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August 11, 2020

Honorable Charles Grassley
United States Senate
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Grassley,

As a member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, I am writing to you on behalf of the Iowa Organic Association (IOA), a statewide leader in organic education and advocacy committed to expanding organic agriculture and foods systems in Iowa. We want to express disappointment about yesterday's (8/10/20) Farm Service Agency notice published in the Federal Register regarding funding cuts to the Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP), a program that provides cost share assistance to farmers and handlers (75 percent of certification costs up to maximum of $750 per certification scope).

> ***For FY 2020 through 2023, FSA is revising the reimbursement amount to 50 percent of the certified organic operation's eligible expenses, up to a maximum of $500 per scope. This change is due to the limited amount of funding available and will allow a larger number of certified organic operations to receive assistance. If additional funding is authorized at a later time, FSA may provide additional assistance to certified operations that have applied for OCCSP, not to exceed 75 percent of their eligible costs, up to $750 per scope.***

The USDA is cutting the funding formula for OCCSP, alleging that there is not enough funding available to reimburse organic operations at the levels specified by Congress in the 2018 Farm Bill. This is not the time to reduce support for American organic farmers and businesses when most Americans are struggling to maintain balance during these unprecedented and challenging times. Furthermore, organic and specialty farmers and handlers have very little help from other agricultural programs. The OCCSP has provided critical funding for cost share assistance to organic producers and handlers of agricultural products who are obtaining or renewing their certification under the National Organic Program (NOP). Until now, certified operations could receive up to 75 percent of their certification costs paid during the program year, not to exceed $750 per certification scope.

Additionally, the announcement "USDA Accepting Applications to Help Cover Costs for Organic Certification" is less than transparent, framing the funding as a positive move for the industry to support expansion, when in fact it makes no mention that this is a funding reduction or explaining why those changes were made. Organic certification costs have been identified as a major barrier for those interested in organic transition, expansion or diversification. The reduction of funds does not incentivize greater participation in the organic movement, rather it creates additional, undue burden on this segment of the

PO Box 139, Des Moines, IA 50301
info@iowaorganic.org • www.iowaorganic.org • 515-608-8622

industry. Not only is organic production and demand outpacing conventional agriculture in the U.S. and beyond, the indirect benefits of organic production are innumerable resulting in a healthy environment, healthy food, healthy people, and healthy local economies. U.S. policies should be encouraging greater organic production and participation across the country, now more than ever.

As the voice for organic agriculture in Iowa – IOA strongly urges your support of 2018 Farm Bill commitments and to restore OCCSP funding to the levels specified by Congress.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you need additional information or to further discuss this issue and opportunities that can support greater organic participation in Iowa. Thank you for your time and attention to this issue.

Respectfully,

Rosalyn Lehman
Executive Director
Iowa Organic Association
PO Box 139, Des Moines, IA 50301
roz@iowaorganic.org | 515-608-8622