

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 3, 2022

The Honorable Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing in support of the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Organic Livestock and Poultry Standards (OLPS) proposed rule (Doc. No. AMS-NOP-21-0073). These long-awaited and widely supported regulations will enhance animal welfare, bolster consumer confidence, safeguard the integrity of the organic label, and protect organic producers from being unfairly disadvantaged in the marketplace. We look forward to USDA finalizing this rule and welcome the opportunity to provide input on the department's proposal at this stage.

As you know, this rule is the culmination of decades of public input and extensive economic analysis. Before the prior administration withdrew the 2017 iteration of this rule, tens of thousands of comments were submitted – almost all of them in support of the regulations. We are gratified that USDA is working to fulfill the mission of the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990, which granted broad legal authority to USDA to promulgate regulations governing the organic standards including additional requirements “for the care of livestock”.

Organic farming is a vital part of U.S. agriculture production and the economy more broadly. We commend USDA for prioritizing these much needed regulations to set clear standards concerning outdoor access and the care of animals raised under the National Organic Program, create a level playing field for organic farmers, and meet consumer expectations.

We wish to highlight a number of the key components in the proposed rule that will deliver clear and consistent standards for certified organic livestock care; importantly, the proposed rule would:

- Clarify that enclosed, screened-in porches with a roof do not constitute outdoor access, closing a major loophole that has led to market failure for the organic egg sector;
- Prohibit certain practices such as the debeaking of birds, routine tail docking of pigs, tail docking and face branding of cattle, and “mulesing” of sheep (removal of strips of skin from the backside);
- Set minimum indoor and outdoor space and enrichment requirements so that organic chickens can engage in natural behaviors;
- Forbid the use of gestation crates for organic swine and require that all organic livestock housing ensures that animals have sufficient space and freedom to lie down, turn around, stand up, and fully stretch their limbs;
- Establish welfare provisions for animals during transport and slaughter; and
- Require that appropriate medication and treatment be used to minimize pain and suffering for injured or sick animals.

Speedy implementation of this rule is critical. Therefore, we urge the agency to limit the timeframe to comply with outdoor access and density requirements for organic poultry to no longer than 3 years. Outdoor access is viewed as a key component of the organic program and standards requiring such access have been decades in the making; continuing to delay implementation of these standards disadvantages producers who have already invested in providing their birds with meaningful outdoor access and impedes their ability to compete fairly in the marketplace.

The implementation of consistent and robust standards is critical to meeting consumer expectations, promoting fair practices, and improving the care of the more than 186 million animals raised under the organic label.

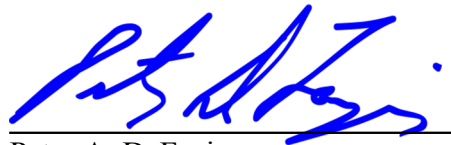
Surveys show strong support among American consumers for higher animal welfare standards for organic foods and a willingness to pay a premium for these practices. For example, in a 2017 Consumer Reports survey, 83 percent of consumers who buy organic products said that it is highly important that eggs labeled “organic” come from hens that have sufficient outdoor space to move freely. As the \$62 billion organic industry continues to grow, it is imperative that the voluntary organic standards align with the expectations of consumers seeking these value-added products.

The OLPS rule represents landmark federal regulations to set clear, consistent, enforceable, and robust standards for organic livestock, in line with the intent and spirit behind the National Organic Program. Again, we applaud USDA for moving forward with this rulemaking that will benefit farmers, animals, and consumers alike, and urge its swift implementation so that the integrity of USDA’s organic label is ensured.

Sincerely,



Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



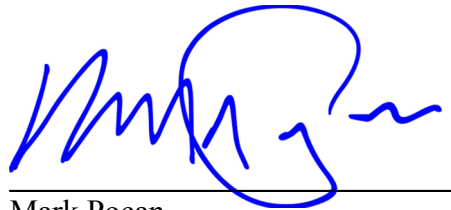
Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress



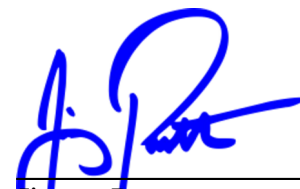
Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress



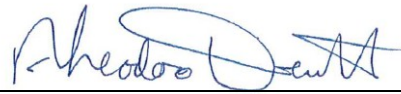
Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Jimmy Panetta
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Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



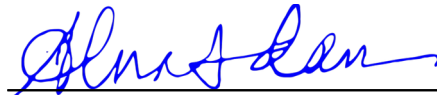
Theodore E. Deutch
Member of Congress



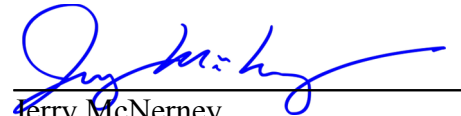
Jared Huffman
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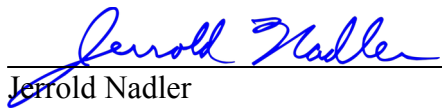
Lucy McBath
Member of Congress



