ORGANIC FARMING RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Fostering the improvement and widespread adoption of organic farming.

June 24, 2021

To: Dr. Carrie Castille, Director, and Bill Hoffman, Chief of Staff
USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture

From: Brise Tencer, Executive Director, and Dr. Mark Schonbeck, Research Associate
Organic Farming Research Foundation

Re: Research, Education, and Extension Budget Priorities for Fiscal Year 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the June 17 Listening Session and to provide written comments on NIFA priorities for Fiscal Year 2023. We appreciate the opportunity.

As we stated during the Listening Session, Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) urges NIFA to increase its overall investment in organic agricultural research to reflect the US market share of organic foods (~6%), and the potential for organic systems to enhance resilience and food security, sequester carbon, and provide other ecosystem service; and to invite proposals that address four key farmer-identified research priority areas:

1. Soil health, fertility, nutrient cycling, and carbon sequestration in organic systems.
   - Develop soil health, climate mitigation, and organic production methodologies suited to small-scale, diversified, and limited resource production systems.
   - Develop an improved understanding of biological indicators of soil health, including optimizing soil microbiomes to suppress soilborne plant pathogens.
   - Improve nutrient cycling, budgeting, and management (especially nitrogen) to protect soil, water, environmental, and human health, as well as farm profitability.
   - Develop practical organic reduced tillage strategies, including rotational no-till, strip till, and engineering of tillage and cultivation tools that minimize impacts on soil biota.
2. Systems level, NOP-compliant, integrated weed, pest, and disease management.
   - Develop organic minimum-till and ecological integrated pest management (IPM) systems that do not rely on synthetic inputs.
3. Organic livestock, grazing, crop-livestock integration, and animal health.
   - Develop regionally-adapted advanced grazing systems for organic livestock.
4. Development of crop cultivars and livestock breeds for organic systems.
   - Develop cultivars and breeds that enhance ecosystem services, such as perennial grains (soil health) and livestock adapted to advanced grazing management.
   - Develop regionally adapted, climate-resilient, public crop cultivars that perform well in organic systems, partner effectively with beneficial microbes, resist disease, use nutrients and moisture efficiently, outcompete weeds, and meet market needs of organic producers.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide recommendations for NIFA priorities during the 2023 fiscal year.

Sincerely,

Brise Tencer

Brise Tencer, Executive Director
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