



ACTION ALERT

June 19, 2007

FINAL PUSH BEFORE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE RELEASES ITS FARM BILL PROPOSAL

URGE YOUR SENATOR TO INCLUDE KEY ORGANIC PROVISIONS IN THE SENATE FARM BILL PROPOSAL

Phone calls or faxed letters are needed **immediately**, directed to members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry to urge them to include organics in their Farm Bill Proposal. The Chair of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Tom Harkin (D-IA) is finalizing his initial draft version of the 2007 Farm Bill as we speak, and has promised to include all of our organic priorities. Now the other members of the Committee need to hear from us about the importance of including organic provisions in the 2007 Farm Bill. If we can get all the organic priorities into the initial version of the bill with the active, or at least tacit support of a majority of the Committee members, it will put us on the path to victory without having to try to amend the bill later in the process.

PLEASE CALL OR FAX TODAY

The message is simple: I am a constituent and am calling to ask Senator _____ to advocate for key organic provisions in the Committee's Farm Bill proposal.

To compete for the huge increases in consumer demand for organics, U.S. producers need a fair share of federal support in the 2007 Farm Bill. This package will encourage domestic production of organic goods, keeping the economic and environmental benefits in this state and in the U.S.

Key provisions:

1. National Organic Certification Cost-Share (\$5 Million/yr. mandatory funding.)
2. Organic Conversion Stewardship Incentives (\$50 Million/yr. mandatory funding, equal split for financial and technical assistance.)
3. Fair Share for Organic Research (at least \$15 Million/yr. mandatory funding for Organic Research and Extension grants; amend the National Research Initiative to include classical plant and animal breeding; adequate funding for organic data collection.)
4. Crop Insurance Equity for Organic (remove 5% surcharge and allow for organic price payouts).
5. Conservation Security Program (full mandatory funding and integrated application for organic producers.)

[See more background below. If you are able to engage the Senator's staff in a longer conversation, this will help you communicate the importance of each specific item.]

It's easy to call or write.

Please call your Senator's office (phone numbers below). Ask the receptionist to connect you with the staff person responsible for agriculture. If the agriculture aide is unavailable, leave your name, phone number, and the message above on the aid's voice mail, or if necessary, with the receptionist.

If you prefer to write, fax a brief letter with the same points above, along with your name, address, and contact information (fax numbers below).

Background:

National Organic Certification Cost Share Program – The Organic Certification Cost Share Program was authorized in the 2002 Farm bill and provides modest assistance to help farmers cover the cost of organic certification, an expense that has risen considerably since the advent of USDA's National Organic Program. The program received \$5 million in mandatory funding in the 2002 Farm Bill, which was completely utilized by 2006. The program should be reauthorized in the next Farm Bill with increased funding to meet the overwhelming demand from the growing organic sector, and per farm payments should be increased to a maximum of \$750 per year, an amount consistent with increasing USDA organic certification fees.

Organic Conversion – As a result of the high production standards required of organic producers, and the three-year minimum time requirements for converting land to organic production, the barriers to organic conversion are significant. It is critical that the standards for organic production remain high, because they are the underpinning of growing consumer demand for organic products. However, it is also critical that the new Farm Bill include financial and technical assistance to help farmers convert to organic production, including assistance for implementing organic conservation practices and for business and marketing planning. At least half of the funding allocated to transition support should be dedicated to technical assistance and education programs, due to the knowledge-intensive character of organic farming.

Research – USDA research programs have not kept pace with the growth of organic agriculture in the marketplace. Although organic currently represents about 3 percent of total U.S. food retail market, the share of USDA research targeted to organic agriculture and marketing only represents 0.6% annually. A coordinated strategy for scaling-up organic agricultural research, outreach and development should provide a mixture of funding methods and programs to gradually achieve an overall "fair share" spending total of approximately \$120 million/year. This should include \$15 million mandatory funding for the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative competitive grant program that funds research and extension projects to meet the production, marketing and policy needs of the growing organic industry. Classical plant and animal breeding should be listed as one of the priorities for competitive research grants under the National Research Initiative, as public resources for classical plant and animal breeding have dwindled, causing limited access to germplasm and the diversity of seed variety and animal breed development that organic and sustainable farmers depend upon. Adequate funding should

be allocated to expand the Organic Production and Marketing Data Initiative which requires USDA to collect and publish segregated organic data to meet the needs of organic producers, processors, and consumers.

Crop Insurance Equity – Currently organic producers are required to pay a 5 percent surcharge on their crop insurance rates. In addition, organic producers are often reimbursed for losses based on conventional prices, without recognition of the higher value of their organic products. These inequities for organic producers should be rectified.

Conservation Security Program - The Conservation Security Program is an innovative and proactive stewardship incentives program that was authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill. The CSP provides financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers who develop and maintain conservation systems that solve critical natural resource and environmental concerns, rewarding them for investments of labor, management, and capital aimed at fostering healthy, productive, and non-eroding soils, clear air and water, energy savings, and wildlife habitat.

Despite its wide popularity with farmers and ranchers, the intent and scope of CSP have been stunted by repeated cuts to its funding levels. Changes need to be made to make it easier for organic producers to participate in the program.

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Democrats

Member	Phone	Fax
Tom Harkin (IA), Chair	202-224-3254	202-224-9369
Patrick Leahy (VT)	202-224-4242	202-224-3479
Kent Conrad (ND)	202-224-2043	202-224-7776
Max Baucus (MT)	202-224-2651	202-224-0515
Blanche Lincoln (AR)	202-224-4843	202-228-1371
Debbie Stabenow (MI)	202-224-4822	202-228-0325
Ben Nelson (NE)	202-224-6551	202-228-0012
Ken Salazar (CO)	202-224-5852	202-228-5036
Sherrod Brown (OH)	202-224-2315	202-228-6321
Robert B. Casey, Jr. (PA)	202-224-6324	202-228-0604
Amy Klobuchar (MN)	202-224-3244	202-228-2186

Republicans

Member	Phone	Fax
Saxby Chambliss (GA) Ranking Member	202-224-3521	202-224-0103
Richard Lugar (IN)	202-224-4814	202-228-0360
Thad Cochran (MS)	202-224-5054	202-228-9450
Mitch McConnell (KY)	202-224-2541	202-224-2499
Pat Roberts (KS)	202-224-4774	202-224-3514
Lindsey Graham (SC)	202-224-5972	202-224-3808
Norman Coleman (MN)	202-224-5641	202-224-1152
Michael Crapo (ID)	202-224-6142	202-228-1375
John Thune (SD)	202-224-2321	202-228-5429
Chuck Grassley (IA)	202-224-3744	202-224-6020

