



National Organic Program Notice to Stakeholders and Interested Parties

To: Stakeholders and Interested Parties

From: Miles McEvoy, Deputy Administrator

Subject: Removal of AQSS from NOP Website

Date: June 14, 2011

In February 2008, the National Organic Program (NOP) launched the NOP-AQSS (www.ams.usda.gov/NOPAQSSQuestions), a webpage with Answers to Questions on NOP Standards by NOP Staff, as a tool for the public to use in finding information about the NOP regulations (7 CFR Part 205), certification, and accreditation. Over time, the NOP has become aware that stakeholders have used the answers provided through NOP-AQSS as the basis for interpreting the NOP regulations. However, the NOP-AQSS page was last updated in September of 2008 and, therefore, does not accurately reflect current program policy and guidance.

To replace the NOP-AQSS tool and provide more detailed, transparent information on the NOP regulations to the public, the NOP now publishes a Program Handbook (www.ams.usda.gov/NOPProgramHandbook) that contains official NOP policy and guidance for the organic industry. The purpose of the Program Handbook is to:

1. Provide assistance to the regulated industry by clarifying requirements that have been imposed by the Act or its implementing regulations and by explaining how industry may comply with those statutory and regulatory requirements; and
2. Provide standard operating procedures and specific review and enforcement approaches to help ensure that all parties implement the program's mandate in an effective, fair, and consistent manner.

The Program Handbook is issued under the auspices of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Bulletin on Agency Good Guidance Practices (GGPs) published January 25, 2007 (72 FR 3432-3440). The purpose of the OMB's GGPs is to help ensure that program guidance documents are developed with adequate public participation and are readily available to the public. The Program Handbook serves the functional goals of the GGPs as it is a controlled document, is developed with public input, and is kept up to date with official NOP policies. Therefore, this notice informs stakeholders and interested parties that, effective June 14, 2011, the NOP will remove all NOP-AQSS content from the NOP website. This notice also advises the public that the official resource for current NOP policy and guidance is located in the Program Handbook. Questions about the NOP Program Handbook, including requests for additional topics, can be sent to NOP.Guidance@ams.usda.gov.