

March 21, 2025

The Honorable Brooke L. Rollins
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

RE: Status of Funding for the Organic Market Development Program and Transition to Organic Partnership Program - State Departments of Agriculture

Secretary Rollins:

We write to request the status of funds for the Organic Market Development Grants (OMDG) and Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP). These funds are essential for U.S. farmers and businesses to meet the growing demand for organic products. America imports *billions* of dollars of organic crops like corn, rice, soybeans, avocados, blueberries, strawberries, and squash that are also grown here at home. TOPP and OMD represent an America-first approach by investing in American farmers to bolster the domestic supply of organic food.

TOPP connects transitioning and organic producers with mentorship, technical assistance and resources. OMDG partners with farmers, manufacturers, and organizations to expand domestic infrastructure for processing, storage, transport, distribution, and educates consumers about USDA certified organic. Both programs were developed by the USDA to strengthen the market for domestically grown organic goods and support producers seeking organic certification.

Through USDA certified organic, farmers and businesses have the opportunity to serve U.S. consumers who choose healthy organic products grown and manufactured in alignment with their values, many of which are reflected in the MAHA movement. The beauty of organic certification is that these farmers and businesses opt into *voluntary* regulations that meet this consumer demand, as opposed to compulsory regulations. Many of these farmers and businesses are “split operations” growing or manufacturing both organic and conventional crops and products. Organic certification offers farmers access to different markets to spread the risk of farming across sectors.

Since TOPP launched in late 2022, six regional leads, two national partners, and more than 165 state and local organizations have successfully provided robust farmer-to-farmer mentoring services, technical assistance, and organic workforce development. In the federal fiscal year 2024 (FY24), this included more than 1,466 educational events reaching over 65,400 people. More than 2,225 individuals received technical assistance, and 327 farmer-to-farmer mentoring pairs were active. TOPP is proud to support the growth of American agriculture, contributing to the 3,863 operations and 260,479 acres certified USDA Organic. The top five crops served by the program include corn, grains, mixed vegetables, tree fruit, and berries, while the top five types of livestock are poultry for eggs, dairy livestock, beef cattle, sheep, and goats. Even greater impact occurred in previous fiscal years, with more planned for the future.

With OMDG grantees spanning Montana, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Iowa and many other states, this program is uniquely positioned to address key challenges in the organic supply chain. Combining tens of millions of dollars of matching business investment with USDA funding this grant program invests in infrastructure development, market diversification, and value-added opportunities to strengthen the competitiveness of U.S. organic products domestically and establish fair competition against foreign manufacturers and producers.

The impact of OMDG funding is essential to build the necessary infrastructure to support increased domestic organic production. To date, the program has contracted with 107 entities in 37 states. 68% of the funding was awarded to small businesses- mostly in rural communities with more than 2/3s of those going directly to farmers and ranchers. Over 40% of the projects are for expansion of organic grains and feedstuffs, a crop that U.S. net imports for organic despite being a net exporter in conventional agricultural. The signers on this letter represent projects impacting over 1000 American farmers. Many farmers and businesses that received OMDG contracts have already begun building new processing lines or renovating on-farm infrastructure. They funded projects out of pocket and are awaiting clarity on reimbursements and future expenditures. USDA certified organic is a successful public-private partnership. Through continued USDA investment in the National Organic Program, Transition to Organic Partnership Program, and Organic Market Development Grants we can continue to jointly build and grow a successful domestic organic market that serves American producers and the American public.

We welcome the opportunity to share more on the importance of these programs for farmers and businesses in our states. In the interim, we respectfully request an update on the status of the contracted funds and provide industry support for their continued completion to realize their necessary impact on growing our domestic production.

Sincerely,

Anson Tebbetts
Secretary
Vermont Department of Agriculture, Food &
Markets

Paul Brierley
Director
Arizona Department of Agriculture

Thom Petersen
Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Lisa Charpilloz Hanson
Director
Oregon Department of Agriculture

Kelly Pehrson
Interim Commissioner
Utah Department of Agriculture and Food

Randy Romanski
Secretary
Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade
and Consumer Protection

Kate Greenberg
Commissioner
Colorado Department of Agriculture

Jonathan Shell
Commissioner
Kentucky Department of Agriculture

Russell Redding
Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture

Derek Sandison
Director
Washington State Department of Agriculture