

**USDA-Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)
National Organic Program (NOP)
Strategic Planning Update**

Do you have comments about this document or the National Organic Program's strategic planning project? Send your comments to the strategic planning facilitator: Dr. Jennifer Tucker at jtucker@typetalk.com.

The National Organic Program (NOP) has a clear mandate to expand its enforcement, standards development, training, and accreditation capacities to tackle the requirements and needs of the \$25 billion organic industry. Growing quickly, the NOP anticipates reaching a staffing level of 31 during fiscal year 2010. In addition, the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) committee of representative stakeholders that provides advice to the NOP will have turnover of 10 out of 15 members during the next 14 months.

The NOP needs a clear and agreed upon strategic plan that guides its work over the coming years. It is essential that this strategic plan effectively maps a path forward for building a solid and resilient team of both internal and external stakeholders, ready to marshal shared energy to meet the needs of the organic marketplace.

NOP Strategic Planning Process and Objectives

To encourage feedback along the planning path, the NOP has decided to break its strategic planning process into segments, allowing for incremental development of the plan and for thoughtful data gathering from key stakeholders as part of the process. There are four steps now underway:

- Step 1: One Day Strategic Planning Session with NOP Staff – 25 March 2010
- Step 2: Data Gathering with NOSB and Other Stakeholders – April and May 2010
- Step 3: Two-Day Planning Session – 14-15 June 2010
- Step 4: Strategic Plan Review and Rollout – June and July 2010

Objectives: The driving objectives of the overall strategic planning process are to:

- Reaffirm the National Organics Program mission and shared sense of purpose moving forward
- Identify the key customers and audiences of the National Organics Program and the National Organics Standards Board, and their respective needs and interests
- Realistically assess our current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to meeting and prioritizing the needs of our audiences and customers
- Develop and prioritize clear goals, objectives, and actions
- Develop performance measures that will assess success from four perspectives: customer success, financial measures, process metrics, and people measures (e.g, staff development)
- Develop evaluation criteria for setting priorities, resolving conflicts, and making tradeoffs as the plan unfolds
- Establish a communication plan as we move our strategic plan into operation

Step 1 Strategic Planning Session

On 25 March 2010, the NOP staff and leadership met for an internal strategic planning session. The remainder of this document summarizes key work from that session, and is a mechanism for requesting feedback on our planning to date from the NOP stakeholder community. Material from these notes will be integrated with other inputs to form an NOP Strategic Plan, to be developed after the group's June 2010 session, and informed by input received from external audiences.

NOP Self-Assessment: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

Early in the March session, the NOP team generated a list of its current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to meeting and prioritizing the needs of our audiences and customers. This list was generated as part of the strategic planning effort to help: (1) Generate a preliminary list of new goals that NOP wishes to pursue in order to minimize its weaknesses, maximize its opportunities, or mitigate its threats; (2) Realistically assess the strengths and risks that both support and face NOP's operations as it pursues its strategic goals in the future.

Key points from the discussion were as follows:

- Chief among the NOP team's strengths are its current political and funding support, and high visibility for the program. While this visibility also leads to increased scrutiny, it provides great benefits that strengthen the ability to achieve goals. Other strengths include a positive and highly engaged team that brings fresh talent, entrepreneurial energy, and a desire to be proactive in moving forward with the work ahead.
- The NOP team perceives its current weaknesses to be: elements of public and stakeholder outreach program; the existing length of our standards development timeline, which is too long; the existing approach with foreign ACAs; a lack of documented and institutionalized procedures; and a current lack of clear structure and sharp roles and responsibilities, which has resulted from fast growth.
- Many opportunities lie ahead. These include: more consumer and stakeholder education; greater enforcement of standards; increased efficiencies; setting a customer-based strategic plan; partnering with other agencies and organizations with complementary missions; and setting important legal precedents that will support enforcement.
- Like all organizations, the NOP also face certain threats, among which are the risks and lost efficiencies associated with poor document control and records management; public confusion about organics; organic scandals related to enforcement; and some disruptive dissention among industry groups.

Stakeholder Analysis

The March 2010 session includes a discussion about the NOP's primary stakeholders (customers, audiences, and organizations with interest or involvement in NOP activities or operations). While not intended to be exhaustive, the following table is a first effort to list those stakeholder groups that are most connected or interested in the NOP's mission.

