*NOTE: I will create a version with full citations before submitting*.

Dear Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry,

On behalf of our millions of members, supporters, and customers, the undersigned organizations and companies are writing to urge you to fully support organic agriculture in the Farm Bill and to oppose any changes that would undermine the organic standards and the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB).

Consumer confidence in the integrity of the USDA organic seal is the driving factor in the exponential growth in the organic sector. Making changes to the authorities or composition of the NOSB could harm the integrity of the organic program, undermine consumer trust in the organic label, and severely damage the reputation of the industry as a whole.

Organic farming is a bright spot in the U.S. rural economy. Data show that organic farms are 35 percent more profitable than the average farm and that rural counties with a high level of organic farms and businesses have higher household incomes and reduced poverty rates by as much as 1.35 percent, even more than major anti-poverty programs. Domestically, the organic sector is home to over 26,000 certified organic family farms and businesses.

A growing body of research demonstrates that organic farming systems provide an impressive range of conservation benefits. Organic farms support 50 percent more pollinator species, sequester carbon in the soil, and deliver greater resilience in the face of climate-related weather impacts like drought and floods by improving soil structure and soil water-holding capacity.

Research also shows that organic food and farming reduce human exposure to toxic pesticides for consumers, farmers, farmworkers, and rural communities.

The number of organic consumers is steadily growing. Data shows that over 80 percent of U.S. households buy organic food, and the demographics of organic buyers matches the diversity of the American population. Organic remains the fastest-growing sector of the food industry — while the overall food market experiences a stagnant 0.6 percent growth rate, organic sales grew 8.4 percent from 2016 to 2017.

Yet, domestic production is not keeping up with this booming consumer demand. The U.S. accounts for 44 percent of global organic sales, but just four percent of global farmland under organic production. Approximately 25 percent of organic corn and 75 percent of organic soybeans used in the country are imported. U.S. farmers are losing out on the chance to feed Americans’ growing appetite for organic food.

At a time when so many farmers and rural communities across America are struggling, we need more policy support for organic agriculture.

**First and foremost, the undersigned organizations and companies urge you to oppose any changes that would undermine the National Organic Standards Board in the Farm Bill.**

We also urge you to:

**Fully fund the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program (NOCCSP) and the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program** which encourages small and mid-size farmers to transition to organic and helps farmers afford organic certification;

**Increase funding for the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) to $50 million** annually. Organic and non-organic farmers alike benefit from this research. For example, cover cropping is standard practice on organic farms but has been widely adopted by non-organic farms as well;

**Fully fund the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP),** the nation's largest conservation program by acreage and a critically important program that supports organic farmers. CSP is the only Farm Bill program focused on advancing conservation systems to comprehensively protect natural resources, including soil health, water quality, and wildlife habitat;

**Equalize payment limits under the Organic Initiative within the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP OI)**, to ensure equal opportunity for organic farmers to participate in this key conservation program;

**Devote $50 million annually to public plant and animal breeding programs** focused on developing regionally adapted cultivars and animal breeds that are suited to farmers’ local growing conditions, changing climates, and farming systems. The funding should come from existing USDA competitive grant research programs and a coordinator should be appointed to oversee these efforts;

**Create a level playing field for U.S. organic family farms** by increasing funding for the National Organic Program, providing funding to improve import data tracking, and creating better mechanisms to ensure that all organic imports comply with U.S. standards; and

**Provide $5 million in one-time mandatory Farm Bill funding for the Organic Data Initiative** to ensure consistent and reliable data about production and sales trends.

Organic farmers and businesses depend on consumer trust in the organic seal and support from the programs outlined above. We urge you to uphold the integrity of the organic standard by opposing any changes that would undermine the National Organic Standards Board and to fully fund the critical research, marketing, and conservation agriculture programs that are needed to grow the American organic sector.

Thank you,