

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Legislation to combat fraudulent organic imports heads to the President's desk in major victory for American consumers and organic farmers

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

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin's legislation to combat fraudulent organic imports that unfairly undercut American farmers and mislead consumers [passed Congress last week with overwhelming bipartisan support](#) as part of the 2018 Farm Bill. The legislation now heads to the President to be signed into law.

“Wisconsin is home to more than 1,200 organic farms, 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 USDA organic standards, and we must make sure that all organic products sold in the U.S. meet those same rigorous standards. This reform will level the playing field for American farmers and make sure that American consumers get the high quality, organic food products they expect. I look forward to seeing the President sign this

important legislation into law.”

Reports by the [Washington Post](#), the [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) and the [USDA Office of the Inspector General](#) 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 American organic products and undercut their sales, posing a threat to U.S. farmers and consumers alike.

Senator Baldwin’s *Organic Farmer and Consumer Protection Act* will take on these unfair trading practices by giving officials new and better tools to guard against fraud. The legislation works to ensure that all organic products admitted at ports of entry in the United States are authentic and prohibit 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 exporting products to the U.S. must abide by robust organic production standards, just like domestic organic farmers.

“The National Organic Coalition is grateful to Senator Baldwin for her incredible leadership in the Farm Bill process to strengthen oversight of organic imports by introducing and successfully championing the *Organic Farmer and Consumer Protection Act*. There has been an urgent need to modernize and strengthen USDA’s infrastructure to prevent fraud,” **said Abby Youngblood, Executive Director of the National Organic Coalition.** “This farm bill is a huge win on that front, by providing USDA with enhanced authorities and resources to crack down on fraud. These provisions are a boon to farmers, especially those who are 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. NOC will play an active role in working with USDA to fully operationalize these changes to ensure integrity of organic products originating from both international and domestic farms and companies.”

“MOSES is excited to tell our farmers and supporters about Farm Bill wins for organic – more funding for organic research and data collection, provisions to address import fraud, and funding for organic certification cost-share,” **said John Mesko, Executive Director of the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES).** “We especially want to extend appreciation to our

home-state Senator Tammy Baldwin for her leadership role in strengthening oversight of organic imports. The Senator has met with farmers on this issue and heard loud and clear about the need for a level playing field. We're thrilled that she and other Congressional champions have succeeded in making sure that the USDA is armed with the resources and authorities to keep organic strong alongside tremendous growth in the organic marketplace."

"The Farm Bill contains the largest commitment of resources ever to ensure organic integrity remains strong. It includes better policy and funding for organic fraud prevention, especially in the international trade arena, which was really needed. Modernizing the organic regulations and increasing funding help the National Organic Program be in a position to better weed out fraud," **said Melissa Hughes, Chief Mission Officer and General Counsel, Organic Valley.** "A big thanks to our home-state U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin as well as Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow for leading efforts to strengthen organic oversight. They played a key role in making sure the Farm Bill updated the agency's ability to crack down on any suspected fraud no matter where it might originate. The work ahead of the organic industry is to now get these changes operational at the National Organic Program as soon as possible, and at Organic Valley, we are going to keep our foot on the gas pedal until these new provisions are fully realized and implemented."

"We thank Sen. Tammy Baldwin for her leadership that resulted in the bill containing important steps to modernize and speed up federal efforts to prevent organic fraud and to create a transparent marketplace," **said Laura Batcha, CEO and Executive Director of the Organic Trade Association.** "The Farm Bill strengthens the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program's authority and capacity to conduct investigations to keep organic markets strong; it invests in technology and access to data to improve tracking of international organic trade; and requires increased measures that will strengthen global organic supply chain integrity. Reliable oversight and a level playing field are critical to the success of U.S. organic farmers and ensures that consumers are getting what they pay for every time they choose the USDA organic seal."

An online version of this release is available [here](#).