

I'm Dave Chapman. I have farmed organically for 37 years. I also served last year on the USDA hydroponic task force, where I learned a great deal about this subject.

I want to talk about a phrase currently popular with hydroponic supporters: "**The circular firing squad.**" This phrase implies that we all agree on the important things, and we are being divided over a trivial side issue.

But the current debate is actually over what "organic" stands for. Some claim the foundation of organic farming is avoiding synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. This is a misunderstanding.

The foundation of organic agriculture has always been the development and maintenance of fertile, living soil. We believe that all benefits proceed from this starting point. Healthy plants, healthy animals, healthy humans, and now we learn, a healthy climate.

The outcome of this debate will decide if the USDA is worthy to serve and protect organic integrity. If you decide that soil is unimportant, certified organic will continue as a brand, but it will lose its place as the world leader of the healthy soil movement. And the world needs that movement more than ever. We are running out of time.

The USDA has the legal right to define organic in keeping with OFPA. But it has never been given permission to reinvent organic in order to serve the market needs of favored enterprises.

The NOP was created to serve and protect, not to reinvent. Hard-won trust in the organic seal is being destroyed, and it will not be easily won back.

This is the most important recommendation you will ever make. You will either tear apart the organic movement, or you will start to restore it. When organic certification is reduced to a marketing strategy that misleads consumers, it loses its soul, and it will soon lose its followers as well. How long will organic flourish without those who have built it?

If certification no longer represents soil health, many will move on. We will build something that supports real organic, with soil as the center of a living system that includes plants, animals, and microbes. The world needs your leadership now more than ever. Please choose well.