



CORNUCOPIA
I N S T I T U T E

Secretary Thomas Vilsack
United States Department of Agriculture

June 21, 2012

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

When Congress passed the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) of 1990, it aimed at filling seats on the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) with a balanced variety of organic community stakeholders. To reach this goal, OFPA ensured that two seats would be reserved for agribusiness representatives (“handlers”) and that organic farmers, public interest representatives, environmentalists, a certifier and a scientist would fill other slots.

If the intent of Congress were respected, this system would work well and lead to a balanced Board acting in the interest of the entire organic community. Instead, a secretive nomination process has led to the appointment of agribusiness employees to seats reserved for other stakeholders. Your recent appointment of Carmela Beck serves an example of agribusiness representatives serving on seats that were legally reserved by Congress for others.

The nomination process to fill an environmentalist slot is now open. We would like to see the best candidate appointed – someone who shares the values of the organic community and truly fulfills the spirit and the letter of the law’s intent for an environmentalist/conservationist.

We hope that qualified individuals will apply to be on the Board this year and that you will reverse your policy of refusing to share the names of nominees publicly. We would rather be placed in a position to applaud your next appointment rather than challenge it in court.

We believe that transparency in the nomination process will result in the appointment of a truly exemplary candidate who reflects the values of the organic community, as intended by Congress.

Sincerely,

Mark Kastel
Codirector
The Cornucopia Institute

CC: Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan