

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Reana Kovalcik, 202-547-5754

Support for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers is Key to Growing Sustainable Ag Movement

California Organic Farmer, Javier Zamora, Advocates for Sustainable Ag Programs on Capitol Hill

Washington, DC, March 17, 2016 – This week the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC), one of the nation’s leading voices in food and agriculture policy, wraps up a month-long series of “farmer fly-ins” in an effort to raise legislators’ awareness around the importance of funding sustainable agriculture programs and policies in the FY2017 budget. Throughout March, farmers from across the country, like Javier Zamora of JSM Organics in California, have descended upon the capital to speak with legislators about important food and agriculture issues.

“In our view, there are no better advocates for these critical U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs than the farmers who use and benefit from them,” said NSAC Policy Director, Ferd Hoefner. “Each year, as Congress prepares to develop its annual funding bills, we bring farmers and ranchers from NSAC member organizations to Washington to speak with their congressional delegations about what matters most to them. This year we are honored to host a great group of farmers and program leaders from across the country who can testify first-hand as to the importance of these programs.”

Javier Zamora is an organic farmer from the central California coast. He got his start in organic farming thanks to support from two NSAC member organizations, the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) and California Farmlink; Javier now serves as a board member for each. Serving a primarily Latino audience, ALBA’s work is “grounded by the belief that in order for limited-resource and aspiring farmers to gain a foothold within California’s highly competitive farm sector, they must have access to information, operating capital, and opportunities to access land”.

When ALBA received funding through the USDA’s Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers program (also known as “Section 2501”, Javier was one of the local, Latino farmers they were able to support.

For decades, Section 2501 has served as the only farm bill program dedicated to addressing the specific needs of minority farmers, and was recently also expanded to also serve military veterans. Section 2501 helps institutions and nonprofits provide critical resources, outreach, and technical assistance to serve these historically underserved producers.

“If we didn’t have these programs, I don’t think I would have made it to where I am,” said Javier. “Without Section 2501 I wouldn’t have been able to make my dream of farming come true. I am who I am because organizations like ALBA and support from USDA’s grant programs made these opportunities happen for me. I am going where I am going because of their support.”

Javier started with a 1.5-acre farm in 2011, and today operates over 40 acres on his California farm, JSM Organic Farms. Javier and JSM grow mostly strawberries, along with an assortment of vegetables, heirloom tomatoes in the summer, and organic flowers.

“The growth in my business is due to the fact that I love what I do,” says Javier. “I enjoy it. I have a really good crew of people who work with me. It is about nine different families that are surviving and depending on the growth of the business.”

Javier and JSM have benefitted not only from the Section 2501 program, but also from the research program SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program), and the conservation program EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program), which have helped him to do better nutrient management on his crops and incorporate more sustainable practices, like erosion control, on the farm.

Together, NSAC and Javier (who comes to D.C. “first as a farmer” and secondly as a representative of ALBA) are advocating for support of these critical sustainable agriculture programs from California legislators: Senator Diane Feinstein (D-CA); Representative Sam Farr (CA-20); and Representative David Valadao (CA-21). Specifically, NSAC and its members are requesting that legislators support the \$10 million dollar increase in the President’s budget proposal for Section 2501, the \$5.3 million increase in the President’s budget for SARE, and that they leave funding for the EQIP program (which for the first time during this administration received no cuts to mandatory funding in the President’s proposed budget) in tact.

QUOTE THAT SUMS UP MEETING EXPERIENCE

###

About the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC)

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition is a grassroots alliance that advocates for federal policy reform supporting the long-term social, economic, and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources, and rural communities. Learn more: <http://sustainableagriculture.net>

About JSM Organic Farms

JSM Organic Farms provides the Central Coastal California area with local, organically grown produce, fruits, and flowers. We are certified organic and have always grown strictly organically. We also cooperate with our neighbors to assure a healthy farming environment while promoting the growth of organic production in California. We welcome the public to come to our farms and learn more about organic farming and our production. Learn more: <http://jsmorganicfarms.com>

About the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA)

The Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association generates opportunities for farm workers and limited-resource, aspiring farmers to grow and sell crops from two organic farms in Monterey County, California. Our mission is to advance economic viability, social equity and ecological land management among limited-resource and aspiring farmers.

Learn more: <http://www.albafarmers.org/>