

May 18, 2016

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128
The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Vice Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128
The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Vice Chairwoman Mikulski:

The undersigned 37 farmer, consumer, and industry groups urge you to oppose any amendment to the FY17 agriculture appropriations bill that seeks to stall or block rulemaking on organic livestock and poultry standards.

USDA recently issued a proposed rule on “Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices” based largely on the recommendations of the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) from 2011. The proposed rule builds on the NOSB’s recommendations dating back to 2002. This rule seeks to standardize and create greater consistency in organic livestock and poultry practices.

Congress passed the Organic Foods Production Act that established the National Organic Standards Board to help develop recommendations for implementation of the Act. The Act specifically calls upon the NOSB to recommend standards for livestock to ensure that it is organically produced. The NOSB, which by statute includes representation from across the different subsectors of the organic community, was given a prominent role in the establishment and implementation of organic regulations. This rulemaking is based on the Board’s recommendations.

Inconsistency in organic regulations creates confusion in the marketplace for farmers and consumers. This rule will provide certainty about what procedures are allowed under the organic program. It will also clarify the animal welfare standards for organic and maintain the integrity of the organic seal.

Our organizations will continue to evaluate the rule and comment during the rulemaking process. Any efforts to stall or block the rulemaking process will undermine organic farmers and consumer trust in the organic seal. It has been common knowledge in the industry that this rule is forthcoming. The appropriate place to impact the rule is in comments, not in the appropriations process.

We urge you to stand up for the integrity of the organic seal and reject any amendment that prohibits USDA from continuing the rulemaking process on organic livestock and poultry practices.

Sincerely,

Beyond Pesticides
Buffalo Mountain Coop (VT)
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association
Center for Food Safety
Citizens for GMO Labeling
Consumer Federation of America
Consumers Union
Experimental Farm Network (NJ)
Farm Aid
Food & Water Watch
GMO Free NJ
GMO Free PA
Hunger Mountain Cooperative (VT)
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance
Middlebury Co-op
Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service
Monadnock Food Co-op
National Farmers Organization
National Farmers Union
National Organic Coalition
National Young Farmers Coalition
Neighboring Food Co-op Association
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance
Northeast Organic Farming Association - Connecticut
Northeast Organic Farming Association - Interstate Council
Northeast Organic Farming Association - New Hampshire
Northeast Organic Farming Association - New York
Northeast Organic Farming Association - Rhode Island
Northeast Organic Farming Association - Vermont
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
Old Creamery Co-op (MA)
Oregon Tilth
Organic Seed Alliance
Organically Grown Company
Rural Advancement Foundation International
Wild Oats Market (MA)