Dear Mr. Secretary:

As you embark on your important role as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, we are writing as farms, businesses and organizations representing a broad spectrum of perspectives about food and agriculture to express our strong, shared support for the USDA organic label and the federal marketing, research and data collection programs that support the label.

With the establishment of the National Organic Program in 2001, consistent national standards were created to govern the labeling of organic food and the use of the USDA organic seal. Consumer confidence in the integrity of the USDA organic seal has been a driving factor in the exponential growth in the organic sector. In 2000, organic sales of products labeled under various conflicting state and private organic labels totaled only $6 billion. Today, as a result of the establishment of the consistent federal organic standards, total sales of organic food and beverages are nearly $50 billion. Domestically, the organic sector is home to nearly 24,000 certified organic family farms and other businesses.

Organic farmers are required to use farming practices that preserve and enhance natural resources, and organic processors are required to use ingredients that have passed strict environmental and human health reviews. Consumers are willing to pay higher prices for products that meet these higher standards. As a result, organic farmers and processors enjoy a higher price to reward them for their extra costs and efforts.

Organic regulations are voluntary, or opt-in, in the sense that farmers decide whether they want to participate in the National Organic Program. Similarly, consumers voluntarily decide whether to buy organic food. House Speaker Ryan has used the USDA organic standards as an example of a "better way" to approach federal regulations to foster a stronger U.S. economy using a voluntary approach to regulations.

The economic success of the organic sector also depends on strong enforcement by USDA and USDA-accredited organic certifier organizations domestically and internationally. It is the job of the certifiers to ensure that all organic operations meet the strict production, processing and handling standards established by USDA through an open and transparent public process. It is the job of USDA to use its accreditation and oversight functions to ensure that certifiers are enforcing the standards in an effective and uniform manner for all organic operations. Consumers depend on the integrity of the USDA organic seal, and expect uniform enforcement of the standards.

Despite the success and growth of the organic industry, the U.S. organic sector faces significant challenges. While organic sales are growing at a double-digit pace each year, domestic organic production is struggling to keep pace with that growth with an increased reliance on imports to meet the demand.
In the spirit of the public-private partnership that underlies the success of the organic sector, it is critical that your agency continue to support the work of the National Organic Program, as well as the research and data collection programs that will help ensure that U.S. organic farmers can meet growing consumer demand for their products. It is our firm belief that jobs associated with organic agriculture can and should be kept here in the United States, without having to rely on increased imports to meet demand for products we can produce here.

In that regard, we look forward to working with you to support the key marketing, research and data collection programs, as well as the strong standards enforcement procedures that are critical to the U.S. organic sector.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.