

ORGANIC TRADE ASSOCIATION

Farmers Advisory Council

2018 ANNUAL REPORT



Organic
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trade association

The Organic Trade Association (OTA) Farmers Advisory Council (FAC) is a broad coalition between OTA and organic farming organizations across the country and various farming sectors. Each organization appoints one producer for each 500 members they represent to serve as the voice of their organization in FAC discussions. In addition to the organizational representatives, OTA organic farmer members may volunteer to participate in FAC. Current membership in FAC includes organizations representing over 8,000 organic producers from most regions and production systems across the country including dairy, eggs, cotton, grain, produce, beef, and poultry.

CCOF Inc. (California Certified Organic Farmers)

With 2,732 farmers, CCOF is one of the larger organizations in FAC. Its farmers grow 420 different types of crops and raise 17 different types of livestock throughout the U.S. and Mexico (2,367 and 190 operations, respectively). Its FAC representatives are as varied as CCOF's membership, ranging from the smallest diverse farmers to the larger-scale perennial farmers. Being a part of FAC allows CCOF the opportunity to "hear perspectives from diverse types of farmers and regions," and be included on "farmer-to-farmer exchange of ideas on federal policy through the farm bill discussions."

Georgia Organics

The newest member to FAC, Georgia Organics, represents approximately 300 growers throughout the state of Georgia. Its certified organic growers range in size from one acre to more than 4,000 acres.

Montana Organic Association

The Montana Organic Association is the voice of the Montana organic community. It provides education, information, support, assistance, promotion, and representation for organic producers, processors, handlers, retailers, consumers, researchers, agricultural service providers, and other interested parties.

Organic Egg Farmers of America

Organic Egg Farmers of America (OEFA) is made up of individual organic egg farmers, organizations that represent hundreds of organic egg farmers, and allied industry businesses. The primary aim of the organization is to educate and provide dialogue on issues affecting organic egg producers no matter what scale. Especially given current issues such as the Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices Rule being shelved and the pursuit of robust integrity in all aspects of production, OEFA is appreciative to be a part of the OTA Farmers Advisory Council.

Oregon Tilth Certified Organic

With farmers located in 39 states and Canada, Iceland, Mexico, and Panama, Oregon Tilth Certified Organic certifies 915 farm domestically and 122 farm operations internationally. Their farmers produce a wide variety of crops and livestock products and represent all scales of production. Through participating in FAC calls, Oregon Tilth Certified Organic has been able to engage "in discussion on 'hot topics' facing the organic farming community, such as hydroponics/aquaponics and fraudulent imports." Additionally, FAC has allowed them to distribute the "OTA Farm Bill Survey to our farmers, providing the opportunity for input on OTA Farm Bill Priorities."

Organic Valley/CROPP Cooperative

With over 2,000 farmers, Organic Valley/CROPP Cooperative is the nation's largest farmer-member organic cooperative. With farmers located in 36 states, the cooperative processes and markets members' organic milk, as well as eggs, meat (beef, pork, poultry), produce, and crops. FAC allows them to "hear what other organic farmers are dealing with across the nation and in different crops/ livestock that we're not familiar with at the coop." It is also "useful to have FAC help redefine or shape

Council Members





Twenty organic farmers – including one major league baseball player – stepped up to the plate for thousands of organic farmers throughout the country when they came to Washington in late November to participate in the Organic Trade Association's first Farmers Advisory Council fly-in and talk with lawmakers and policy officials about organic priorities in the 2018 Farm Bill.

how we communicate about the priorities we as the association have determined.”

Pennsylvania Certified Organic

Joining FAC in 2017, Pennsylvania Certified Organic (PCO) is one of the newer organizations to join FAC. PCO represents 1,333 farmers throughout the eastern part of the U.S. (DC, DE, IN, MA, MD, ME, NC, NJ, NY, OH, PA, VA, VT, WV). PCO farmers grow all types of field crops (hay, pasture, corn, soybeans, small grains), produce (various varieties of vegetables and fruit), herbs, tree fruits, forest botanicals (ginseng, black cohosh, goldenseal), wild crops (ramps, nettles, watercress, wild oregano), and more. Additionally, their farmers raise dairy cattle, beef cattle, pullets, layers, broilers, turkey, ducks, sheep, goats, and swine. Being a part of FAC has allowed PCO farmers' perspectives to be elevated into OTA's policy work through participating in items like the Farm Bill priorities. Additionally, FAC grants PCO the ability to be “aware of the issues facing farmers around the country and how those issues can evolve into a position or other action taken by FAC or OTA. It has been unifying to know that often we are facing the same challenges no matter where in the country we are, what we grow, or how big our farms are.”

