their knowledge gaps, overcome barriers in transitioning to certified organic, and become successful organic farmers. We request an increase in FY24 funding from \$7.5 million to \$15 million to keep pace with growth in organic farming.

Organic Production and Market Data Initiatives (ODI) – Fund at \$3 million

ODI is a multi-agency organic data collection initiative that collects and disseminates data regarding organic agriculture through the AMS. This includes information vital to maintaining stable markets, creating risk management tools, and negotiating equivalency arrangements with foreign governments. ODI has been successful in providing valuable data to policymakers and the organic industry at a low cost. We support appropriating \$3 million for ODI in FY25 to continue and expand upon organic price reporting and data collection.

National Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP) - Fund at \$11 million

OCCSP reimburses up to 75 percent of annual certification costs for organic operations. Certification is an important step that ensures compliance with rigorous USDA organic standards, however, it can create barriers for organic producers, particularly smaller and medium-sized farmers who may not be able to afford the full cost. In recognition of the economic, environmental, and human health benefits of organic production, Congress has consistently helped to defray certification costs. Though the OCCSP received \$8 million in FY24 through the Farm Bill extension, we urge you to appropriate \$11 million in FY25 to ensure program funding does not lapse and continues to keep pace with the growing number of organic farmers and handlers that are seeking certification.

While federal funds appropriated to support organic agriculture have been modest in recent years, the return on that investment has been substantial and impactful. From farm fields to businesses, organic agriculture continues to be a growing industry which provides jobs throughout the supply chain. We ask that you continue to support its growth by funding the organic-specific programs outlined in this letter.

Sincerely,



Peter Welch
United States Senator



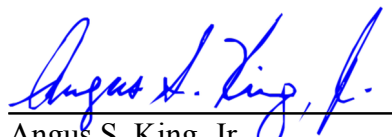
Tina Smith
United States Senator



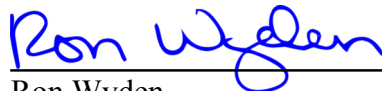
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Robert P. Casey, Jr.
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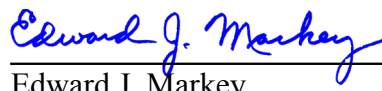
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United States Senator



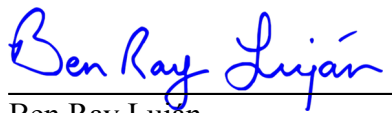
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