

I'm Linley Dixon, Senior Scientist with The Cornucopia Institute. I own a 5-acre farm in Durango, Colorado with my husband and brother who both farm full time. In southwest Colorado, there is a strong young farmer movement. We have a local chapter of the National Young Farmers Coalition and Rocky Mountain Farmers Union. The farmers are marketing and distributing together through a farmer-owned cooperative.

But organics has a problem. Some of our farmers and ranchers don't want to get certified, even though their practices are in line with the standards. They say organic has lost its meaning. The standards don't represent the way they farm.

The organic label currently provides little added value. The wholesale prices for organic crops are so low that there is little market incentive for farmers to become certified. Industrial hydroponic operations have flooded the organic market for our highest value crops - tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, basil, and greens.

Real organic poultry producers have already left organic for pasture-based labels. Real organic dairy farmers are failing as we speak because of the lack of enforcement of pasture requirements and origin of livestock.

History has shown that during farm crises, industrial operations actually increase production so they will control the market after the crisis. Aurora is building another factory farm in Colorado and a processing facility in Missouri, while Horizon is lowering prices and dropping contracts with family-scale dairies in several states.

Fraudulent organic grain imports are directly related to the quick rise of domestic organic factory farms that are thriving on large amounts of cheap organic grain.

But, for the first time, there is a ray of hope. The Real Organic Project is a fervent effort to keep soil- and pasture-centric farms part of the organic label before industrial operations have squeezed them out.

The aim is to rebuild public trust in organic; to inspire new farmers and consumers into the organic market; to bring transparency back to the organic label; to bring production practices back into compliance with OFPA and fill gaps where the organic standards have failed us.

This label would not be necessary if farmers felt the current NOSB process of continuous improvement was working, if the NOP assurance of a level playing field was enforced. There is a deep feeling of frustration and earnestness to save the family farm that the organic label brought back to life in the first place.

I see the Real Organic Project as an opportunity to tell our organic story again; to remind consumers that organic was built by family farms and that they are still overseeing the success of the label; to inspire the next generation of farmers and eaters to be part of organic.

After all, the people leading the Real Organic Project are the same people who built the organic movement the first time around. These are farmers that welcome unannounced visits to their farm and offer full transparency in their practices. It's time to insist on these Real Organic ideals again - together.