

ORGANIC ASSOCIATION OF KENTUCKY ADVOCACY UPDATE



Spring 2025
by Brooke Gentile
Executive Director

TAKING ORGANIC FARMER PRIORITIES TO D.C.

In early March 2025, organic farmers from across the United States converged on Washington, D.C. for the [Organic Farmers Association \(OFA\)](#) Farmer Fly-In. OAK was proud to participate in this powerful advocacy event, alongside 35 farmers and advocates who met with over 60 U.S. legislators to advocate for organic agriculture. Representing Kentucky, Brooke Gentile, OAK Executive Director, had the privilege of joining farmer and OAK Board Member, Bryce Baumann, in sharing the stories and priorities of Kentucky's organic farmers with our representatives.



Farmers and advocates from across the country stood united, raising their voices on behalf of organic agriculture. With the federal funding freeze, congressional discussions heating up around the continuing resolution, the long-delayed 2023 Farm Bill and upcoming federal appropriations, it was (and is) an important time to advocate for policies that directly impact our farms and communities. While connecting with elected officials might sound intimidating, Fly-In participants learned that officials and their staff are eager to hear from OAK and from *YOU* - their constituents!

ADVOCATING FOR ORGANICS & KENTUCKY FARMERS

During their visit to The Hill, Brooke, Bryce and other farmers involved in the Fly-In met with members of the **Senate and House Agriculture Committees**, focusing on the urgent needs of the organic sector within the appropriations process and the Farm Bill.

Brooke and Bryce also engaged with Kentucky Congressional offices to advocate for key organic priorities, while addressing critical issues like federal funding freezes and staffing cuts at the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA). These reductions threaten vital farmer programs. Meetings with legislative staff from **Senator Mitch McConnell's, Representative Andy Barr's and Representative Hal Rogers'** offices were productive, ensuring Kentucky farmer priorities were heard.



OFA farmers, members and leadership meet with the Senate Agriculture Committee majority leader, Senator Boozman (R-AR)

MEETING WITH USDA LEADERSHIP

OFA coordinated an informative meeting with USDA leadership, bringing together a room full of organic farmers to engage with **Chris Purdy, Deputy Director, National Organic Program (NOP)** and **Bruce Summers, Administrator, Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)**.

During the meeting, farmers raised important questions about the rollout of the [Strengthening Organic Enforcement](#) (SOE) rule, heard about NOP's priorities for the year and discussed concerns about looming budget cuts.

The NOP operates with a budget of under \$23 million annually, overseeing a \$70 billion industry and more than 56,000 certified organic operations — **a small investment that yields tremendous results**. Moving forward, it's critical that we advocate for Congress and USDA to protect NOP funding and staff, ensuring the integrity and continued growth of organic agriculture.



From left: Bruce Summers USDA AMS, Kate Mendenhall OFA, Ben Bowell Oregon Tilth, Scott Myers of Woodlyn Acres Farm, Chris Purdy USDA NOP

KEY PRIORITIES FOR ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

This year, OFA's advocacy efforts were bolstered by **The Washington Post**, which showcased the passionate voices of organic farmers who are pushing for policies that protect and grow the \$70 billion U.S. organic industry: [watch the video](#).

Throughout meetings in Washington D.C., farmers focused on sharing stories to illustrate several crucial issues that will shape the future of organic farming. Fly-In participants focused on the following key priorities:

- **Lifting the Federal Funding Freeze:** Organic farmers are experiencing significant setbacks due to the freeze on federal funding for organic programs. Immediate action is required to restore funding and to ensure continued support.
- **Adapting USDA Programs for Organic Farmers:** Existing USDA programs need to be better tailored to meet the needs of organic operations, particularly in areas such as crop insurance and conservation.
- **Funding and Staffing Conservation Programs:** Organic farmers rely on conservation programs. Full funding and staffing for these initiatives are essential to support sustainable farming practices and environmental protections.
- **Upholding Organic Integrity:** Ensuring the integrity of organic certification is vital for maintaining stable markets for domestic organic products. Farmers stressed the importance of strengthening enforcement mechanisms within the USDA's National Organic Program (NOP).
- **Reauthorizing Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP):** This program offsets the cost of certification for organic producers. OCCSP is essential for ensuring access to the organic market for family farms.
- **Codifying Infrastructure Grants:** Farmers continue to call for infrastructure grants in the upcoming Farm Bill to support farm viability, economic development and growth of the organic sector.
- **Investing in Organic Research:** Increased funding for organic research is needed to ensure that organic farmers have the tools and knowledge to thrive. Research investments should serve all types of organic farming operations, from small-scale growers to larger producers.

