



## **Stacking the Deck at the National Organic Standards Board 2025 Appointees**

The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) was created by Congress through the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) in 1990 to establish the direction for the US Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program (NOP) and act as a buffer against the undue influence of agribusiness lobbyists. Recognition of the importance of organic foods from the perspective of consumers, family farmers, and environmentalists was not initially shared by the USDA.

The board was established to ensure that the voices of organic farmers and consumers drove the direction of the USDA's organic program when there was grave concern about handing over the budding organic farming movement to conventionally focused USDA political appointees and bureaucrats and the corrupting influence of corporate money.

Since then, Big Ag and Big Food have consolidated ownership of most of the largest and best-known organic brands. At the same time, the USDA has been criticized for "stacking" the board — which is charged with guiding the regulatory oversight of organic farming and food production — with members from, or friendly to, corporate interests. Currently there are four multibillion corporations on the NOSB with a combined total of more than \$42.3 billion in revenues.

Whether the apparent tactics outlined below were applied to the 2025 board appointments intentionally or as the result of unconscious bias, they are textbook examples of how to change the balance of power of a policy-making committee. And the impact on the organic industry will be felt for years to come.

### **Tactic One: Replace a multimillion-dollar major produce handler with a multibillion-dollar one.**

**Amanda Felder** is the Organic Integrity & Environmental Compliance Manager for **Taylor Farms/Earthbound Farms** and now holds one of the Handler/Processor seats on the NOSB. She has been employed by Taylor Farms for more than 5 years, and worked for Earthbound Farms 12 years, prior to the company's acquisition by Taylor Farms in 2019. Ms. Felder also worked for Wolf & Associates, a prominent agribusiness consultancy and OTA member.

Taylor Farms/Earthbound Farms have an [estimated annual revenue of \\$2.0B](#), [employing about 20,000](#) people, and producing conventional and organic produce in the US and elsewhere in their [122,200 crop-acre field-grown program and 16 salad](#)

[producing facilities across North America](#). (The exact acreage in organic production is not publicly available.)

In 2024, conventional onions produced by Taylor Farms were [implicated in a massive E. coli outbreak](#) that impacted McDonald's restaurants in 13 states, reportedly sickening 49 and allegedly killing one adult. This incident was preceded in 2020 by a [recall for potential salmonella contamination](#) in seven products prepared with onions from Taylor Farms and sold by Kroger and Walmart.

Taylor Farms/Earthbound Farms is also a prominent member of the Organic Trade Association (OTA), the industry's primary corporate lobby group. Taylor Farms has been closely affiliated with the OTA and staff members have sat on various task forces, both in the past and currently:

- Global Supply Chain Organic Integrity Task Force 2017-2019
- Strengthening Organic Enforcement Task Force 2019-2020
- Mexico Trade Task Force 2017-present

Ms. Felder also serves on the California Organic Products Advisory Committee (COPAC): Vice-Chair (2024-present), Processor Rep (2021-present)

Taylor Farms de Mexico S. de R.L. de C.V. is CCOF-Certified, and Amanda Felder is the operation's contact listed on the USDA Organic Integrity Database. Taylor Farms has six operations certified by CCOF and one operation certified by QAI.

Taylor Farms has been a generous donor, sponsor, and advertising underwriter of CCOF. Because federal law specifically prohibits certifiers from receiving payments from their clients over and above certification fees, CCOF is currently the subject of an ongoing investigation into conflicts of interest.

Ms. Felder received 26 letters of reference for her NOSB application, including from: Certifiers CCOF and QAI; CDFA (California Department of Food and Agriculture); OTA; Taylor Farms (including TF Baja; TF Canada); and John Foster, Wolf & Associates.

Ms. Felder replaced Gerald (Jerry) D'Amore, who works for a major conventional/organic industry produce handler, Munger Farms ([\\$280 million revenue in 2023](#)). Munger Farms is member of the OTA and certified by CCOF. He was previously employed by a number of other major, primarily conventional, agribusinesses. Many of these companies are also OTA members, including Dole, Chiquita, and Driscoll's Strawberry Associates.

