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PRESS RELEASE
WORC Urges Vilsack to Commit to Bold Action

WASHINGTON, D.C. – As the Senate prepares for hearings on President Biden’s nomination of Tom Vilsack to serve again as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), leaders of the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC) expressed disappointment over Vilsack’s nomination based on his track record, and urged the nominee to commit now to bold action to build toward a vision for a farm and food system and rural communities that are fair, thriving, and sustainable.

As Secretary, Vilsack invested in local and regional food systems and promoted the expansion of organic agriculture, but failed to address the rapid consolidation of agribusiness, the decline of family farms, unfair practices by meatpackers, civil rights complaints, and the culture of discrimination at USDA. Since 2017, he has led the U.S. Dairy Export Council, representing large-scale dairy processors while 10,000 family dairy farmers went out of business.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the weaknesses and inequities in our farm and food system, and the challenges rural America faces. This is an unprecedented moment for action to provide food to those who are in need during the pandemic and protect the working people who are in the fields and the processing plants. We urge the next Secretary of Agriculture to advance a plan to transform our agriculture and food system and revitalize rural communities and economies. Business as usual won’t cut it. I want to know what Tom Vilsack’s vision is,” said **Marielena Vega, a member of Idaho Organization of Resource Councils who lives in Nampa, ID.**

One of Tom Vilsack’s first actions as Secretary was to launch a series of workshops on competition in agriculture and the need for antitrust enforcement. He heard from thousands of farmers, ranchers, workers, and everyday Americans who catalogued a multitude of problems and called for action to ensure fair prices for farmers, fair wages for workers, and a safe and resilient food system. Then, nothing happened. USDA proposed modest new Farmer Fair Practices rules but didn’t get them all of the way through the process, and they were gutted by the Trump Administration.

“Joe Biden has made strengthening antitrust enforcement his [first priority to help family farms thrive](#). I want to know what Tom Vilsack is going to do to restore competitive markets that’s different from his first eight years on the job as Ag Secretary,” said **David Schwalbe, a member of Dakota Resource Council who lives in Bismarck, ND.**

“Montana can’t afford another status quo USDA with pro-corporate policies. Under Secretary Vilsack, we lost mandatory Country-of-Origin-Labeling (COOL) for beef and pork and now are stuck with a loophole which allows meat from other countries to be labeled Product of the USA, though this meat is not necessarily born, bred, and fed in the U.S. This is fraudulent. Ranchers deserve a fair price for their quality meat and consumers deserve to know where their food comes from. Reinstating Mandatory COOL needs to be a top priority of the Biden Administration,” said **Jean Lemire Dahlman, of Forsyth, MT and a member of Northern Plains Resource Council.**

“Though we are disappointed in the choice of Vilsack as Secretary of Agriculture, we hope that he and the Biden Administration will take the criticism as a challenge to take bold action, not only to fix what’s been broken, but to transform the USDA into an agency that fights for family farmers, ranchers, and working people of this country. We are ready to be a resource for the Senate Agriculture Committee as they work through the nomination process, during the duration of the next Secretary’s term, and beyond,” said **Kathryn Bedell of Grand Junction, CO and a member of Western Colorado Alliance.**

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[The Western Organization of Resource Councils \(WORC\)](#) is a network of eight grassroots organizations in seven Western states with 15,000 members, many of them ranchers and farmers committed to common-sense reform in agriculture, oil and gas development, coal mine reclamation, and rural economic development. Headquartered in Billings, Mont., WORC also has offices in Colorado and Washington, D.C.

[Northern Plains Resource Councils](#) is a grassroots conservation and family agriculture group that organizes Montanans to protect our water quality, family farms and ranches, and unique quality of life.

[The Idaho Organization of Resource Councils](#) is an Idaho-based grassroots nonprofit that empowers people to improve the well-being of their communities, sustain family farms and ranches, transform local food systems, promote clean energy, and advocate for responsible stewardship of Idaho’s natural resources.

[Dakota Resource Council’s](#) mission is to promote sustainable use of North Dakota’s natural resources and family-owned and operated agriculture by building member-led local groups that empower people to influence the decision-making processes that affect their lives and communities.

[Western Colorado Alliance for Community Action](#) brings people together to build grassroots power through community organizing and leadership development. We believe that right now, today, we have the ability and opportunity to create a future where engaged local voices are leading communities across Western Colorado that are healthy, just and self-reliant.