

Statement of

Kim Tait  
Tait Farm Foods  
Before the U.S. Senate  
Committee on Agriculture  
July 28, 2011

Chairwoman Stabenow, and members of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I am Kim Tait, owner of Tait Farm Foods. I am testifying on behalf of the thousands of small and medium size organic farmers across the country. Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony regarding the importance of organic agriculture and specialty crops in this country as it relates to the upcoming 2012 Farm Bill.

I own and operate a family farm in central Pennsylvania. It is a diversified business that has a number of inter-related enterprises, including a certified organic farm that operates 10 acres of vegetable, fruit & greenhouse production. Our primary market for organic produce is a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program that serves 200 members and 3 restaurants, as well as a local farmers market and an on-farm retail store. Tait Farm manufactures specialty foods and produces a line of 55 value-added products in our on-farm processing facility. The business also operates an on-farm retail store & greenhouse that supports 100+ regional food producers and artisans. In addition, we have a regionally based mail order catalog/internet and wholesale business. On the farm we also conduct educational workshops, tours & research in collaboration with Penn State University (PSU), local government and community organizations.

As a representative of the thousands of small to medium organic producers, I would like to emphasize that all of us have been and continue to be part of the fastest growing sector in the agricultural marketplace. Our successes come from growing consumer demand for healthy food and we serve local, regional, national & international markets. Our customers want to be assured of the organic authenticity of our products and are willing to pay for the additional integrity provided by the USDA organic seal. Our industry has generated double-digit growth in the market each year since 2002, except during the recent recession, when we experienced 8% growth. This is unprecedented when you consider the conventional food system grew by only .6%.

I have had the good fortune to participate in several of the USDA programs designed to help organic and small to midsize growers. These include the Organic Certification Cost Share, the EQUIP High Tunnel Grant, SARE Research Programs with PSU, NRCS - Soil Conservation Planning for farms, as well as Land Grant Agricultural Extension. I am also very proud to say that we have recently been approved to accept Food Stamps for our CSA.

These USDA programs provide significant help to organic producers. They allow us to grow our businesses by providing seed money to take the next steps. They are a hand up, not a hand out!

The results of the assistance have become firmly rooted in sound agricultural and business practices. The Organic Cost Share Program for organic certification is helping thousands of new and small farmers come into and stay in the growing organic marketplace. An example on my farm of the value of these programs is with the EQUIP High Tunnel Grant. The seed money from USDA provided two thirds of the cost and we were able to contribute the additional one third. This new growing structure will allow us to double our winter and early spring greens production. This is a good investment for both the government and us, and will continue to provide a return on the investment for the next 30 years. Equally important, our ability to accept Food Stamps will help us expand our market and allow families and individuals with limited means to purchase locally grown, organic foods.

Successful and diversified organic farming operations create jobs for rural communities, they train new young farmers, and they help meet the demand for organically grown foods on local, regional, national and international levels. With continued support, organic farms have the opportunity to provide even more healthy, fresh food to people of all economic means.

In order to assure the future viability and integrity of organic agriculture, it is essential we continue to have oversight and regulation from the National Organic Program (NOP). This governing body assures consumers around the world that they can buy organic food with confidence. Again, funding this program makes good economic and environmental sense. Its growth is driven by consumer demand and is being promoted nationwide by programs such as *Know Your Farmer*, *Know Your Food* and *Buy Fresh, Buy Local*.

Here is how I believe Congress can help us:

- Continue to fairly fund the National Organic Program and the growing organic marketplace.
- Support new and beginning farmers with the Organic Cost Share program. Please keep an eye on the ceilings for participation in Federal programs - in this economy they may quickly become too low.
- Continue to help organic farmers take the next steps, with a hand up! Support on-farm innovation through programs like EQUIP and renewable and green energy projects – We are a good investment!
- Simplify the granting process, making it and the timing of deadlines more farmer friendly. For example, the current Value Added Producer Grants have a deadline of August 29th - working farmers simply cannot write grants at the height of the growing season.
- Base grants on sound business proposals rather than feasibility studies. By and large, we are doers! For example - I don't need \$100K to study something when I know what I want and need to do, and have a sound business plan that might require \$60K - \$300K to implement and get it done!

- Make funding and tax incentives for farmland preservation and conservation easements permanent.
- Please don't over regulate us! Organic is already one the most regulated sectors of agriculture. We meet ALL food safety and nutrient management regulations, as well as the rigorous requirements of the NOP standards. We have an annual inspection of our farms and records, and are required to have full traceability of our food chain from seed to table. As for food safety – we are all for it. However, we are concerned that the Food Safety and Modernization Act is too burdensome for the small to midsize operations.
- Provide every American with access to fresh, healthy food.

We are all in this together and each of us has role to play. In nature, we know that *Diversity Creates Stability*. I believe the same is true for agriculture. It is the diversity of our farms and farming systems that make American agriculture great. Organic agriculture is an important part of the future of food, from local to global. We ask you to fairly support us in the 2012 Farm Bill.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kim Tait*

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