

February 9, 2011

The Honorable Jim Jordan
Republican Study Committee
1524 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Jordan:

On behalf of the American farmers, ranchers, handlers, processors, and consumers who have fueled the double-digit growth in the organic agriculture sector over the past decade, we write in support of the National Organic Certification Cost-Share Program. Cost-share assistance is critical to the continued vitality, growth, and diversity of the organic agricultural production sector in the U.S. – a sector that creates jobs in rural America and has grown to a \$26.6 billion industry. The National Organic Certification Cost-Share Program provides assistance up to \$750 or 75 percent of the total cost of certification per organic operation.

The Republican Study Committee's Spending Reduction Act incorrectly lists this program as a cost-savings of \$56.2 million annually. This is an error – the program has a total of \$22 million available from the 2008 Farm Bill and the majority of that funding has already been spent.

A modest investment in the sector through certification cost-share has yielded tremendous results and helped underpin sector growth. For 10 years, the industry grew at an average annual rate of 20 percent, and continued to experience positive growth during one of the worst economic downturns in the country's history. The economic activity generated by the rapid growth of organic agriculture creates jobs in rural America, encouraging people to stay in their community instead of leaving to find employment in more urban areas.

Continued growth in the organic sector requires continued investment through the Cost-Share Program. Repealing the program would significantly increase the barriers to organic production for farmers by making certification a prohibitively expensive process. This would negatively impact small and mid-sized farmers as well as beginning farmers who, because of the sector's lower start-up costs and market opportunities, view organic agriculture as a promising entry point into farming.

We understand that most sectors of the budget will experience cuts, and as you consider the cuts to the agriculture sector, we urge you to seek a fair, balanced approach that will not unduly harm one segment of agriculture over another, or focus on eliminating small, well-targeted programs while leaving huge, unfocused programs unscathed.

We thank you for your attention to this issue and look forward to working with you to continue making the organic sector an important part of American agriculture. Please do not hesitate to contact Ariane Lotti, Policy Director for the Organic Farming Research Foundation, at ariane@ofrf.org or (202) 821-2760 with follow-up questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

National Organic Coalition
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Organic Farming Research Foundation
Organic Trade Association

Cc:

Rep. Mike Conaway
Rep. Rick Crawford
Rep. Scott DesJarlais
Rep. Renee Ellmers
Rep. Stephen Fincher
Rep. Jeff Fortenberry
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