

Lack of Transparency Fuels Corruption Allegations in Organic Governance

Cornucopia Institute

CORNUCOPIA, WI — The Cornucopia Institute has [called upon](#) [1] USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack to make public all candidates for appointment to fill the four vacancies on the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB). The NOSB, a 15-member board of organic stakeholders representing farmer, consumer, environmental, retail, scientific, certifying and organic food processing interests, was established by Congress to advise the USDA on organic food and agriculture policies and review materials allowed for use in organic food production and processing

[Past investigations](#) [2] by The Cornucopia Institute, a Wisconsin-based farm policy research group, found that prior appointments, during the Bush and Obama administrations, violated the letter of the law, and congressional intent, by appointing agribusiness executives to fill slots on the NOSB reserved for farmers and other independent stakeholders. Public interest groups have suggested that these extra agribusiness representatives on the board have voted in favor of weakening the organic standards.

"Transparency has been a hallmark of organic food and agriculture. We think that letting the organic community know who has applied for the vacant positions will allow for feedback and help the Secretary make the best possible appointments," said Cornucopia's Will Fantle, the organic industry watchdog organization's Codirector. "Appointments have been made in the past of individuals who do not meet the legally mandated criteria for a seat on the NOSB. Sunshine on the secretive process could have prevented such ill-advised moves," added Fantle.

At least once in the 20-year history of the NOSB, during the Bush administration, the nomination process was public, but Secretary Vilsack has never followed that path. The four NOSB vacancies up for appointment this year include an organic farmer, a retailer, an organic food handler (processor), and an environmentalist. In addition to asking Secretary Vilsack to make the list of potential appointees public, Cornucopia has [filed a Freedom of Information Act request](#) [3] with the USDA seeking release of the candidate names.

The Cornucopia Institute reached out to members of the organic community asking for help identifying candidates and asking candidates themselves to step forward announcing their application to the NOSB. The move has met with some success as Cornucopia has confirmed the identity of nine applicants who are seeking a seat on the NOSB. These include:

- Lisa de Lima, the Vice-President of Grocery for the retailer Mom's Organic Market in the Washington, D.C. metro area

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- Rebecca Goodman, an organic dairy farmer from Wisconsin
- Patrick Horan, an organic vegetable farmer from Connecticut
- Alan Lewis, Director of Special Projects for the retailer Vitamin Cottage in Colorado
- Cameron Molberg, an organic egg producer and feed mill operator from Texas
- Sarah Manski, owner of PosiAir, an online green business services company, in California
- Phyllis Haanan, an organic elderberry grower from Missouri
- Colin Archipley, an organic hydroponic farmer from California
- Scott Silverman, the Executive Director of Natural and Organic Product at KeHE Distributors in Colorado

"We think that this list of applicants likely does not include all who have applied for the vacancies on the NOSB," said Fantle. "We would encourage anyone else who does not appear on this list of known applicants to contact us and let us share their name with the public as well. This will hopefully lead to the appointment of high-quality, informed and energetic individuals who are legally qualified to hold these positions of public trust."

Cornucopia encourages any organic stakeholder who knows of a potential NOSB nominee, even if their knowledge is in the rumor-state, to inform the organization, confidentially, and Cornucopia will confirm the veracity of the information, as was done with the names above.

"We hope that by making the names of these candidates public, some of whom are

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eminently qualified to sit on the NOSB, it will be harder for Secretary Vilsack to

ignore the intent of Congress by stacking the NOSB with additional agribusiness-

friendly representatives,” said Helen Kees, a third generation certified organic

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Links:

- [1] http://cp.mcafee.com/d/k-Kr4xAg410SyNtNd6XXy9KVJ6XbVEVpjvohdETpvd7barXPVJ6X8VdVUQsFzzqdS3hOqen6kS3hOraX6nil8v4y2JgcX2uAvlZ2mYKrR0PI9WhZnQ9rOVJRR5551B_HYztZZdMQsZuVtddNzAnTzhOqehMXBHESHjIhhsVkffGhBrwqrhvdFFCX YOVuZXTLuVKVI07GOTkD7ZIFY4enOS9EzzhOY-ed7ecEECzBf5hIr6hsf2-6zBoc21afEiz ZFYlWD4VPm7Iy0Zcn7FyVjHlz1KRIFrM04uCbxc03x0uCbXChZdII5go61wp5j_DfUYlwWrIH6fDDwGRoMrJlqmY01dLCzBNxYS3fck1vD_Jfid40ISnkQgItd409zlabr7Umbo9lz5Jqs GMd40wuvV7pOH2xEwB0Qg1co3x0Qg1y97oilq80BkPYor2TCTCjpAdFtD5s-Yor
- [2] <http://cp.mcafee.com/d/k-Kr6x0g4x0SyNtNd6XXy9KVJ6XbVEVpjvohdETpvd7barX>

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