By appointing **Amanda Felder**, organic integrity and environmental compliance manager for **Taylor Farms/Earthbound Farms**, to one of the Handler seats, the NOSB now has two of the nation's largest produce companies on the board.

Ms. Felder joins existing member, **Logan Petrey**, organic ranch manager of 9,000 acres at **Grimmway Farms/Cal-Organic** (estimated annual revenue: \$5.0 billion/[over 50,000 acres of certified organic land](#)) on the Board. As a result, 13 percent of the 15-member board represents \$7.0 billion sales in the produce market.

**Tactic Two: Replace a multibillion-dollar poultry handler with an even larger multibillion-dollar dairy conglomerate.**

**Kathryn Deschenes**, director of regulatory affairs at French-based **Danone**, was appointed to the other Handler/Processor seat. Danone, [the fourth largest dairy company globally](#), had sales in 2023 of [\\$28.48 billion \(€27.62 billion\)](#). They also produce plant-based products and baby food.

In 2017, Danone – which originally controlled the Stonyfield brand of organic yogurt and milk – proposed acquiring White Wave, which then owned the Horizon label. A legal effort to challenge the merger as anticompetitive, spearheaded by OrganicEye’s Executive Director Mark Kastel, proved successful and Danone was forced to divest its interest in Stonyfield. In 2022, five years after its purchase, [Danone sold the Horizon Organic brand](#) to a private equity firm.

Ms. Deschenes replaced previous board member **Kimberly Huseman**, Director of Specialty Ingredients at Pilgrim’s Pride, a \$12 billion business enterprise and the second-largest conventional poultry producer in the United States. Ms. Huseman was appointed to a slot reserved for a Handler/Processor in 2020; her term expired in 2025.

**Ms. Deschenes received** letters of reference for her NOSB application from the OTA and John Foster, Wolf & Associates.

Ms. Deschenes’ industry affiliations include the OTA and IFT (Institute of Food Technologists). Her previous experience includes:

- Dairy Farmers of America, Labeling Compliance Manager, 2017-2018
- Nurture Inc., DBA Happy Family Organics, Regulatory Compliance Manager
- Kansas Value Added Foods Lab, 2008-2010, 2011-2013
- Kellogg Company, 2010

Danone is a member of the OTA.

**Tactic Three: Select multiple board members with close connections to the same large international corporation.**

**Andrea Hatziyannis**, category strategy manager for Sprouts Farmers Market, was appointed to the Retailer seat. She also has employment history with Danone.

Ms. Hatziyannis' industry experience includes:

- Sprouts Farmers Market, Category (Frozen) Strategy Manager, 2023 to present
- Ahold Delhaize US, Product Development Manager, Private Brands, 2018-2023
- **Danone North, Product Developer, 2013-2018**
- Stonyfield Farm (owned by Danone at the time and [sold in 2017](#)), R&D Scientist, 2011-2013
- Pepperidge Farm, R&D Product Development Consultant, 2010-2011

She is also affiliated with IFTA (International Food Technology Association).

Ms. Hatziyannis received six reference letters for the NOSB position, including from: The Food Marketing Institute (FMI); Campbell's Snacks; and NOSB member, at the time, Nate Powell-Palm. (Mr. Powell-Palm has a long resume of extensive involvement with the OTA and some of its affiliates. He has spoken at OTA conferences, participated in their Capitol Hill lobby days, and received the organization's coveted "Rising Star" award in 2019.)

The Retail seat on the NOSB was previously held by Mindee Jeffery, Organic Activism and Education Coordinator, Good Earth Natural Foods. Ms. Jeffery was active in the Independent Natural Food Retailers Association (INFRA), also an OTA member.

**Tactic Four: Appoint as many board members as possible that have relationships with the lobbyists at the OTA.**

**Cathleen McCluskey**, Organic Seed Alliance, was appointed to fill the Environmental Protection and Resource Conservation seat.

