

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Continues Secret Process of Appointing Corporate Factory Farm Executives to Organic Standards Board

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Global Research, October 04, 2014

[Natural News](#) 3 October 2014

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#)

Passed in 1990, the Farm Bill's intent was to set regulations for the agricultural sector, implementing provisions for food, nutrition, forestry, natural resource conservation, environmental protection and rural development, among other facets.

Also referred to as FACT-90 (Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990), the law was designed to make agricultural policy more green, including keeping mandatory records on pesticide use and maintaining national standards for products labeled "organic," according to the University of California.

Under the Farm Bill, the Organic Foods Production Act was established to uniform national organic food standards through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) [National Organic Program \(NOP\)](#).

Agribusiness employees holding NOSB seats jeopardize the quality of organic food

The NOP is responsible for setting standards for production, handling and processing of organically grown food, a program from which the National Organic Standard Board (NOSB) was derived. The NOSB is a 15-member board that advises the Secretary of Agriculture on maintaining quality organic standards.

The NOSB is supposed to be comprised of individuals representing farmers, environmentalists, public interest advocates, handlers, retailers, scientists and a USDA certifying agent, as [reported](#) by *Natural News*. However, one of the nation's leading organic industry watchdog groups has persistently criticized the selection of four NOSB board appointees and the secrecy surrounding their nominations.

"The selection process was conducted in secrecy despite requests to cast sunlight on the decision making and solicit input from a very engaged community of [organic](#) farmers, businesses, and consumers," said Will Fantle, the co-director for *The Cornucopia Institute*.

"We think a more transparent process would ensure the selection of the best and brightest for the various vacancies on the board — instead of, once again, appeasing the organic corporate lobby."

While four of the board's seats are designated for "farmers" and "growers" in the organic

industry (people who own or operate an organic [farm](#)), large agribusiness employees occupy two of the seats instead.

“Congress deliberately set aside the majority of seats for independent organic stakeholders as a way to prevent the kind of unseemly corporate influence we have witnessed in recent years on the NOSB,” Fantle stressed.

Cornucopia warns that allowing agribusiness employees to replace seats intended for farmers jeopardizes the integrity of organic food. Powerful food processors do not have the same interests as small-organic farmers, nor do their interests meet the NOSB’s intent under the law.

One of the new farmer-appointees is Ashley Swaffer, an employee of Arkansas Egg Company, a large, industrial-sized egg company that turned organic about five years ago. Last year, the company signed a consent decree with state officials “related to remediating problems concerning manure and liquid waste,” wrote Cornucopia.

“Maybe it’s a general conflict of interest to have companies that are primarily involved in non-certified organic manufacturing, sitting on the National [Organic Standards Board](#).” - Mark Kastel

Meanwhile, Rebecca Goodman, a “hands-on” Wisconsin organic dairy farmer, was passed up after applying three times for the board. “I guess I am not suave enough to serve my fellow organic farmers. After three attempts, I will not be applying again,” she said.

Watchdog groups are also disappointed by the appointment of Tom Chapman, a Clif Bar employee selected for one of the “handler” seats.

“The [USDA](#) Secretary could have chosen a representative of a company that sells 100% organic products, rather than a company that offers manufacturers less than 20% of their product line in a certified organic form,” said Mark Kastel, Senior Farm Policy Analyst for Cornucopia.

While some of Clif Bar’s products use organic materials, other ingredients are synthetic. Part of the board’s responsibility is to make decisions regarding allowing synthetic materials into organic food production.

“Clif Bar’s product line is basically competing with companies, at a higher price point, that are truly organic,” Kastel said. “If they are using lots of ingredients that are not presently approved for organics, will they be predisposed to open up organic production for increased use of synthetics?”

Additional sources:

<http://www.cornucopia.org>

<http://www.nal.usda.gov>

<http://tilth.org>

<http://www.naturalnews.com>

<http://www.ams.usda.gov>

<http://californiaagriculture.ucanr.org>

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