Key Stakeholder Group	Includes...
Leadership and staff groups within USDA; Advisory Board	• USDA Department Leadership • AMS Executive Leadership • AMS Program and Staff Office Leadership • NOP Staff (internal team) • National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) • Other AMS Program Staff • USDA Office of General Counsel (OGC) • Other USDA Agencies: FSIS, APHIS, FAS
External stakeholder groups	• Farmers and Producers • Organic Handlers • Trade Associations • Public Interest Groups • ACAs and State Organic Program • Media • Materials Reviewers • Service Granting Agencies • Consumers • Other groups with interest in or involvement in NOP activities: Lobbyists, ISO groups, Data providers/analysts
Other Government Organizations	• Congress and the White House • Oversight Organizations, including USDA Office of Inspector General (OIG) and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) • US Trade Representative (USTR) and Foreign Governments

Initial Strategic Goals and Objectives

During the 25 March 2010 strategic planning session, the NOP team generated the following *first draft* of strategic goals and objectives to help prioritize actions and deliverables in the months and years ahead.

- 1. Develop, publish, and maintain a documented quality management system (QMS) for the efficient and effective operation of the National Organics Program (NOP)**
 - a. Develop and/or map well-defined and documented guidelines, processes, and procedures for NOP business processes
 - b. Complete gap analysis of existing processes, using ISO 17011, Part 205, OIG recommendations, and other appropriate resources as inputs
 - c. Create enterprise database (for QSM elements, including records management and training)
 - d. Implement a process for maintaining the QSM and associated database(s) through internal audits, continuous improvement efforts, and management reviews
- 2. Develop, communicate, and apply clear and consistent NOP standards in a uniform manner across all stakeholder groups**

- a. Develop and publish NOP Handbook, including documented standards development and publication procedures
 - b. Prioritize rulemaking efforts and communicate criteria for future prioritization
 - c. Develop and publish additional product standards
 - d. Actively facilitate collaboration with the NOSB, improving the processes for adopting Committee recommendations, material reviews, and National List updates
 - e. Ensure adequate training of all stakeholders, including NOP staff, the ACAs, domestic and foreign producers/interests, and the State Organic Program
- 3. Enhance compliance with and enforcement of the organic label**
- a. Develop and implement public and industry awareness programs related to enforcement
 - b. Develop and implement a penalty matrix
 - c. Consistently ensure application of penalties as needed
- 4. Improve NOP communication with both internal and external stakeholder groups**
- a. Improve quality and completeness of public access to NOP information (e.g., via searchable information index and clear website presence)
 - b. Develop and implement a communications strategy that reflects an understanding of target audiences, key needs and messages, and the best channels for message delivery
 - c. Identify needs for and implement training programs
 - d. Partner with other organizations to more clearly define and explain organic terms, and to help communicate the NOP mission
- 5. Continue to build and develop an effective and well-trained NOP team**
- a. Identify specific capabilities and experience of NOP staff and ensure that others know who holds specific sources of experience and expertise
 - b. Ensure that all staff are trained in relevant business processes and procedures
 - c. Initiate formal succession planning, including effective hiring and onboarding processes, and cross-training across functions
 - d. Partner with other Federal agencies to determine existing programs that complement or overlap with the NOP mission, and identify ways to maximize effectiveness across involved agencies and staff

It is anticipated that the successful achievement of strategic goals and objectives will lead to the following positive outcomes:

- Increased transparency of information, better records management, and an improved web presence that allows stakeholders to locate and access the information they need in a timely way, reducing response burden on staff
- Decreased number of complaints and appeals, due to greater consistency; and faster resolution of any complaints that are received
- Reduced redundancies and inconsistencies across NOP information sources
- Reduced oversight and more autonomy to serve stakeholders, guided by formal guidelines and well-defined processes

Next Steps

The NOP believes that its March 2010 session was an important step forward to in forming its strategic plan. The process affirmed a great deal of shared agreement about NOP goals and needed priorities, and revealed a strong sense of enthusiasm and collaboration within the team. Some of the activities suggested by this planning session are already underway; new goals and objectives are likely to be identified during the subsequent steps of the planning process.

The NOP team will be convening again in mid-June to further articulate goals and objectives, to develop performance measures for assessing the success of future activities in meeting those goals, to revalidate our mission and vision, to engage in communications planning, and to continue the process of building the team. As we continue to engage in this process, we welcome feedback on the work from this initial step from our community of stakeholders.

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