



## Talking Points for NYS Farm Bill Listening Tour

10.30.17

**INTRODUCTION – DESCRIBE WHO YOU ARE** (Farmer – say what you grow, how many acres).  
ARE YOU A MEMBER OF NOFA-NY? Please let them know that, and feel free to introduce NOFA-NY:

Composed of farmers, gardeners, consumers, and businesses, NOFA-NY has been serving the organic and sustainable food and farming community since 1983. Through education, outreach and advocacy, we promote land stewardship, organic food production, and local distribution & marketing, as well being New York's largest USDA-accredited organic certifier of over 1,000 operations.

### **INTRODUCTION TO ORGANIC IN NEW YORK STATE:**

Organic sales and demand have been growing at an annual nearly double-digit rate for over a decade – and New York has consistently ranked in the top 3-4 in the nation in organic. Yet U.S. farmers not able to meet the demand and are losing ground to offshore supply. Our federal policies need to support U.S. organic farmers supplying the U.S. organic demand.

**HERE ARE SOME OF NOFA-NY'S PRIORITIES for the FARM BILL. Pick as many as you feel comfortable talking about.**

- **ORGANIC CERTIFICATION COST SHARE Assistance** is crucial to increase number of U.S. organic farmers to meet this demand. **If you are a farmer, tell them how important this is to you! Give numbers: total cost of your certification and total cost after cost share.**
  - Ask them to support the Local Food and Regional Market Supply (FARMS) Act (HR 3941), which includes funding of Certification Cost Share.
  - NOFA-NY has greatly appreciated NYS Ag & Mkts implementation of this program, and encourages NYS Ag & Mkts continued participation even as FSA takes over federal administration.
- **ORGANIC AGRICULTURE RESEARCH ACT (HR 2436) – provides research support of \$50 million to OREI** to address production constraints faced by organic farmers. Organic Research at USDA is under 4% and has been stagnant for years. On average, only about **0.2 percent** of AFRI funding goes toward organic research.

- **ORGANIC FARMER AND CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT (HR 3871)**– Thank you to Rep. Faso for introducing this bill to prevent the importation of fraudulent organic products from overseas through stricter enforcement of organic entering the U.S., modernization of organic import documentation, etc.
  - **Tell them how fraudulent organic product affects YOU!**
- **SEEDS & BREEDS** – Farmers need seeds and animal breeds that are ideally suited to their local growing conditions, changing climates and farming systems. USDA should prioritize this work, by using existing research programs to dedicate \$50 million in annual funds to public plant and animal breeding efforts, with a focus on regionally adapted cultivars.
- **National Organic Program (NOP) and the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB)**  
Consumers must have confidence that products with the USDA organic seal meet the strict standards established by USDA. Funding for the NOP must be increased to address the enforcement challenges facing the sector, and the work of the standards Board must continue to be transparent and open.
  - **NOFA-NY strongly opposes any efforts to dilute the authority and role of the NOSB in the overall standard-setting process, or to seek statutory changes to the delicate balance of stakeholder slot allocations for the Board membership.**
- **Risk Management.** Organic farmers need to insure their crops based on organic, not conventional prices. **2014 Farm Bill language should be renewed requiring RMA to provide price elections for all organic crops.**
  - **The Whole Farm Revenue Program should be reformed and streamlined to improve options for diversified organic farms.**
- **Organic Data.** Data about production and sales trends is extremely important to the organic sector and policymakers such as efforts to expand risk management options for organic farmers. **The Organic Data Initiative should be reauthorized to provide \$5 million in mandatory funding, as well as continue existing language authorizing additional funding through the annual appropriations process.**
- **Young and Beginning Farmers Act.** Support this bi-partisan bill which will help new farmers overcome the common barrier of access to land as well as improve access to critical programs that educate, train, and assist young and beginning farmers in starting their career. This bill will focus on three primary areas of concern for young farmers: access to land, USDA programs for young and beginning farmers, and investments in local and regional food systems.
- **Conservation Program.** Currently, the EQIP Organic Initiative has a payment limit of \$80,000 over 6 years, whereas the general EQIP limit is \$450,000 over 6 years. **Organic payments should be equalized with the rest of the EQIP program.**
  - **USDA conservation programs should be used to provide technical assistance and**

**mentorship for farmers transitioning to organic.**

- **ESPECIALLY FOR DAIRY FARMERS: Organic dairy in the Northeast is in crisis.** Organic dairies are approximately 18% of New York dairy farms. 2017 saw a massive drop in pay price for most producers, and an oversupply of organic milk that will take until well into 2018 to adjust. Even though the Northeast is an organic milk deficit area, all producers have been hit by a 25% pay price drop (\$10/cwt by Spring 2018) and most have had a form of quota applied. Over quota milk is paid at conventional prices. Despite the fact that retail sales of organic milk in the Northeast have increased, the national oversupply of milk has hit organic producers hard, many of whom have no safety net.

The reasons for this surplus can be summarized in three distinct areas; two of which are clearly the purview of the USDA and must be fixed in the Farm Bill –

- 1) Inadequate supply management by milk buyers;
- 2) Poor implementation of existing National Organic Program regulations; and
- 3) Failure of USDA National Organic Program to publish regulations to uphold a consistent and fair organic standard.

***Finally, while not a Farm Bill item, in an effort to address some of the emerging issues for New York organic farmers such as dairy and imported grain competition, NOFA-NY encourages NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets to create a position of “Organic Expert” on your staff and convene an Organic Summit to develop organic priorities for New York State for the next 3 years.***