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Organic Farmers Demand Fair Share from 2007 Farm Bill

California's organic farmers, businesses, and organizations are asking US Representative Dennis Cardoza, (D-Merced) Chairman of the newly established House Agriculture Subcommittee on Horticulture and Organic Agriculture for their fair share from the upcoming 2007 Farm Bill. Nearly $300 billion is at stake over the next five years in this upcoming Farm Bill.

In a public listening session held today in Merced, farmers and organizations will be asking Rep. Cardoza for a significant increase in federal investment in California's organic agriculture sector to address the needs of the more than 2000 organic farmers in California.
In a letter signed by more than 50 farmers, businesses and organizations, groups say that "At the very least, federal investment in organic agriculture should be equivalent to its proportional share of the U. S. food market." Current federal funding aimed specifically at organic growers makes up less than one tenth of one per cent of current Farm Bill spending. Estimates put the current market share of 2006 organic retail sales at about 3%, and sales are growing at an average 20% annually.

Within a few weeks, Mr. Cardoza is expected to reintroduce the EAT America Healthy Act, a flagship marker bill for the "Specialty Crops" Industry. "Generally, we are very supportive of increasing public investment in the Specialty Crop Sector, and applaud Mr. Cardoza for taking this initiative," said Peggy Miars, executive director of California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF), a trade association of more than 1,500 certified organic producers and 300 supporting businesses and individuals. "However, we want to make sure that his Bill includes specific provisions to enhance support for organic production, research, and marketing." Miars said.

"We need greater public investment in organics, especially to help small and mid sized growers remain competitive in this increasingly globalized system," says Cindy

Lashbrook, an organic producer of fruits and nuts from Cardoza's district, who will be presenting the letter to Congressman Cardoza. "California's organic growers protect our environment in so many ways. We help conserve our state's water, soil and air quality. We help reduce our dependency on fossil fuels. Yet, unlike corn, soybeans, and other major commodity groups, we receive almost no federal support. Along with many of the other 140 organic growers and businesses in his district, I look forward to working with the Congressman's office to promote organic agriculture in the upcoming Farm Bill."

While California produces half of the country's organic and conventional fruit and vegetables, it has never gotten its fair share of Farm bill benefits. Historically, the majority of farm payments have gone to a handful of commodity crops in the Midwest. Much less support has gone to diversified farming regions like California and even less has gone to support regional and sustainable farming practices. The California Coalition for Food and Farming (CCFF), one of the main coalition groups signing on to the letter, is aiming to change that this year. "We want to build support among our California Congressional delegation-urban and rural alike-to speak out for a Farm Bill that invests in a healthier and more sustainable food system that better meets the needs of both farmers and consumers," said Kari Hamerschlag, policy director for CCFF, an alliance of more than 45 California environmental, food, and farming organizations.

For a copy of the letter, see: http://ofrf.org/action/ofan/070215_cardoza_sign-on_ltr.html and for a copy of CCFF's Farm bill policy platform, visit: http://www.calfoodandfarming.org/. Letter is also attached.

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