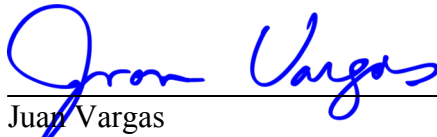
Alma S. Adams
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Vice Chair, Committee on
Agriculture



Jerry McNerney
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Jerrold Nadler
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Juan Vargas
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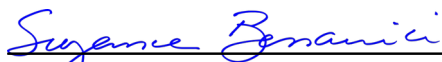
Richard E. Neal
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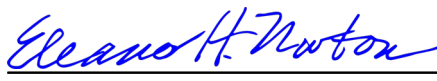
Peter Welch
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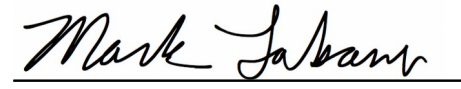
Steve Cohen
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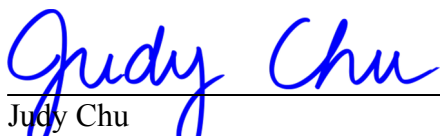
Suzanne Bonamici
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Judy Chu
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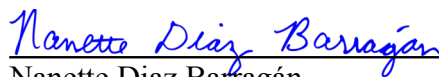
Barbara Lee
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Salud Carbajal
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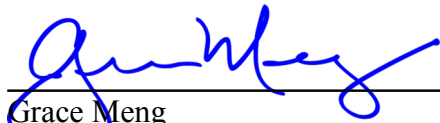
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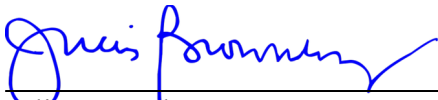
Lori Trahan
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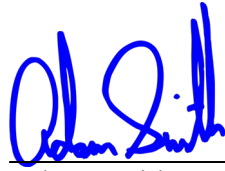
Cynthia Axne
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Julia Brownley
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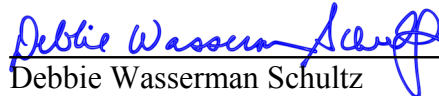
Adam Smith
Member of Congress



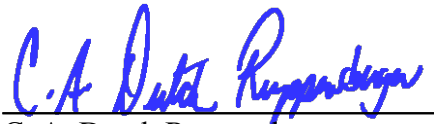
Haley M. Stevens
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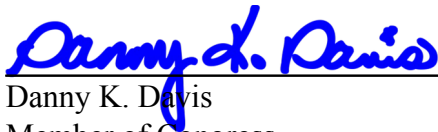
Stephen F. Lynch
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Debbie Wasserman Schultz
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C. A. Dutch Ruppertsberger
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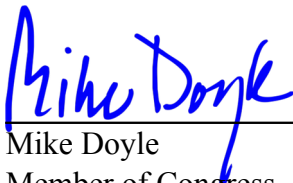
Danny K. Davis
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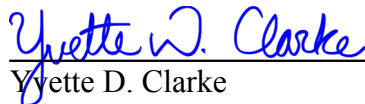
Karen Bass
Member of Congress



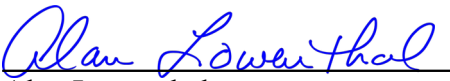
Nikema Williams
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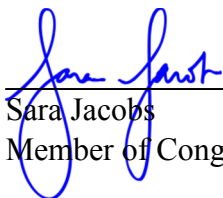
Mike Doyle
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Yvette D. Clarke
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Alan Lowenthal
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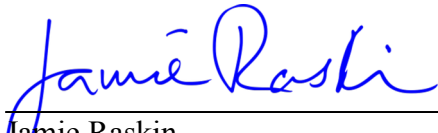
Sara Jacobs
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Bill Pascrell, Jr.
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Ro Khanna
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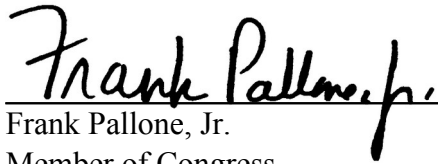
Jamie Raskin
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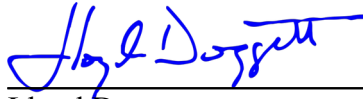
Ann McLane Kuster
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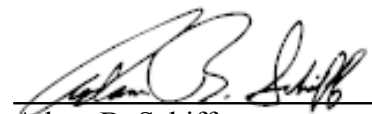
Jason Crow
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Frank Pallone, Jr.
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Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress



Adam B. Schiff
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