

## **National Organic Coalition—Press Release from January 7, 2025**

### *The Status of Organic Programs and the Farm Bill: A Call for Action*

As 2024 came to a close, Congress narrowly avoided a government shutdown by passing a last-minute spending package that included a one-year extension of the Farm Bill through September 30, 2025. While this decision temporarily ensures funding for baseline programs, it excluded critical "orphaned" organic programs that lack permanent funding. This omission underscores the ongoing challenges faced by the organic sector and the urgent need for action.

### *What Happened?*

In its rushed effort to avert a shutdown, Congress passed a continuing resolution to fund the government through March 14, 2025. This resolution included \$30 billion for agricultural disaster assistance, with \$10 billion earmarked for commodity farms and revenue-based disaster relief for producers. While this funding was critical to help farmers who are struggling with economic challenges, it does little to address the unique needs of organic farmers and businesses. Notably, the Farm Bill extension failed to include funding for essential organic programs, leaving them in jeopardy.

The programs left unfunded—commonly referred to as “orphaned” organic programs—include the following:

1. The Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP): This program, now defunded, helps organic farms and businesses offset certification costs. Without it, certification costs will increase significantly in 2025, and may force some farms to abandon certification altogether.
2. The Organic Data Initiative (ODI): This initiative is critical for collecting and analyzing data to support organic agriculture. Without this program, USDA will be hampered in their efforts to provide organic producers with the critical data they need to meet growing consumer demand and remain competitive.
3. The Organic Certification Trade and Tracking Program (OCTT): This program provides the technology infrastructure needed to enforce organic regulations and prevent fraud. Its defunding will hamper the USDA’s ability to safeguard the integrity of the organic label and enforce the new Strengthening Organic Enforcement rule.

### *The Consequences of Defunding Organic Programs*

Excluding funding for these programs is a significant blow to the organic community. Farmers will face increased costs and reduced support, while the USDA could struggle to

maintain the integrity of the organic label, a key factor in consumer trust. While the ‘orphan’ organic programs represent a miniscule fraction of the overall Farm Bill’s budget, the impacts of their defunding are significant, threatening organic farms and businesses from across the U.S.

### *A Missed Opportunity*

The exclusion of these programs highlights the importance of educating legislators about the value of organic agriculture. Congress also failed to include Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding for conservation programs like EQIP and CSP in the Farm Bill baseline, missing an opportunity to provide permanent support for sustainable farming practices.

### *Looking Ahead*

The National Organic Coalition’s work in 2025 will focus on educating Congressional offices, and new Agriculture Committee members in the House and Senate in particular. NOC will advocate for the inclusion of critical organic programs in a new Farm Bill. With a new Congress and administration, organic advocates must explain the value of organic agriculture in creating economically viable farm businesses and in protecting natural resources. In addition, we need to make sure that policymakers understand that organic is a voluntary program and the future success of organic agriculture rests on keeping organic standards strong and maintaining consumer trust in the organic label.

The road ahead is challenging. The lack of funding for core organic programs in the Farm Bill extension demonstrates the importance of continued education for legislators on why organic programs are critical to farmers’ success and the future of organic agriculture.

### *What’s Next?*

In March 2025, NOC will host a fly-in and lobby day in Washington, D.C., bringing farmers and advocates together to meet with Congressional leaders and highlight the importance of organic agriculture. This education and advocacy will be critical to making the case for permanent funding of orphaned organic programs and advancing the priorities of the organic community in Farm Bill and government funding negotiations in 2025.

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### *Take Action with Beyond Pesticides*

Stay tuned for an incoming Action of the Week to contact your U.S. Representative and Senator to fully fund organic programs in the next Farm Bill. Organic agriculture must grow and become the standard for agriculture in order to address the existential crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and human disease.