

OTA Farmers Advisory Council Operating Guidelines

PURPOSE

The Organic Trade Association (OTA) Farmers Advisory Council provides the OTA Board of Directors and staff with input from small- to medium-sized organic farmers, ranchers and growers on matters pertinent to the advancement of organic agriculture, with a specific focus on OTA's policy agenda.

One of OTA's Core Values is the understanding that "organic farms are the foundation of the organic industry." The OTA Farmers Advisory Council helps to realize this core value by giving voice to organic farmers to influence OTA's policy and advocacy work.

ORGANIZATION

The OTA Farmers Advisory Council is comprised of representatives of state and regional farming organizations representing organic that enter into an agreement with OTA for the mutual benefit of strengthening the organic industry's national public policy influence. These strategic alliances enhance the capacity of the sector to grow and protect U.S. organic agriculture in the fast-changing political environment. The partners work together with OTA, while remaining independent organizations.

Qualifying criteria for participating organizations:

- Existing governance/ membership structure for representing organic producers,

FUNCTIONS

The OTA Farmers Advisory Council formalizes and improves two-way communication between OTA and organic producers. Through dialog and upfront input, the Council gives voice to organic farmers to directly influence OTA's policy work and allows OTA to better represent the diversity of organic producers in its policy and advocacy work.

Meetings

The OTA Farmers Advisory Council will strive to host a minimum of three meetings per year:

- Two conference calls held at a date and time convenient to the Council members.
- One in-person discussion at the annual meeting or other convention, conference or gathering of each partner organization where representatives from the OTA policy staff and/or from the OTA Board of Directors will meet with the organic growers who are participating in the Council.

An agenda will be distributed prior to each meeting that includes time for:

- i. OTA to share its priorities and ask for input

- ii. Council members to share their experiences and concerns from the field

Recommendations and action items will be identified and recorded by OTA staff.

One of the two OTA Farmers Advisory Council co-chairs plus 50 percent of the voting membership will constitute a quorum and allow the Council to proceed with any official business. Decisions will be made by a consensus where possible, or majority of Council members will prevail.

OTA's Producers Farmers Council is not a Governance Board or an independent organization.

STRUCTURE

- OTA's Farmers Advisory Council is co-chaired by the OTA Farmer Board Seat* designee and the OTA Community Relations Committee (CRC) Chair.
- OTA's Executive Vice President, or designee, serves as the staff liaison.
- Each of the state and regional organic farming organizations that enter into a strategic alliance with OTA will receive one Council seat for every 500 organic producers they represent, with a minimum of one seat per partner. The representatives should reflect the diversity of that organization's producer base, to the extent possible.
- The alliance partners may select who participates on their behalf via a process determined by them.
- Each alliance partner may also assign one senior and/or policy staff to serve as ex-officio, non-voting, Council participants for the purpose of coordinating priorities and activities amongst organizations.
- The council is intended to represent the diversity of crop and livestock operations in the U.S..

Members

Established through a Memorandum of Understanding endorsed by the Board of Directors of both organizations, or direct membership in OTA.

***OTA FARMER BOARD SEAT**

The OTA Farmers Advisory Council will be asked to nominate and recommend one individual for OTA's Board Nominated Slate to fill the OTA Board of Directors Farmer Seat. Any candidate that the OTA Farmers Advisory Council puts forth must meet the definition of a farmer as identified by the OTA Board, have a proven knowledge base and commitment to organic agriculture, and have a clear understanding of the scope of the OTA Board role and time commitment.

For the purposes of the designated OTA Farmer Board Seat, the OTA Board defines a farmer as someone who:

- Owns, leases, or is a partner in an organic farm;
- and has a full-time functional role as an organic farmer;
- and derives their primary income from an organic farm.

The term of the Farmer Board Seat will be three years, consistent with all other OTA Board seats. In the event that the Farmer Board Seat is unable to be filled either through direct election or appointment, the seat will not remain open and will be filled by another qualified candidate. The nomination process will be repeated in the next election cycle, with the intention to fill the Farmer Board seat in the subsequent OTA Board election. Each time the OTA Farmer Board Seat is open, the OTA Producers Advisory Council will be asked to weigh-in.

ACCOUNTABILITY

OTA staff, in conjunction with the OTA Board Community Relations Committee, will, at minimum, send an annual report to the OTA Board of Directors on the outcomes of the Council meetings. This report will also be made available to the OTA Farmers Advisory Council and strategic alliance partnering organizations.