Learn more about OFA's legislative priorities [here](#)

CONTINUING RESOLUTION: SPENDING BILL CUTS

In mid-March, Congress passed the Continuing Resolution (CR), a temporary spending bill that averted a federal government shutdown. The CR maintains funding for some food and agriculture programs at the same levels as fiscal year (FY) 2024, through September 30, 2025. However, **the deal includes significant funding cuts** for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and the Agricultural Research Service (ARS). These reductions will limit farmers' access to vital technical assistance and slow down critical organic research and education initiatives. Ultimately, these cuts threaten progress in improving farm productivity and enhancing farmland resilience.

As Congress begins work on FY2026 funding, it is crucial that lawmakers prioritize farmers and communities by standing against harmful cuts and advocating for meaningful investments in agricultural progress.

WHAT TO EXPECT WITH THE NEXT FARM BILL

Progress on a new Farm Bill is still stalled. The 2018 Farm Bill has been extended until September 30 of this year, but it does not include several important organic programs, such as the Organic Certification Cost Share Program. More information is included in the "Take Action" section below about how to urge your legislators to restore funding for cost-share and other critical programs important to organic farmers.

As lawmakers begin to work on a new Farm Bill, OAK will continue to advocate for organic and conservation priorities, closely watching "marker bills" that play a crucial role in the development of the Farm Bill. Marker bills are introduced early in the process to signal priorities and set the stage for broader negotiations, laying the groundwork for specific policy areas such as crop insurance, conservation, research and nutrition. They often highlight key issues that need to be addressed in the final Farm Bill. The legislative process begins with marker bills being discussed and refined in committees before the full bill is drafted. The timeline can span over a year, with hearings, amendments and debates in both the House and Senate. By the time the final Farm Bill is passed, these marker bills will help shape the direction and content of the legislation, ensuring that important issues for farmers are considered.

Curious to learn more about the Farm Bill?

Check out [this resource from the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition](#) (NSAC).

TAKE ACTION NOW!

Reflections from Bryce Baumann, OAK Board Member and farmer

As farmers, we're used to putting our heads down and doing what needs to be done to get the crop planted before a spring rain, repair equipment breakdowns on Friday afternoons and rush to harvest the tomatoes before the first frost. Farm life is full of so unknowns because our livelihoods are so inextricable from nature.

Over the years, American society has acknowledged, albeit unwittingly, this deep and complex interconnectedness. We eat, therefore we are. We have developed a handful of public programs that support farmers and farming by investing in conservation projects, education, research and financial and disaster assistance. Many of these programs and agencies are now directly at risk of funding cuts or elimination, reversing the decades of work it has taken to build this public network of farm support. OAK is also at risk, as many of the programs developed in the last couple of years are on the chopping block.



Bryce and Brooke sharing stories from Kentucky farmers.

Now is the time to make your voice heard!

Contact members of Congress to share your story about the federal funding freeze and to advocate for programs that will help family farms thrive. Ask your elected officials to support priorities for family farms and organic agriculture in the upcoming Farm Bill by mentioning any programs or marker bills that matter most to you, your farm and your community.

[Visit OAK's Advocacy page](#) for details on how to contact your members of Congress.

STAY CONNECTED TO ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITIES

Kentucky Food Action Network (KFAN) - [sign up for updates](#)

National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition - [sign up for enews](#)

Organic Farmers Association - [sign up for emails and monthly e-magazine](#)

Learn more about OAK at www.oak-ky.org and contact us at info@oak-ky.org.

FEDERAL FUNDING FREEZE RESOURCES

If your farm or community has been impacted by funding freezes, contract terminations or other program cuts, please explore these resources and contact your representatives.

- [National Sustainable Agriculture Funding Freeze Toolkit](#)
- [Federal Funding Freeze Action Center - OEFFA](#)
- [Farm Commons Resources for Frozen or Terminated Federal Grants](#) including these detailed [Legal Action Steps for Farmers with Signed Contracts](#)
- What to do if your farm receives USDA funding:
 - Document everything and remain in compliance. Ensure that you are fully compliant with all active contract terms and conditions and document communications from any federal agency related to your project.
 - Check out this helpful resource from [Land & Liberation](#), which offers suggestions on how you can best prepare to take action.
- What happened when? [Check out OEFFA's Federal Funding Freeze Timeline](#)

A UNIFIED VOICE FOR ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

Thank you for your ongoing support of Kentucky's organic farmers and for sharing your stories, enabling OAK to amplify collective voices on the national stage. Together, we are stronger, and we are shaping the future of organic agriculture and conservation work.



OFA farmers and advocates on the steps of the United States Department of Agriculture building in March.