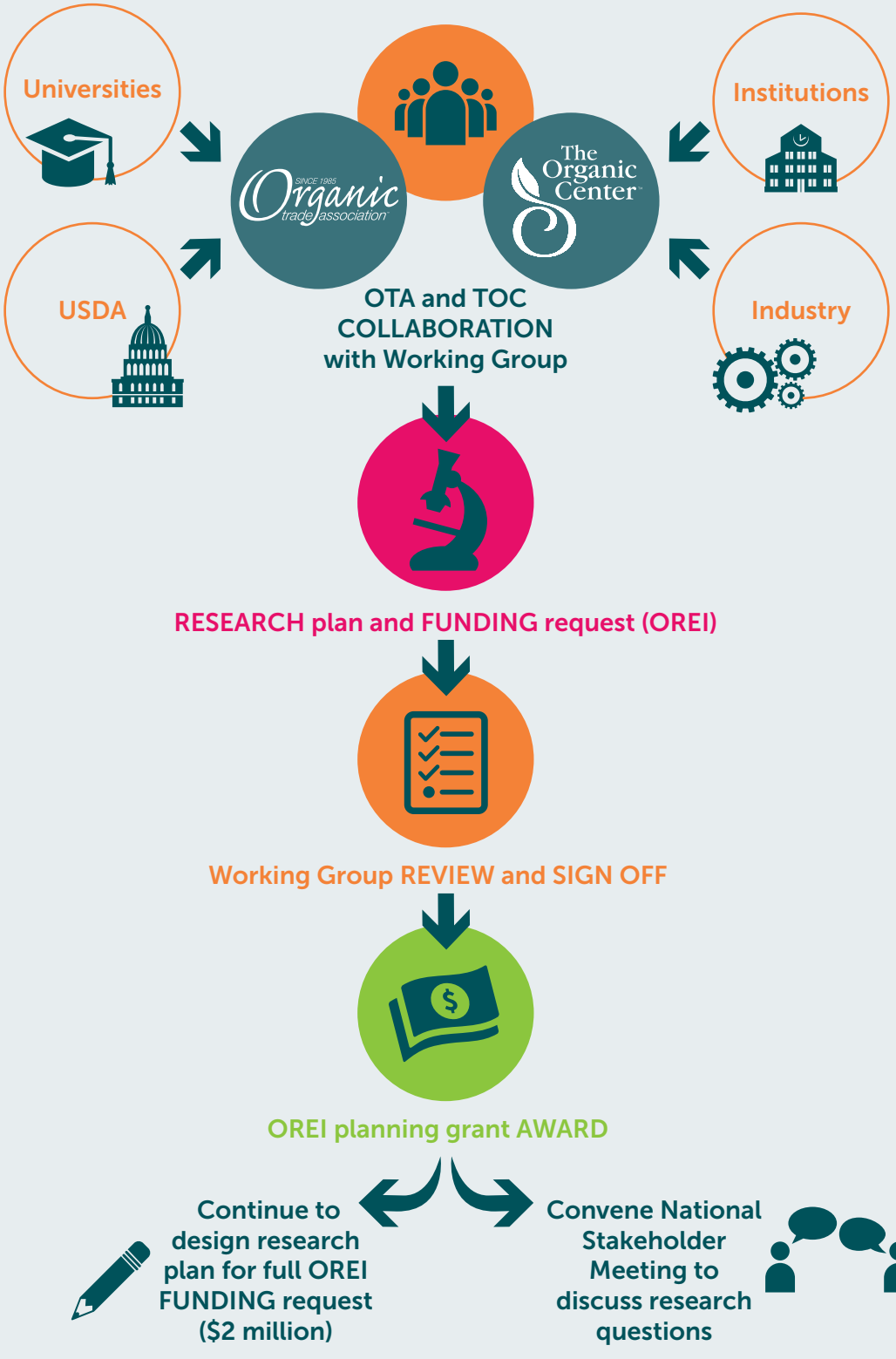
Developing an

ORGANIC ALTERNATIVE TO CELERY POWDER

AN OTA WORKING GROUP PROGRESS UPDATE



SPOTLIGHT: CELERY POWDER WORKING GROUP UPDATE

An Organic Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) planning grant has been awarded to the University of Wisconsin, with The Organic Center and The Organic Trade Association as collaborators, to help identify an organic alternative to conventional celery powder in curing organic processed meat products.

Celery powder has been in use for over a decade as a "curing" agent in certain processed meat products as an alternative to sodium and potassium nitrate and nitrite. Since 2007, conventionally grown celery powder has been allowed for use in certified organic meat products. During this time, the organic processed meat industry has grown to an estimated $150 million. As the demand for organic processed meats increases, the organic industry wants to replace the use of conventional celery powder with an organic alternative.

The awarding of this grant reflects the involvement and hard work for over a year of the Organic Trade Association's National List Innovation Working Group, which was formed in 2015 to invest in research to identify and develop alternatives to inputs on the National Organic Program's list of approved ingredients for certified organic products.

The first project of the National List Innovation Working Group was to look at the development of organically grown celery or other vegetables used in the curing of organic meat products. Celery powder is a key preservative in the curing of meats, but organic celery powder is not as effective in curing as non-organic celery powder. While organic stakeholders would like to remove non-organic celery powder from their toolbox, an appropriate alternative needs to be developed first.

The OREI-funded research will help identify potential varieties of organic crops that would meet the chemical specification needed for curing, while being easily incorporated into current crop rotation systems. It will also identify potential management protocols that need to be developed to achieve target nitrate levels in the curing crop to produce the required shelf life, prevent bacteria in the cured meat, and produce the desired flavor, color and texture in food.

Identifying solutions for the organic processed meat industry's need for a curing powder is extremely complex, and the timeline to develop an effective organic alternative is short. At a minimum, it will require a very deliberate and well-researched road forward as a multi-regional, multi-stakeholder coordinated effort. It will also require substantial funding. Although this is the early stages of the project with many unknowns ahead, we believe that the commitment and organization of the Celery Powder Working Group will provide a solid model on how to best carry out the process for developing alternatives to a National List material.