

## Certification Recommendations -- 1994

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### D. ALLOWANCE FOR A "SPLIT OPERATION"

#### STATUTORY REQUIREMENT

Section 2107(b)(1)(A), (B), and (C):

Discretionary Requirements:

(1) provide for the certification of an entire farm or handling operation or specific fields of a farm or parts of a handling operation if -

(A) in the case of a farm or field, the area to be certified has distinct, defined boundaries and buffer zones separating the land being operated through the use of organic methods from land that is not being operated through the use of such methods;

(B) the operators of such farm or handling operation maintain records of all organic operations separate from records relating to other operations and make such records available at all times for inspection by the Secretary, the certifying agent, and the governing State official; and

(C) appropriate physical facilities, machinery, and management practices are established to prevent the possibility of a mixing of organic and nonorganic products or a penetration of prohibited chemicals or other substances on the certified area. . .

#### COMMENTARY

The process of conversion from a conventional farming operation to an operation that relies solely on organic production methods is based on the producer's assessment of the agronomic, economic, and environmental benefits of organic agriculture as well as on the producer's personal philosophy. The fact that some farmers decide to maintain conventional production methods in some areas of their farms while employing organic methods in other areas prompts philosophical debate over the producer's commitment to "organic" and practical debate over the implications for organic certification. The debates over such "split operations" have been carried out at the local, national, and international levels for many years.

Those promoting a required 100% conversion to organic production methods offer the following arguments. The extent to which a farming operation has been or is being converted to organic production is an indication of the producer's commitment to the organic philosophy to some. Others believe split operations are difficult or impossible to certify because the risks of contamination or fraud are too high and an unbroken chain of custody is possible only within an all organic management system. It is also pointed out that some certification organizations in this country and in Europe now require a gradual conversion of participating farms to a totally organic operation.

Those promoting an allowance for split operations offer the following arguments: Real commitment to an organic system will flow from the actual success of a producer and should not be mandated by the government. Sometimes the economics of an operation will prohibit a producer from fully acting on the commitment they might have to the organic philosophy. In addition, it is argued that mandatory whole farm conversion discourages entry level organic

production and may force a premature commitment from growers who are evaluating the agronomic and economic impacts of the organic transition of their farms. While split operations present a significant challenge to certifiers, the real issue is the ability of the farm management system to maintain the organic integrity of organic fields and crops.

The NOSB believes that the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 (OFPA) neither requires nor implies a commitment from the producer to complete conversion of the farm to organic production methods. The OFPA states in the definitions (§ 2103(4)) that the term "certified organic farm" may refer to a "portion of the farm." § 2107(b)(1)(A),(B), and (C) states that the "program established under this title may provide for the certification of an entire farm. . . or specific fields of a farm." The NOSB recognizes the challenges that certifying a split operation presents, but again believes that the OFPA addresses this challenge. Under

§ 2107(b)(1), restrictions on farms with split operations are clearly identified, setting forth requirements for boundaries and buffer zones, separate record-keeping, measures for preventing co-mingling of product in handling and processing, and measures for preventing "a penetration" of substances used under conventional farming practices into "the certified area." The NOSB wishes to acknowledge that significant challenges lie ahead for certifying agents whose task is to verify compliance on split operations. It can be especially difficult in split livestock operations where the mobility of animals presents increased risks and may require increased scrutiny. In order to address this issue over time, and to encourage conversion to 100% organic production, the Committees will amend the Organic Farm Plan to include a section which requests that producers describe their current efforts and existing obstacles toward conversion.

## RECOMMENDATION

In a farming operation where both organic and non-organic fields, crops, and livestock are managed, the time table and level of transition to organic production is at the discretion of the producer. The producer must be in full compliance with § 2107(b)(1)(A), (B), and (C) of the OFPA of 1990. Organic certification should be determined solely on the basis of the farm's compliance with the OFPA.