

**Statement of
Mr. Will Harris
White Oak Pastures
President, Georgia Organics Board of Directors
Before the US Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
September 15, 2010**

Honorable committee members,

I'm very grateful and humbled to have been asked, by senator Saxby Chambliss, to address you today and share my views on the state of the *national organics program*.

I would also like to thank each of you and your congressional colleagues for creating, supporting, and working to refine this program.

White oak pastures is my farm, and it is the largest USDA certified organic farm in the state of Georgia.

My family has raised cattle on the same farm since 1866. My daughter is the fifth generation of the Harris family to be employed on this farm.

We raise beef that is certified grassfed, certified humane, and animal welfare approved. We also raise sheep, turkeys, and chickens. Our beef is sold by whole foods markets from Miami, Florida to Princeton, New Jersey.

We have constructed our own USDA-approved beef abattoir on our farm. This is a zero-waste facility, and 40% of its energy needs are supplied by solar panels. It is one of a very few such on-farm facilities in the country.

We are about to begin construction of our on-farm poultry processing plant that we hope will qualify for a USDA certificate of inspection on this facility, as well.

I'm proud to say that my farm is one of the largest privately- owned employers in early county, with an annual payroll of over \$1 million. This demonstrates that organic farming is more than just a hobby. We're an industry that can provide hundreds of thousands of jobs across the country.

These organic farms stimulate the economies in rural areas, where help is so desperately needed. I'm proud to say that my ranch is a testament to this fact.

When I'm not on my farm, it is my honor to serve as the president of the board of directors of Georgia organics.

It is in that capacity that I'm going to get down to brass tacks for the discussion about the pros and cons of the national organic movement and how it functions today.

There's no doubt the program has been vital in bringing sustainability and improved land stewardship to the American agriculture industry.

The national organic program has significantly improved production practices that protect our soil, air, and water quality.

We can only speculate how many millions of tons of carcinogenic pesticides have not been used because of this program... or how many tons of greenhouse gases have been eliminated?

The program provides consistent and strong marketing opportunities for farmers across the county. It offers price premiums in the marketplace to producers who raise products that have been certified organic.

The program gives consumers the choice of eliminating toxins, additives, gmo's, artificial hormones and antibiotics from their diet.

Georgia organics appreciates this opportunity to share what we would consider to be room for improvement.

I suspect that you might have heard some of these before:

We'd like to see the program more strongly enforce its certification standards and employ punitive measures for producers who cut corners or flat out cheat.

We worry that the lack of oversight – over time - may weaken public trust, undermining the efforts of those of us who are committed to eliminating the use of synthetic fertilizers, chemicals, hormones and antibiotics for both environmental and public health.

We would also like to see the program continue and expand its cost share program with state governments to offset certification costs, particularly for first-time applicants.

You should also know that the national organic program has significant partners across the country that supports its mission of perpetuating sustainable food and farms.

At Georgia organics, we are committed to providing regular educational services on organic production and certification.

We shall continue to partner with researchers, educators and extension agents to bolster their commitment and resources directed at producers interested in organic production and certification.

And we shall continue to promote, recognize, and market certified organic producers in the Georgia organics local food guide.

Thank you again for giving me this opportunity and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.