

Protect the Organic Standards & U.S. Organic Family Farmers

Talking Points & Tips for Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor

Background

[Farm Bill Watch 2018: A Sneak Attack on the Organic Standards?](#) By Kendra Klein, Friends of the Earth
[Are We on the Brink of an Organic Crisis?](#) By Melody Meyers, UNFI

The Basics

Targets

Publishing in local and regional papers is important for farmers and consumers in all states right now, but especially for those with Senators on the Agriculture Committee. Please mention in your letter or op-ed if your Senator is on the committee:

- **Senate Ag Committee Democrats:** Debbie Stabenow (MI), Patrick Leahy (VT), Sherrod Brown (OH), Amy Klobuchar (MN), Michael Bennet (CO), Kirsten Gillibrand (NY), Joe Donnelly (IN), Heidi Heitkamp (ND), Bob Casey Jr. (PA), Tina Smith (D-MN).
- **Senate Ag Committee Republicans:** Pat Roberts (KS), Chairman, Mitch McConnell (KY), John Boozman (AR), John Hoeven (ND), Joni Ernst (IA), Chuck Grassley (IA), John Thune (SD), Steve Daines (MT), David Perdue (GA), Deb Fisher (NE), Cindy Hyde-Smith (MS)

Length

- Letters to the editor should be under 200 words, 150 or less is best.
- Op-eds should be 600-750 words.

Once it's published

If your letter or op-ed is published, make sure to send a copy to the legislator you're targeting! Contact Kendra at Friends of the Earth (kklein@foe.org) for the email address of your Senator's agriculture staff director.

Talking points

Top points to include

As an organic farmer of XX years, I am writing with deep concern over a threat organic farmers unfolding in the Farm Bill. Senator XX from our state, is in a position to stop this threat.

At a time when the Farm Bill should be providing increased support for organic farming in the U.S., some legislators are using the bill to attack the integrity of the organic standards.

Right now, the Senate Agriculture Committee is considering language that would gut the authority of the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB). The board is an independent advisory body that determines which materials can be used in organic farming. Weakening the NOSB would open the

organic standards to allowing toxic pesticides and GMOs. It would put corporate interests above the needs of family farmers. And it would severely damage consumer trust in the organic seal.

Senator, _____ is on the Senate Agriculture Committee and must oppose any language that would undermine the authority of the National Organic Standards Board.

Pick and choose from additional points

This would be disastrous for organic farmers in our state and across the country. Our livelihoods depend on consumer trust in the organic seal.

The future of American organic family farms is at stake. The changes being considered for the NOSB could end organic as we know it.

Booming consumer demand for organic food has made it a critical market opportunity for farmers. For some of us, it's the difference between keeping or losing our family farms.

Organic farming is a bright spot in the U.S. rural economy. Data show that it is more profitable for farmers, and that rural counties with many 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.

Decades of scientific data show that, because organic farming doesn't rely on toxic pesticides, it protects consumers, our rural communities, and drinking water from being contaminated. It also helps pollinators and other beneficial organisms thrive.

Because of its promise for rural America, organic agriculture has growing support from both Democrats and Republicans. The Farm Bill should reflect that by protecting the role of the National Organic Standards Board.

The organic standards must remain strong to ensure consumer trust in the label and to create a level playing field for the vast majority of organic farms and businesses that are playing by the rules.

The Farm Bill should create a food and farm system that we can all be proud of. It should support family farmers and organic agriculture.

We need more support for organic agriculture in the Farm Bill, not a sneak attack aimed at taking this healthy and sustainable option away.

Additional points if you're writing an op-ed

The time to influence Senators is now. The committee is currently drafting the Senate version of the Farm Bill; it is expected to go to the floor of the Senate in late May or June.

The National Organic Standards Board is the heart of the transparent, democratic process that upholds the integrity of the organic seal. In fact, no other part of our food system is governed by such a transparent and democratic process. The NOSB is made up of 15 dedicated public volunteers from across the organic community. At their twice annual public meetings, the NOSB listens to hours of public comments from farmers, businesses, consumers, scientists, environmentalists, animal welfare advocates and many others with a stake in organic agriculture. The board deliberates on all of this public input and then advises the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture on a wide variety of topics related to organic standards, including which materials should be allowed in organic farming.

The NOSB was created in the 1990 Organic Foods Protection Act to protect the organic standards from the influence of political and special interests. Changes that weaken the NOSB could be the end of organic as we know it. They could make it easier for industrial operations to cash in on organic at the expense of family farmers and to add toxic pesticides and GMOs to the list of materials allowed in organic production, thereby destroying consumer trust in the seal.

The Farm Bill should create a level playing field for organic farmers by fully supporting the critical research, marketing, and conservation programs that support American organic farmers. This includes:

- First and foremost, protecting the authority and composition of the National Organic Standards Board.
- Increasing funding for the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) to \$50 million annually.
- Fully funding the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
- Devoting \$50 million annually to public plant and animal breeding programs.
- Increasing funding for the National Organic Program.
- Providing funding to improve import data tracking and mechanisms to ensure that all organic imports comply with U.S. standards.

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.

Organic consumers are everywhere and their numbers are growing. Data show 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.

Tips

Follow the paper's directions. Information on how and to whom to submit is usually found right on the letters or op-ed page in your paper. This often includes guidelines on what the paper looks for. Follow these guidelines to increase the likelihood that your letter or op-ed will be printed. If you can't find the information you need, simply call the paper and ask how to go about submitting. Make sure to include your contact information when you submit.

Share your expertise. If you have relevant qualifications to the topic you're addressing be sure to include that in your letter up front.

Keep your letter short, focused, and interesting.

Craft a clear message, focus tightly on one idea or argument and tell readers, high up in the piece, why they should care. Finish on a note that reinforces your message.

Include supporting facts or anecdotes

If possible, include interesting facts, relevant personal experience, and any local connections to the issue.

Choose a title for op-eds

Choose a strong title for your piece, knowing that the editor may decide to change it. (They almost always rewrite the headline, but it still pays to craft one that will grab their attention.)

Follow-up with your legislator or corporation. If your letter is printed, and targeted to a specific decision maker or corporation, clip out your printed letter and send it to the target with a brief cover note. This way you can be certain that the appropriate decision maker sees it.

- **Contact Kendra Klein at Friends of the Earth (kklein@foe.org for the email address of your legislator's agriculture staff director.**

Sources

[Writing an Effective Letter to the Editor](#)

[Op-Ed Writing Tips](#)
