



FROM THE MARGINS TO THE MAINSTREAM

*Advancing Organic
Agriculture in the U.S.*



NATIONAL ORGANIC ACTION PLAN



The NOAP Project is a collaborative project, led by RAFI-USA, which provides overall programmatic development and organizing support for the Project. Michael Sligh and Liana Hoodes lead this effort on behalf of RAFI and the NOAP Planning Team listed below. Our team of dedicated volunteers, active in organic food and farming movements, came together to plan the NOAP Project and to organize and facilitate Dialogue Meetings and the National NOAP Summit. Some members also contributed to the drafting of the NOAP document (*denotes NOAP drafting Team Members).

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Advancing Organic Agriculture in the U.S.

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This NOAP is dedicated to the hundreds of people across the country who freely offered their time, talent, and expertise to make the creation of this National Organic Action Plan possible. We are forever grateful for their collaboration in constructing this vision and plan for the future of organic food and agriculture in the U.S.

We also dedicate this NOAP to the family farmers who laid the foundations of organic agriculture and to those who continue to forge innovative systems of organic production in this country and throughout the world.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This National Organic Action Plan (NOAP) represents the culmination of five years of meetings that engaged diverse stakeholders in envisioning the future of organic and in building strategies for realizing our collective vision. It calls for the creation of an expanded organic policy agenda for the next decade and beyond that reflects the broad social, environmental, and health values of the organic movement and the associated benefits that organic food systems afford society. The goal of the NOAP Project is to *establish organic as the foundation for food and agricultural production systems across the United States.*

Grassroots Lead the Development of a National Organic Action Plan

Motivated by the growing realization that the grassroots must regain and redirect the vision of organic or risk it being compromised by those without a commitment to organic integrity, the NOAP Project embarked on a five-year, nationwide, dialogue on the future of organic. NOAP organizers wanted to create a proactive, organic action plan similar to National Organic Action Plans in the European Union and elsewhere. But in contrast to the many government-derived plans, we wanted our plan to emanate from the grassroots organic community so that the broadest range of stakeholders would share in its development and take responsibility for its implementation.

Organic Agriculture Affords Multiple Benefits to Society

At this critical moment in history when concrete solutions are so desperately needed to address integrated global social, environmental, and economic crises, organic agriculture provides multiple solutions and benefits. Its system of production can produce high yielding crops, enhance food security and independence, reduce the adverse impacts of agriculture on the environment and climate change, and contribute to the development of food self-sufficient and sustainable communities. The largely untapped potential of organic to provide concrete and long-lasting solutions to a variety of persistent problems of modern, industrialized society has inspired farmers and non-farmers alike to join grassroots movements to strengthen the integrity of organic, grow markets for organic products, and facilitate universal access to healthy, organic food.

Time is Ripe for Government to Forge a Comprehensive Organic Agenda

The U.S. government lags well behind many other governments in terms of its commitment to enhancing and promoting organic food and agriculture and it remains one of the last industrialized countries to develop a national organic action plan. It has yet to acknowledge the multitude of health and environmental benefits associated with moves away from chemical-intensive agriculture and towards more environmentally and socially responsible methods of food production.

In surprising contrast to its predecessors, the Obama Administration has demonstrated early public support for organic not only in the White House garden and kitchen, but also in the U.S. Department of Agriculture where it has doubled the budget and staff of the National Organic Program (NOP). Clearly the time is ripe for the government to forge a comprehensive organic agenda, created in partnership with the wide range of stakeholders in the organic community, as envisioned by the drafters of the founding U.S. organic legislation — the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA).

It is also worth noting that the NOAP Project has already made some progress towards reaching its goals. In June of 2009, USDA elevated the status of the National Organic Program (NOP) to a stand-alone program within the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). It was formerly buried as a project of AMS's transportation program. And, in September 2009, USDA hired the first NOP Deputy Administrator who has extensive experience running a statewide organic program and assisting other states in the development of their organic programs.



NOAP Reflects Broad Social, Environmental and Health Values Embedded in Organic

The NOAP recommends adoption of an expanded U.S. organic policy agenda that reflects the broad social, environmental, and health values embedded in OFPA and espoused by the organic community. It identifies concrete objectives and timelines for the future growth of organic food and agriculture and for achieving the associated social and environmental benefits by articulating objectives and benchmarks for tracking and measuring accomplishments. The NOAP empowers the grassroots to engage in public policy debates on organic by providing a detailed plan of action that can be adapted to meet community and statewide needs and conditions.

NOAP Establishes Concrete Benchmarks for Expanding Organic Production

Although the purpose of the NOAP goes beyond simply establishing production targets, it does make some specific recommendations with respect to expanding organic production. In particular, it calls for:

- Doubling the amount of organic products and the number of farms, acreage, public lands, and animals under organic management every five years through 2020.
- Expanding local organic seed production capacities, with a benchmark of meeting 50% of all local organic seed needs by 2020.

- Increasing local organic production and processing by 50% by 2020, by increasing the infrastructure of organic regional food systems with government financial assistance.
- Increasing organic supplies to ensure the commercial availability of all agriculture-based organic ingredients contained in processed foods by 2014, including minor ingredients, seeds, and livestock feed.

To protect the integrity of organic and to prevent contamination from genetically modified organisms (GMOs), the Plan recommends the adoption of legislation that shifts the responsibility and liability for buffering against GMO contamination to the manufacturers and/or patent-holders of GMO seeds by 2012. NOAP recommendations also include rBGH labeling on all products by 2010 and GMO labeling by 2012 to protect organic integrity.

NOAP Advances Agriculture Policies Beyond Marketplace Goals

We call upon the U.S. government to use the recommendations contained in this NOAP as a guide for the development of a broader framework for policies that support the growth and improvement of organic food and agricultural systems. This framework will help advance organic policies beyond narrow, market-based goals to include incentives for transitioning to organic, technical assistance, research, and other programs aimed at maximizing organic's social, environmental, economic and health benefits.

We also call upon state governments, non-government organizations (NGOs), and community activists to use the NOAP as the basis for developing State Organic Action Plans (SOAPs) that will contribute to the realization of these vision and goals.

The NOAP Project agreed upon the following overarching principles to advance organic food and agriculture in a manner that supports our shared values and furthers our vision of the future of organic:

- 1. Maintain and continuously improve organic quality and integrity;**
- 2. Increase domestic organic production by supporting farm and market diversity;**
- 3. Ensure a fair marketplace for small, medium-sized, and family farmers and workers;**
- 4. Maximize organic production potential by increasing the U.S. produced share of organic products in the domestic marketplace;**
- 5. Safeguard the environment and conserve biodiversity;**
- 6. Enhance access to healthy, organically grown, fresh food for all people of all income levels; and**
- 7. Move society towards more socially just and humane food and agricultural production systems.**

It is our hope that the vision and plan for collective action that is embodied in the NOAP will unite people across the country in their efforts to **establish organic as the foundation for U.S. food and agricultural production systems.**