



# CCOF

Organic Certification

Education & Outreach

Political Advocacy

Promotion

## Testimony Presented at CDFA Farm Bill Listening Session Salinas, California February 22, 2017

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about Farm Bill priorities for the state of California.

My name is Jane Sooby and I represent CCOF, California Certified Organic Farmers.

CCOF advances organic agriculture for a healthy world. We advocate on behalf of our members for organic policies, support the growth of organic through education and grants, and provide personal and accessible organic certification services.

CCOF is a nonprofit organization governed by the people who grow and make our food. Founded in California more than 40 years ago, today our roots span the breadth of North America and our presence is internationally recognized. We are supported by an organic family of farmers, ranchers, processors, retailers, consumers, and policymakers. Together, we work to realize a future where organic *is* the norm.

California is the nation's number one organic state, with the farmgate value of organic commodities reaching \$2.4 billion in 2015—almost four times the value of the next most productive organic state.

California produces 21 percent of the nation's organic agricultural products (by volume). This includes \$1.8 billion of organic crops and \$325 million of livestock and poultry products.

Add to this \$2.4 billion of organic agricultural products the \$10 billion in organic processed products made in California last year, organic is a \$12 billion per year sector of California's economy that continues to demonstrate double digit rates of growth year after year.

In California, the majority of organic crops are specialty crops—vegetables, fruits, nuts—and we support programs that assist specialty crop growers including the Specialty Crops Block Grant Program.

The single most effective way to support California's robust organic sector is to preserve and protect the National Organic Program (NOP), the federal agency in charge of overseeing organic and enforcing the organic standards. We don't want to be alarmist, but we've heard rumblings that the very existence of the NOP may be under attack in the coming farm bill discussions.

The NOP's role is more important now than ever. As the Wall Street Journal reported yesterday, organic corn prices decreased 30 percent and organic soy 20 percent in 2016, a decline attributed to large quantities of imported organic grain from eastern Europe. American organic farmers are calling for stronger enforcement of the national organic standards to ensure that all organic products are made using the same rigorous standards that our farmers and processors follow, and to reduce competition from growers who may be cutting corners. This is the NOP's job, and we want to make sure they have the resources to do it well.

So our number one priority for the 2018 Farm Bill is to maintain and enhance support for the NOP. We advocate for continued funding of the NOP and increased funds for enforcement in all states including California, where we are fortunate to have state-level enforcement conducted by the State Organic Program (SOP), funded by the organic producers in the state. California state law allows the secretary of food and ag to receive federal funds to enforce the law, and we'd like to see the burden on our producers eased. They pay to be certified under the federal program and also pay a mandatory state fee to fund the SOP.

Rather than be in defensive mode, we prefer to focus on maintaining the remarkable momentum that the organic sector has accomplished since organic became federally regulated in 2002. A key program that has made organic certification affordable and accessible for farmers and processors no matter how small is the organic certification cost share program, which rebates organic producers 75 percent of their certification related expenses up to a maximum of \$750 per certified scope. CDFA reports that in fiscal year 2015/16, they processed and distributed a total amount of \$1.5 million to 1,900 producers and handlers. Certification cost share is a very important tool in bringing more farms, ranches, and businesses into organic certification to meet growing consumer demand.

Organic product sales nationwide have increased 300 percent over the past 10 years and are now at **\$43.4 billion**. The organic sector, like the conventional food system, relies on information and data. CCOF also advocates for increased federal funding for production research and marketing data in the farm bill. The Organic Research and Extension Initiative is a federally-funded grant program that funds research on certified organic ground. In the 14 years of its existence, OREI funding has generated a significant body of knowledge on organic farming and how best to manage biological farming systems. CCOF supports continued and increased funding for OREI and for USDA's organic data collection programs, including price reporting on organic produce, grains, and dairy.

Finally, like all producers, organic growers need a safety net to keep them in business when natural disasters or even just bad weather result in crop failure. Risk Management Agency has greatly improved organic crop insurance in the past few years and now more types of organic crops than ever are eligible for coverage at the organic or contracted price. CCOF endorses support for expanded organic crop insurance options in the farm bill.

CCOF is part of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition California caucus and joins in supporting other members' priorities. We also will submit a written comment to CDFA.

It's important that CDFA create the space for small, grassroots organizations to articulate their farm bill priorities, and we thank CDFA for this opportunity.