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# U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Introduces legislation to fight back against fraudulent organic imports, ensure fair playing field for American farmers

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Contact: press@baldwin.senate.gov
202-224-6225

*Baldwin legislation fights back against fraud, delivers on Inspector General recommendations, and protects integrity of USDA organic standards for consumers and Wisconsin farmers*

WASHINGTON – Today, U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin introduced legislation to combat imports of fraudulent organic products that undercut American farmers, in response to media reports and recommendations from the USDA Inspector General. Baldwin's legislation would protect U.S. consumers and farmers to ensure that all products marketed as organic uphold the strong standards necessary to bear that seal.

"Wisconsin is home to the second-largest number of organic farms in the country, and they are a strong driver of our state's agricultural economy," said Senator Baldwin. "Our farmers work extremely hard to make sure their products meet the strict requirements of the USDA organic standard, and we must make sure that all organic products sold in the U.S. meet those same rigorous standards. This reform is about leveling the playing field to help American farmers and standing up for American consumers to ensure they are getting the high quality, organic food

products they expect."

In the past year, reports by the Washington Post, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and the USDA Office of the Inspector General have revealed concerns about the integrity of agricultural products imported into the United States to be sold as organic. In their May 2017 article, the Washington Post reported on substantial fraud in imported grain from Turkey destined to be sold as organic in the United States. Fraudulent organic imports have the potential to seriously and unfairly damage the strong reputation of organic products and undercut sales of domestically produced organic products, posing a threat to U.S. farmers and consumers alike.

Senator Baldwin's Organic Farmer and Consumer Protection Act would take on these unfair trading practices and update protections against fraud. The legislation works to ensure that all organic products admitted at ports of entry in United States are authentic and to prohibit the entry of products labeled as organic that do not meet National Organic Program standards. It addresses the threat that fraudulent imported organic products pose to U.S. farmers and consumers and ensures that farmers importing products to the U.S. must abide by robust organic production standards, just like domestic organic farmers.

"The National Organic Coalition recognizes the urgent need to modernize and strengthen USDA oversight of organic products to prevent fraud and make sure that everyone in the supply chain is playing by the same rules. We appreciate Senator Baldwin's strong leadership on this issue by introducing the Organic Farmer and Consumer Protection Act," said Abby Youngblood, Executive Director of the National Organic Coalition. "This bill will provide the USDA's National Organic Program with additional authorities and resources to crack down on fraudulent organic imports. The bill is critical to both farmers, especially those who are being harmed by fraudulent imports, as well as consumers, whose trust in the organic seal depends on effective enforcement of clear and consistent standards across the board."

"For organic to advance, it is critical that we protect organic's integrity. We applaud Senator Baldwin for introducing this important bill. Our farmers deserve to have a level playing field, and organic consumers deserve to be able to trust that they are getting what they pay for when they buy organic. Today's organic industry operates in a growing global market. We have to modernize and get up to speed to prevent organic fraud and to ensure that every stakeholder in the organic chain is playing by the rules, and this bill takes important steps towards making that happen," said

Laura Batcha, Executive Director and CEO of the Organic Trade Association.

“Organic Valley is glad to see Senator Baldwin champion this piece of legislation. It is smart policy that will allow USDA to be more effective in investigating, tracking, and executing enforcement against those who might try and cheat the US organic regulations. Organic agriculture is important to Wisconsin’s state economy and this legislation helps respond to threats that could compromise the integrity of organic. Consumers trust organic and that is a trust we have built over the years. Any risks to that covenant we take seriously at Organic Valley. This is good legislation and timely as organic production and consumption continues to grow worldwide,” said Melissa Hughes, Chief Mission Officer/General Counsel of Organic Valley in La Farge, Wisconsin.

“As an organic grain farmer I applaud Senator Baldwin for introducing the Organic Farmer and Consumer Protection Act which improves international organic trade oversight,” said Sandy Syburg, Organic Valley Grower Pool Member from Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. “Organics has grown to be global in scope and, with that growth, we need to update both the authority and resources of the National Organic Program to better track and bring enforcement on any suspected fraud in the international arena. Ensuring organic integrity is key to my livelihood and key to the relationship we in organic agriculture have with consumers. The USDA organic seal means real standards, and real consequences, if you don’t follow the regulations. This Act improves that reality.”

The Organic Farmer and Consumer Protection Act is supported by a wide array of organic farming organizations and businesses, including the Organic Trade Association (OTA), National Organic Coalition (NOC), Organic Valley and Organic Farmers Agency for Relationship Marketing (OFARM). Learn more about our industry supporters here.

Learn more about the Organic Farmer and Consumer Protection Act here.

An online version of this release is available here.