



National Organic Coalition

November 2, 2009

Hon. Max Baucus, Chairman
United States Senate Committee on Finance
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6200

Hon. Chuck Grassley, Ranking Member
United States Senate Committee on Finance
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-1501

Re: Nomination of Islam Siddiqui as Chief Agriculture Negotiator for the United States Trade Representative

Dear Chairman Baucus and Ranking Member Grassley:

The National Organic Coalition (NOC) is a national alliance of organizations representing farmers, environmentalists, other organic industry members, and consumers concerned about the integrity of national organic standards. The goal of the coalition is to assure that organic integrity is maintained, that consumers' confidence is preserved and that policies are fair, equitable and encourage diversity of participation and access.

We believe this confirmation process should bring to the fore critical issues that impact the agricultural sector with specific attention to much-needed efforts by Congress and the Administration to advance organic agriculture. To that end, we believe it is important to bring to the committee's attention serious concerns and questions that the National Organic Coalition has regarding the nomination of Islam Siddiqui for Chief Agriculture Negotiator for the U.S. The chief negotiator position requires an even-handed approach that includes efforts to expand organic agriculture in the context of a U.S. and worldwide priority to create green economies that reduce hazardous chemical dependency and the practices that contribute to global climate change.

In this regard, Dr. Siddiqui's past positions that promote hazardous and unnecessary chemical dependency and that are dependent upon genetically modified organisms raise questions that this committee and the candidate must answer before moving ahead with final confirmation.

How will the candidate:

- (i) ensure that past ties with organizations that have challenged the legitimacy of organic agriculture as a solution to polluting practices will not undermine Congressional intent to specifically support organic methods?
- (ii) guarantee that he will reverse past positions that challenge sound science that has led to the European Union decision to restrict the use of genetic engineering in agriculture?
- (iii) support efforts of the Administration to educate the public on organic gardening and agriculture, and food security through local-based food systems?
- (iv) engage in decision making supported by scientific integrity?

We raise these serious questions because of Dr. Siddiqui's long involvement with companies, organizations and programs that have had the effect of undermining support and advancement of organic practices.

Anti-Organic Position

Of course, there are always questions about how closely aligned anyone may be with their past employer's positions on issues. However, since Dr. Siddiqui's employer, CropLife America, has been such an aggressive promoter of chemical-dependent agricultural practices and an opponent of organic methods, and Dr. Siddiqui has played a leadership role in the trade association as its Vice President for Science and Regulatory Affairs, it is necessary to focus on this concern. When the White House announced plans to establish an organic garden on its grounds this year, CropLife played the lead role in challenging the credibility of the effort. Instead of supporting this form of agriculture, CropLife said it "shuddered at the thought that the White House garden will be organic," and asked the question: "What message does that send the general public about the agriculture industry that the majority of you are so proud to serve? What message does that send to the non-farming public about an important and integral part of growing safe and abundant crops to feed and clothe the world -- crop protection products?" Why is Dr. Siddiqui's organization advancing anti-organic positions and does he concur with his organization's positions on this?

In addition, what role did Dr. Siddiqui play in the USDA initial recommendation that biotechnology, sewage sludge and irradiation are allowed in the production and process of food labeled organic? The Department position was reversed after extraordinary public outcry. Has Dr. Siddiqui reversed his position?

Sound Science and Genetically Modified Organisms

While we understand that there are different opinions on the Bush Administration's challenge to the EU moratorium on genetically engineered imports before the World Trade Organization (WTO) because of inconsistency with required process, it was Dr. Siddiqui's challenge of the EU's "sound science" that raises a critical concern. We are entering a time where scientific

integrity must be integral to public health and environmental issues. This is a central concern that affects our relationship with trading partners. Yet, we view Dr. Siddiqui's attack on the science that supports the EU's position on genetically engineered as an example of politicized science that has no place in the domestic or international arena. Moreover, this has no place in the new administration as it seeks to reverse years of politicized science that has lacked integrity.

Sustainable Practices

In a period where escalating problems of access to food, water scarcity, global climate change, and toxic chemical contamination of water and food, we believe that an openness to address these challenges with new approaches that embrace sustainable practices, rather than chemical-dependent systems that have escalated these problems, is required. Dr. Siddiqui has not shown an openness to new required sustainable approaches, let alone the commitment that is required at this moment in history.

The questions raised by Dr. Siddiqui's nomination are very serious. While we certainly believe that Dr. Siddiqui should have an opportunity to answer these questions, we have no reason to believe that, at this time, his history of positions makes him the appropriate person for the job. As a staunch advocate for chemical-intensive practices that ignore the worldwide realities facing farmers and consumers, we need a chief negotiator that is eager to address the historical challenges that we face in a manner that breaks with the status-quo and that embraces sustainable solutions.

We urge that Dr. Siddiqui's nomination is rejected in favor of a candidate with a fresh and critically needed sustainable approach to trade policy. We should not lose this opportunity to aggressively increase organic trade at a time when it offers so many public health, environmental, and economic benefits.

Sincerely,



Liana Hoodes,
Policy Coordinator, National Organic Coalition
Beyond Pesticides
Center for Food Safety
Equal Exchange
Food and Water Watch
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Services
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance
Northeast Organic Farming Association, Interstate Council
Rural Advancement Foundational International – USA
Union of Concerned Scientists