Ms. McCluskey's affiliations include:

- Organic Trade Association (OTA)
- National Organic Coalition (NOC)
- Organic Farmers Association (OFA)
- National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
- Seeds and Breeds for 21st Century Agriculture
- Agriculture, Food, & Human Values Society

Ms. McCluskey received nine reference letters for the NOSB position, including from: OTA; NOC; OFA; certifier Oregon Tilth; Organic Seed Alliance; Organically Grown Company (David Lively, co-founder of Organically Grown Company (retired) is currently the OTA Community Relations Committee Chair); and John Foster, Wolf & Associates.

**Organic Seed Alliance/OTA Connection**

**Matthew Dillon, OTA Co-CEO**, leads the organization's public relations, policy agenda, member engagement, and fundraising. In 2003, Mr. Dillon founded **Organic**

**Seed Alliance**, the nation's first organic seed advocacy and plant breeding organization – the same organization for which **Cathleen McCluskey** is Policy and Advocacy Director.

**OTA corporate members with affiliates on the NOSB:**

- Organic Seed Alliance, Cathleen McCluskey
- Danone North America, Kathryn Deschenes
- Taylor Farms/Earthbound Farms, Amanda Felder
- Cyclone Farms, Amy Bruch
- Cal-Organic/Grimmway Farms, Logan Petrey
- Pennsylvania Certified Organic (PCO), Kyla Smith
- Oyster Bay Farm, Nathaniel “Nate” Lewis (Mr. Lewis also previously served as Farm Policy director at the OTA.)

Seven of the 15 current members of the NOSB are affiliated with the OTA.

**Tactic Five: Continue to appoint token members of the organic family farm community (which has increasingly lacked meaningful voting power on the board).**

The fifth addition to the board is a “minority” appointment of an independent farmer with no documented evidence of a relationship with corporate agribusiness, lobbyists at the Organic Trade Association, or the OTA-member certifiers that have been accused of betraying the fundamental organic principles.

**Corie Pierce** owner of Bread & Butter Farm, a diversified organic vegetable and grass-fed beef and pork farm in Vermont, was appointed to the NOSB Organic Producer seat. She replaced Nathaniel Powell-Palm, a Montana farmer and industry consultant. (Mr. Powell-Palm's deep ties to the OTA have been previously noted.)

Ms. Pierce's affiliations:

- Vermont Grass Farmers Association.
- Founder of New Perennials Project of the Land Institute

Ms. Pierce received four reference letters supporting her NOSB appointment, including:

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets; Certifier Vermont Organic Farmers (VOF); NOC; and OFA.

Corie Pierce joins current members, **Amy Bruch, Cyclone Farms, and Javier Zamora JSM Organics**, on the NOSB as Organic Producers.

JSM Organics has 184 certified acres of vegetables and fruit in California. Cyclone Farms has 1,687 acres and is certified for crops and handling for animal feed, primarily alfalfa, corn, and soybeans – the Midwestern cropping “trifecta.”

As a counter to the agribusiness Goliaths on the NOSB, Corie Pierce's Bread & Butter Farm comprises just 1.56 certified organic acres.

The juxtaposition of Bread & Butter Farm and JSM Organics illustrates the wide range in acreage represented by the small and moderate-sized family-owned organic farms which comprise the majority of US organic operations, many of whom have been forced out of business because they are unable to compete with uncertified/uninspected imports, fraud, and an increasing market share held by industrialized agribusiness concerns like Taylor Farms/Earthbound Farms and Grimmway/Cal-Organic, which together likely represent more than 100,000 organic acres.

One last tactic worth mentioning is employed by the Organic Trade Association. In what appears to be a variation on "[Stockholm Syndrome](#)," the OTA has honed to perfection its strategy of taking new members under its wing and indoctrinating them on the need for "growth" in the industry as the paramount objective of organic regulatory oversight — regardless of the impact on family-scale farmers. Independent board members are all too often swayed by these efforts and cast their votes with the OTA block, giving the lobby group an air of credibility while also advancing its goals.

Background on continuing board members appointed in 2022 and 2023 can be found [here](#) and [here](#), respectively.