



May 10, 2016

USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack
Room 200-A Whitten Building
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack –

The Cornucopia Institute is renewing our request for transparency in the selection process for new members to the National Organic Standards Board. This year, as you know, five new members will be appointed to the NOSB. When Congress passed the Organic Foods Production Act in 1990 (OFPA), they designated membership slots on the NOSB for various constituencies involved with organic food and agriculture and defined the criteria for those slots.

Because of the important role of the NOSB, The Cornucopia Institute believes that the organic community would be best served by an open and transparent selection process allowing stakeholders to weigh in on potential appointees to the Board. At one time, prior to the Obama administration, the names and backgrounds of nominees were made public. We are again calling on you to return to this type of process.

With this request, we are not asking you to release confidential information, such as personal information like social security numbers. Rather, we are explicitly interested in the name of the individual and the background information pertinent to the designated seat for which they are applying. Many in the organic community would welcome the opportunity to provide constructive feedback on the potential appointees and help ensure that the best and most qualified individuals are the focus of the final appointment process that you and the Department exercise.

An increase in transparency would decrease the possibility that an appointee to the NOSB does not meet the letter of the law and the requirements stipulated by OFPA. Conflicts with the

qualifications designated by Congress have been brought to your attention before by Cornucopia. In fact, we are currently involved in litigation with the Department concerning two individuals who do not, in our opinion, own or operate an organic farm (as required by OFPA) yet were somehow appointed to seats reserved for organic farmers. We know of a number of truly exemplary farmer-candidates who have been passed over with these questionable appointments. A more transparent selection process would likely have mitigated this occurrence.

We thank you for your consideration of the substance of this letter. Cornucopia's motivation has always been to help the Department create a truly exemplary program, as Congress envisioned, and to protect the integrity of the organic label.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Will Fantle". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Will Fantle
Codirector