



SUPPORTING ORGANIC & TRANSITIONING FARMERS TO INCREASE DOMESTIC ORGANIC PRODUCTION

Organic farming presents a promising economic opportunity for U.S. farmers, yet less than one percent of domestic farmland is certified organic today. The arduous three-year transition process is an important prerequisite to becoming eligible for organic certification, but there is little federal support to help farmers through this transition. Many farmers face steep challenges and barriers when seeking to transition to organic production. Given the long-term economic and environmental benefits organic agriculture provides, Congress should wisely invest in federal programs that support farmers in successfully transitioning to, and staying in, organic production.

IMPROVE RISK MANAGEMENT TOOLS

The financial risk taken on by new or transitioning organic farm operators or landowners can be a significant barrier to adopting sustainable agricultural and conservation practices. Organic farmers need improvements in the farm safety net in order to achieve appropriate risk management tools for organic farms as well as to eliminate policies that penalize farms when transitioning to organic production.

- **ASK:** When calculating Actual Production History for organic crop insurance, allow producers to utilize their previous yield history, whether conventional or transitional, with appropriate discounts for known reductions in yields that may occur when employing organic production practices.
- **ASK:** Review policies that cap Contract Price Addendums at two-times the conventional price election for any specific crop.
- **ASK:** Under the Whole-Farm Revenue Protection Program, recognize the change in farm revenue after a farm has transitioned to organic. Eliminate the 30% cap on increased production value under the expansion provision.

SUPPORT FOR RESEARCH AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Research in organic production can accelerate the growth of the organic industry by identifying cost effective and environmentally sustainable solutions to on-farm production challenges. Successful organic and transitioning farmers also need to rely on agronomists and extension agents that are trained in organic production methods. However, there is a large gap in research and technical assistance investment to meet the needs of organic and transitioning farmers across production systems, scales, and geographic regions.

- **ASK:** Policy improvements to the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI)
 - Increase current cap of \$2 million to invest in larger scale and longer-term grants
 - Increase the budget allowance for extension and outreach activities
 - Prioritize small grains, food grade and perennial grains breeding
 - Encourage applied research to develop strategies and techniques to reduce the risk of transitioning
 - Emphasize disease resistance, climate change resilience and water conservation and holding capacity
- **ASK:** Develop a competitive grant program for providing technical services to organic and transitioning farmers.
- **ASK:** Reduce the industry contribution under the USDA NRCS cooperative agreements from 50:50 to 25:75 for organic technical assistance providers.



SUPPORTING ORGANIC & TRANSITIONING FARMERS TO INCREASE DOMESTIC ORGANIC PRODUCTION

MARKET AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Improved access to land, credit and capital, investment in distribution systems and infrastructure, and facilitating more market connections between buyers and sellers for the organic market will create opportunities to expand organic production. The government should adopt policies that encourage organic transition in a way that does not distort markets but rather facilitates producer and handler choice in response to market signals.

- **ASK:** Provide market and infrastructure development grants for minor rotational crops that improve soil health.
- **ASK:** Provide tax credits for landowners who have long-term leases under organic production.
- **ASK:** Encourage organic's eligibility within federal rural development programs.

ESTABLISH A FEDERAL PROGRAM TO HELP FARMERS TRANSITION TO ORGANIC

Despite the unique challenges of organic production, there is no single federal program at USDA to assist farmers with managing the process of transitioning to organic. Most programs administered by USDA to help U.S. farmers are tailored to the needs of conventional farmers, not organic farmers, which serves as a major barrier and disincentive for farmers interested in transitioning.

Congress should wisely invest in establishing a program at USDA to evaluate and address the various barriers associated with transitioning to organic.

