



# Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

*An organization of farmers, gardeners, and consumers working to promote an economically viable and ecologically sound Vermont food system*

*Oral Testimony provided to the Vermont Field Hearing  
of the U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee  
by Enid Wonnacott, Executive Director*

Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT)  
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Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this federal hearing. My name is Enid Wonnacott and I am the Executive Director of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT). Having been at NOFA-VT for 20 years, I have witnessed several Farm Bills. They have not, historically, promoted policies that favor small farms, nor local food systems, rather they have been directed at the production and export of commodity crops.

Michael Pollan recently wrote that most Americans are not engaged in the process of creating the Farm Bill, that many people don't know a farmer nor care about agriculture – but we all eat. He recommended that “this time around, lets call it the food bill.” Of course Vermont is different, in that most Vermonters know farmers, and most Vermonters care about agriculture, but it begs the question, “How would our agricultural system be different if our country created a Food Bill or a Farm and Food Bill every 5 years?”

Many people question why the national market for organic food increases more than 20% a year, or why organic farming is the fastest growing agricultural sector in Vermont. There are currently 394 organic producers in Vermont farming 66,000 acres, with more than \$60 million in annual gross sales. The growth may be based on science, or fear, or taste, but more than these factors, I think consumers want to know where there food comes from, they want a food experience, they want the opportunity to buy food directly from the farmers in Vermont, from their neighbors. NOFA-VT supports a Farm and Food Bill that focuses less on the development of export markets and more on the development of local and regional markets. With relocalization as the screen, some of the highlights of the 2007 Farm and Food Bill would include:

Support for organic programs that will help bridge the growing gap between demand for organic food products and supply, including;

- Reauthorization of the organic certification cost-share program;



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- An organic conversion program that is rooted in on-farm technical assistance;
- A credible and respected National Organic Program that works to maintain the integrity of the organic label; and
- The removal of federal regulatory barriers that impede the development of local and regional markets, especially for meat.

*A Nutrition Title that meets the mutual goals of market development and food access that:*

- Creates a new Child and Youth Nutrition Program, modeled after the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, that supports local food purchasing contracts to low income child care centers, summer feeding programs and school food programs.
- Enables food stamps to be used at farmers markets, farm stands and Community Supported Agriculture, which is supported in USDA's new proposed WIC rules. Currently \$4 million dollars a month are being spent in Vermont in food stamps, none of which are being captured by farmers because the local markets don't have the capacity to accept electronic benefits.
- Supports the components of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act, specifically Section 122: access to Local Food and School Gardens, authorized (but not funded) by Congress in 2004.
- Strengthens the Food Stamp Program by increasing the minimum benefit.

*A Research Title that:*

- Mandates a risk assessment on emerging agricultural technologies, like genetically modified organisms, this analysis needs to take place at the federal level.
- Levels the playing field with research on organic and sustainable agriculture. Despite the growth in organic, funding for organic research has remained stagnant at 1/2 of 1% of all research dollars.
- Prioritizes classical plant and animal breeding within the National Research Initiative's germplasm program to maintain genetic diversity and seed and breed stock that is adapted to changing environmental and climatic conditions.

*An Energy Title that:*

- Supports energy efficiency for small farms, and support for on-farm energy production. Most of the funding support has been for larger farms and is not appropriate to scale for small farms.

There are many current programs that support these priorities including the Value Added Producer Grants, the Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program, the Farmers Market Promotion Program, the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, and the Sustainable Agriculture, Research and Education Program (SARE) among others. NOFA-VT currently receives or has received federal support for our program work from these important programs.

In closing, I would like to advocate for the work of the Commission on Small Farms, and their 1998 report entitled *A Time to Act*. Many of the recommendations of NOFA-VT and complementary national organizations are embodied in the Commission's report. The Commission recommended the creation of a new title for the 2002 Farm Bill, a Small Farm Title, which bears reconsideration as part of the 2007 Farm Bill discussion.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today, and thank you for your exceptional congressional leadership.