

## Reps. Panetta, Adams Introduce Legislation to Expand Opportunities for Organic Producers



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Hello Sarah,

## Reps. Adams, Panetta Introduce Legislation to Expand Opportunities for Organic Producers

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** (May 24, 2023) – **Congresswoman Alma Adams (NC-12)** and **United States Representative Jimmy Panetta (CA-19)** introduced the *Opportunities in Organic Act* to strengthen the organic marketplace and empower organic producers by reducing cost-barriers, expanding access to new markets and resources, and providing support and training.

Several existing programs support organic agriculture, transition, and research, but they do not level the playing field for organic producers and do not adequately or holistically meet their needs. Organic certification costs and processes remain a barrier for many, and most producers have limited access to organic-specific technical assistance or mentorship – especially in regions with smaller organic sectors. The *Opportunities in Organic Act* would expand the existing National Organic Certification Cost-Share Program to reduce these barriers and better serve organic producers.

“Organic agriculture is growing in North Carolina, but farmers seeking to join this market face barriers in transitioning their operations to make the most of this opportunity,” **said Rep. Adams, a senior member of the House Agriculture Committee.** “The *Opportunities in Organic Act* would make it easier for farmers to bring healthy, sustainable food to market. This legislation helps socially-disadvantaged, beginning, and smaller-scale farmers and ranchers make the transition to organic agriculture. It also builds capacity for much-needed technical assistance to producers, with an emphasis on institutions that serve socially disadvantaged farmers and have a track record of practical, farmer-focused work on the ground. Farmers want to reach new markets and feed our families while building healthy soil, ecosystems, and communities. The *Opportunities in Organic Act* helps make that work a reality, and I am proud to join Rep. Jimmy Panetta in leading this vital legislation.”

“Despite the rising demand for organic agricultural products, some producers are finding it difficult take full advantage of these opportunities due to cost and skill barriers,” **said Rep. Panetta.** “I’m proud to author and introduce this legislation that would allow organic producers to overcome those barriers by streamlining reimbursements for organic certification and connecting them with the training, skills, and relationships they need to be successful. By expanding programming and services for these producers, we can ensure that our farmers are capitalizing on the immense opportunity that exists in the organic marketplace.”

**The Opportunities in Organic Act has three major components:**

- **Organic Certification Cost-Share**
  - The Opportunities in Organic Act will modernize reimbursements for organic certification, to ensure cost does not deter producers. Cost-share payments would cover up to \$1500 in certification costs. USDA would have discretion to exceed that cap to ensure that certification costs are not a barrier to certification for underserved producers and regions.
- **Transition and Resilience Funds**
  - The Opportunities in Organic Act will provide support for NGOs to build capacity to support organic transition, particularly for smaller scale and socially disadvantaged producers and underserved regions. The program will also pass-through funding from NGOs to producers to offset costs and reduce barriers associated with organic transition.
- **Technical Assistance**
  - The Opportunities in Organic Act will provide resources for organic capacity and partnerships at public institutions and NGOs, including support for education, outreach, and market expansion so producers in any part of the country will have access to professional assistance with building healthy soil, natural pest management, and protecting ecosystems and natural resources.

Original House cosponsors of the *Opportunities in Organic Act* include **Reps. Suzanne Bonamici (OR-01), Zoe Lofgren (CA-18), Jim McGovern (MA-02), Donald Payne Jr. (NJ-10), Chellie Pingree (ME-01), and Andrea Salinas (OR-06). Senator Peter Welch (D-VT)** has introduced companion legislation in the Senate along with eleven other senators.

The *Opportunities in Organic Act* is supported by; the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association, Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, Environmental Working Group, Farm Action Fund, Georgia Organics, Maine Organic Farmers & Gardeners Association, Midwest Organic Services Association, National Organic Coalition, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, National Young Farmers Coalition, Natural Resources Defense Council, Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey, Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York, Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont, Ohio Ecological Food & Farm Association, Oregon Tilth, Organic Farmers Association, Organic Farming Research Foundation, Organic Seed Alliance, Pennsylvania Certified Organic, Rural Coalition, and Union of Concerned Scientists.

“The broad support for the Opportunities in Organic Act sends a clear signal to leaders drafting this year’s Farm Bill: organic stands ready as a time-tested choice with sweeping economic, environmental, and health benefits. Our public investments in agriculture should reflect that,” **said Allison Johnson, Senior Attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)**.

**Congresswoman Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.** represents North Carolina's 12th Congressional District (Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, Cabarrus County) and serves on the House Committee on Agriculture and the House Committee on Education & the Workforce, where she serves as ranking member of the Workforce Protections Subcommittee. In 2015, she founded the Adams Hunger Initiative to address food insecurity across Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, and the 12th Congressional District.

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