

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 7, 2022

The Honorable 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 proposed changes are critical for safeguarding the integrity of the organic seal and protecting organic producers and consumers alike. The Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 granted broad legal authority to USDA to promulgate regulations governing the organic standards including additional requirements "for the care of livestock," and we are pleased that USDA is fulfilling this mission and welcome the opportunity to provide input.

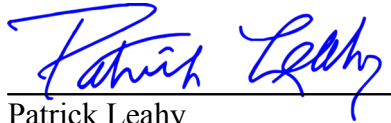
We commend USDA for prioritizing these much-needed regulations to set clear standards concerning outdoor access and the care of animals raised under the National Organic Program, leveling the playing field for organic farmers, and meeting consumer expectations. We are also pleased that the proposed rule clarifies that enclosed, screened-in porches do not constitute outdoor access, closing a major loophole for the organic egg sector and establishing important animal welfare provisions. Additionally, we appreciate the minimum indoor and outdoor space and enrichment requirements for organic chickens. The lack of clarification regarding outdoor access requirements has allowed for inconsistency within the National Organic Program for far too long, and we are grateful that USDA has prioritized addressing this issue.


Americans deserve to know what they are feeding their families, and they care about the standards under which organic animals are raised. According to 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 organic standards align with the expectations of consumers seeking these value-added products.

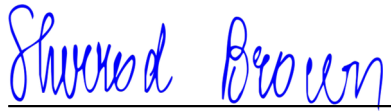
Speedy implementation of this rule is critical. Therefore, we urge USDA to limit the timeframe to comply with outdoor access and density requirements for organic poultry to no longer than three years. Continuing to delay implementation of these standards disadvantages producers who have been already providing their animals with meaningful outdoor access and impedes their ability to compete fairly in the marketplace.


The OLPS rule sets clear, consistent, and enforceable 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,

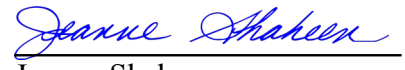

Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

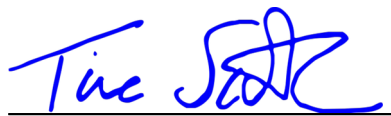

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

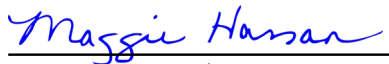

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator


Tina Smith
United States Senator

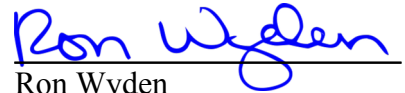

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator


Jon Tester
United States Senator


Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



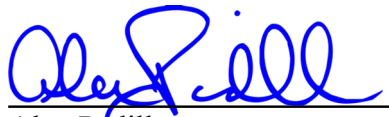
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



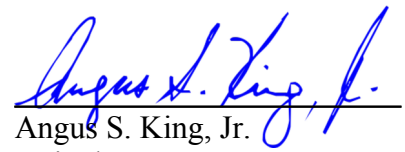
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



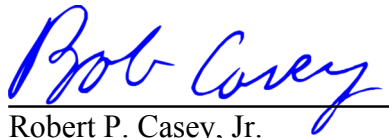
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



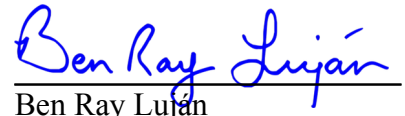
Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator