

What is the Farm Bill?

The Farm Bill shapes agriculture in America. Every five years, Congress votes on legislation that sets policy on topics affecting agriculture, nutrition, conservation, and forestry. Important topics that pertain to organic agriculture include Organic Cost Share Program, Climate Change, research into organic, and funding of the National Organic Program.

How do I make my voice heard?

The Farm Bill is passed by Congress. The most effective way to make sure your elected officials know and understand what the public wants and needs is by telling them. IOIA encourages everyone to contact their House and Senate representatives and/or individuals on the House and Senate Agricultural committees.

Contact information for your representatives is available below. The most effective advocacy is done in your own words so we did not include a stock letter. Please feel free to copy and paste as much as you would like into your own comments!!

What is IOIA advocating for?

Climate Change and Conservation

- **Create a mechanism by which organic farmers can receive payments for carbon sequestration and other environmental practices broadly recognized as essential to mitigating the effects of climate change.** These practices are central to certified organic farming operations.
 - Fund research that explores the most effective agricultural practices for mitigating climate change and sequestering carbon.
 - Forest trees sequester many times more CO₂ than do cultivated soils. While perhaps less intensive than crop production, the longevity and stability of these managed areas comprise a crucial farm asset and preserving them is a valuable public service. We need to encourage sustainable silviculture practices by providing grants that allow

operations to establish silvopasture and other sylvan agricultural systems as part of their whole farm system.

- It is imperative that farms currently utilizing conservation practices that mitigate climate change are rewarded for these historical and continued efforts. The practice of only incentivizing change rather than continuation or improvement of sustainable practices encourages operations to regress to less sustainable management practices; sometimes in order to be eligible for additional funding.
- **Exponentially Increase and prioritize funding for the EQIP Organic Initiative and Conservation Stewardship Program** for, and in recognition of, conservation practices that build soil health.
 - These include, but are not limited to, cover cropping, crop rotations, organic soil amendments, and conservation tillage routinely implemented by organic farming operations.

Cost Share and Technical Assistance

- **Increase Cost Share to 90% up to \$900 per scope.**
 - The Organic Cost Share Program has not kept up with the changing economy. The cost of producer certification and expenses continue to rise due to increased certifier fees, inflation and supply chain shortages, all of which increase costs to the producer. Access to cost share funding keeps certification affordable for small and mid sized farms, helping to underpin a more diverse and stable food system.
- **Allow Certification agencies to collect Cost Share instead of individuals.**
 - Many of the plain people (Amish, Mennonite, etc) do not apply for cost share for religious reasons. Allowing certification agencies to directly receive cost share money in order to apply that funding to certification fees is a viable way to underwrite the cost of certification with equal impact regardless of religious ethos. Payments should be dispensed directly to certifiers quarterly based on certificates issued in order to create a reasonable cash flow throughout the year.

- **Codify and provide continued funding for key elements of USDA’s recently announced Organic Transition Initiative to ensure this comprehensive effort continues, including:**
 - Technical assistance for organic and transitioning farmers.
 - Market development and infrastructure grants to expand domestic organic production and processing capacity especially the development of small scale local slaughter facilities and creameries.
 - Organic and transitional commodity purchases by USDA procurement programs.

- **Increase Organic and Regional Markets**
 - **Incentivize the purchase of organic products for individuals, institutions and fresh food deserts.** Distribute funding targeted for the purchase of organic products. Vouchers that schools can only use to purchase organic dairy products for their cafeterias. **Grants to establish access to healthy food for all.** Without access to fresh, healthy food, SNAP benefits can fail to fulfill programmatic goals. Funding should be made available to establish more food pantries, co-ops, and grocery stores in under-served areas and food deserts.
 - **Increase grants to enable/expand regional supply chains.** Small, local creameries, slaughter/butchering facilities, and other food processing infrastructure will support a more diverse supply chain, significantly increasing food security and boosting rural economies. The current lack of small processors especially in rural areas is a major impediment to the viability of local farm to table organic production.
 - **Restore competition to livestock markets** by ensuring that the USDA updates its rules for enforcing the Packers and Stockyards Act, creating a special investigator for competition issues at the USDA, and requiring large meat packers to procure more livestock on open markets.
 - **Increase the mandatory funding** level of USDA’s Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) to \$75 million and create equitable funding

pools for the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program and the Value-Added Producer Grant Program (VAPG) with a 10% carve out for qualifying organic proposals within VAPG.

- **Increase USDA's Market Access Program (MAP) funding** to \$400 million annually and the Foreign Market Development (FMD) program funding to \$69 million annually.
- **Support Dairy**
 - Establish regional milk markets and price floors for organic milk to eliminate the current, highly destructive swings in liquid milk prices. This has much historical precedent and was the norm in the US from the 1930s until the mid '80s.
 - Empower USDA AMS to investigate wholesale prices paid to organic dairies to ensure that processors are not exercising monopoly power.
 - Recognize the climate benefits derived from grass-based dairying and pay dairy farmers for the climate and conservation services implicit in this form of production. Establish a data link between Federal programs such as EQIP, FSMIP, RMA, SCBGP, FMPP whereby certified organic farms and States that are increasing certified organic operations and acreage are considered for fast track access to funding and have preferred status for access to these grant programs.
 - Investment in regional organic milk processing infrastructure around the country to spur the entrance of new buyers for organic milk.
 - Support for regional programs to collect and publish cost of production data for organic milk (including all costs, not just organic feed).
 - Establishment by USDA of an Organic All Milk Price Survey, analogous to the existing NASS All Milk Price Survey, to

gather and report monthly data about what organic farmers are being paid for their milk, nationally and in the largest organic milk production states.

Increase Funding for Organic Enforcement

- Authorize annual funding for NOP to keep pace with organic industry growth with a 10% increase each year to the existing \$24 million-per-year authorization over the life of the Farm Bill.
- Continue mandatory funding of \$5 million for NOP to upgrade and maintain technology systems.
- Update the Organic Foods Production Act to establish a preplanned, predictable timeline (no less than once every five years) to review and update the organic standards to meet consumer expectations in the evolving marketplace.
- Increase NOP oversight of certifiers to ensure standards are interpreted and implemented consistently.
- Require USDA accreditation of third-party material review organizations and incorporate them into the existing organic certification system.
- Strengthen NOP's authority to take enforcement actions against false or misleading organic claims on all agricultural products, including non-foods.

Contact your Representative

Step 1

Draft a letter or email that expresses your thoughts and concerns regarding the future of agriculture and how the Farm Bill Legislation can help.

Step 2

Contact Congress to share your thoughts! A good place to start is the subcommittee responsible for writing the Farm Bill. Your state senators and the congressional representative for your district are also effective people to contact. Contacts can be found below.

- **House of Representatives**

- Find your Representative [here](#)
- Representatives on the House Agriculture Committee can be found [here](#)
- Comments can be submitted via [this form](#)

- **Senate**

- Find your senators [here](#)
- Senators on the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee can be found [here](#)
- Comments are welcomed via [this form](#) or emailing FarmBill2023@ag.senate.gov.