Tilth Alliance

Newly created in 2016 when Seattle Tilth, Cascade Harvest Coalition, and Tilth Producers merged, Tilth Alliance represents approximately 500 farmers across the state of Washington, with members in almost every county. Its farmers produce a wide variety of items including specialty crops, livestock, and grains. Tilth Alliance's members have been excited that they have been more involved in OTA and FAC, given their presence in the industry.

Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance

Working to preserve, protect, and ensure the sustainability and integrity of organic dairy farming across the West, the Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance represents over 285 dairy producers. Its farmers are located in AZ, CA, CO, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, TX, UT, WA, and WY.

Farm Bill All the Time

The Farmers Advisory Council's 2018 activities focused mainly on ensuring organic producers were represented in ongoing Farm Bill negotiations and marker bills. The work started in 2016 with FAC organizations pushing out OTA's Farm Bill survey and garnering over 500 responses. This survey laid the foundation for OTA's Farm Bill policy agenda. Over the next year, various marker bills and policy positions were developed and shared with Agriculture Committee members in both the House and Senate. FAC's 2018 work plan focus was on organizing and executing OTA's first Organic Farmer Fly-in, which occurred in late November 2017. The success of this fly-in was made apparent by the strong support from Agriculture Committee members for OTA's priorities and the widespread adoption of these positions by other organic farming advocacy groups.

Farm Bill Platform

The Organic Trade Association would not have been able to hone our development of Farm Bill priorities without the input from real organic farmers and organic farming organizations participating in FAC. Justification for these positions came from the direct engagement and advocacy from organic farmers across the country who took time out of their busy lives to participate in conference calls, vet and refine proposals, and ultimately bring the message to DC, so lawmakers knew how to ensure the Farm Bill works for all of America's producers. The platform focused on a number of areas:

- ✓ Trade oversight and adequate funding for USDA enforcement of the organic label.
- ✓ Increasing USDA funded research for organic farming.
- ✓ Promoting exports of U.S. grown organic products through the Market Access Program.
- ✓ Maintaining and improving the safety net for organic farmers through programs including crop insurance, low interest financing, marketing assistance loans, certification cost-share dollars, and conservation assistance programs.

Organic Farmer Fly-In

The first Organic Farmer Fly-In to D.C. was held in late November 2017 by the largest coalition in the U.S. of organic farmers and organic farming organizations, representing over 8,000 certified organic farmers. It brought in farmers from states stretching from California to Montana to Georgia, from the Bluegrass farmland of Kentucky to the prairies of Kansas and Colorado. The diverse group included seasoned organic farmers and farmers just transitioning to organic, large organic grain farmers and the farmer of a five-acre urban organic garden in Atlanta, organic vegetable and fruit growers, dairy farmers and egg producers, the country's largest organic rice grower, and one major league baseball player, Jayson Werth, former Washington Nationals star player and owner of an organic farm in Illinois. The farmers visited the offices of 30-some lawmakers, meeting in person with several lawmakers including Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Pat Roberts of Kansas and House Agriculture Committee Ranking Member Collin Peterson of Minnesota. Moving off Capitol Hill for their second day in Washington, the organic advocates met with officials at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, and with other farmer and commodity associations. The result of this direct advocacy was seen with the introduction and support for various marker bills that advanced the Farm Bill platform developed by FAC and OTA. The success of this fly-in convinced



Looking Forward to 2019

The Organic Trade Association Farmers

Advisory Council underwent an organizational

transition with the hiring of Johanna Mirenda as the newest Farm Policy Director. The strength of the Council is in its members and the direct engagement from organic farmers looking to affect change through reasonable and well-developed policy recommendations. The second annual Organic Farmer Fly-In is scheduled for February. Quarterly conference calls are on the books, and an ambitious work plan focused squarely on passage and implementation of the Farm Bill lies ahead for the diverse and committed organic stakeholders who form the backbone of OTA Farmers Advisory Council.

the group that a fly-in should occur annually, with the next one planned for mid-February 2019 to meet the new Congress and work with agencies on implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill, assuming its passage is successful this fall.

Farm Bill Conference Committee & Implementation

With both Houses of Congress passing a version of the Farm Bill, the conference committee is now hashing out differences between the two bills. Leading up to the two versions, FAC members were instrumental in championing various amendments that would preserve the authority of the National Organic Standards Board and increase availability of crop insurance for organic farmers. FAC members remain engaged through the conference committee process, and have participated in development of report language to ensure organic priorities are implemented appropriately. Assuming the 2018 Farm Bill passes on time, FAC will reset its focus to the agencies responsible for carrying out the implementation of the Farm Bill.

The Organic Trade Association Farmers Advisory Council is co-chaired by Perry Clutts of Pleasantview Farm, the OTA 2017-2018 Board of Directors Farmer Seat holder, and Doug Crabtree of Vilicus Farms, the Community Relations Committee Chair. FAC is supported by Johanna Mirenda, the Organic Trade Association Farm Policy Director.



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