

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 20, 2023

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Thank you for your ongoing efforts to strengthen the integrity of the organic label and provide market opportunities for organic producers. I write to raise my concerns around recent reports of fraudulent organic imports.

There are existing allegations regarding fraudulent organic imports impacting hazelnut crops. As you know, organic integrity is of critical significance to the organic sector and ensuring consumers are confident in the organic label. Organic agriculture sales reached over \$60 billion in 2022 and continues to grow, building a more resilient and sustainable food system.

There is a significant amount of time and resources required to adhere to the required standards to earn a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) certified organic label. When rule-breakers cheat the system, it sows seeds of doubt about the organic label's integrity and jeopardizes the future of the industry as a whole. According to the U.S. Census Trade Bureau, over \$3 billion worth of organic commodities were imported in 2022.

I appreciate the USDA finalizing the Strengthening Organic Enforcement rule, which will go into effect March of 2024, to help address organic fraud, encourage swift implementation and request an update on implementation once the rule goes into effect. I also urge the USDA to investigate allegations of organic fraud.

Sincerely,



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress