



Training for Accredited Certifying Agents

On January 26, the National Organic Program (NOP) conducted training in Savannah, GA, in conjunction with the Accredited Certifiers Association/National Association of State Organic Programs Professional Development Training for organic certifying agents. Officials addressed updates to the NOP, monitoring activities and enforcement policies and procedures, use of 'made with organic' label, particularly pertaining to wine, and certification issues that fail to adhere to the objective and guidelines of the NOP. The purpose of the training was to clarify regulations on these aspects of the program and to hear from agents concerning other issues that NOP should address through policy making in the future.

Participation at 30th Annual EcoFarm Conference

At this year's EcoFarm Conference, Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan addressed participants about USDA initiatives to support organic agriculture. She spoke about the new "era of enforcement" to ensure greater industry compliance with regulations, aligning with the administration's goal for strategic development of the NOP as one of its top priorities.

NOP Deputy Administrator Miles McEvoy also spoke about NOP's goal to provide clarity in standards and regulations in order to ensure the proper use of the organic label on agricultural products. To that end, discussions during the conference highlighted several issues that NOP should address in upcoming months:

- Outside evaluation of the NOP by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to assess the NOP accreditation system and improve the quality of the program.
- Federal list of generic materials allowed in organic farming for consistency of various lists that currently exist.
- Program manual that incorporates NOSB recommendations.
- Other areas of guidance, like the use of the term 'organic' in brand or company name of made-with-organic food products, for example.

Access to Pasture Final Rule

The NOP continued to work with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to obtain final clearance on publishing the Access to Pasture final rule.

NOP Appeals

In January, the NOP Appeals office received 370 adverse action letters, including:

- 163 Notices of Noncompliance
- 34 Notices of Proposed Suspension
- 53 Notices of Suspension
- 5 Notices of Proposed Revocation
- 2 Notices of Revocation
- 14 Denials of Certification
- 91 Notices of Resolution
- 8 Surrenders of Certification

Website Redesign

In February the NOP will release its new and improved website, organized to simplify the user experience and allow for more inherently astute navigation. In addition to highlighting top news stories concerning the organic community and NOP, it provides various pathways tailored to the user and the information he/she seeks based on subject or need: accreditation and certification, compliance and enforcement, consumers, resource center, and National Organic Standards Board. We welcome you to visit at www.ams.usda.gov/nop.

The second phase of the website redesign will begin in late February and will entail developing and implementing new web applications, such as an interactive calendar, an RSS-feed in the NOP Newsroom, a photo gallery of certified operations, cross-searchable databases, and more. This phase will also address past and future document control issues in an effort to improve the consistency and clarity of NOP's web presence.

Proposed Rule Concerning Sulfurous Acid and Tetracycline

Last month NOP proposed amendments to the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances for crop production with the publication of a proposed rule to allow the use of sulfurous acid in organic crop production. The rule also proposes to amend the annotation for tetracycline for use in organic crop production.

NOP is requesting comments from the public until the comment period closes on March 15, 2010. Interested parties can view the proposed rule and post comments at www.regulations.gov. Comments can also be submitted by mail to Toni Strother, Agricultural Marketing Specialist, National Organic Program, USDA-AMS-TMP-NOP, Room 2646-So., Ag Stop 0268, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-0268. For further information about the proposed rule, contact Shannon Nally, Acting Director, Standards Division, at (202) 720-3252.

State Organic Program – Utah withdraws

On February 9, 2004 the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service granted approval for the State of Utah to operate a State Organic Program (SOP) under the National Organic Program. Under an approved SOP, states agree to administer and enforce the NOP regulations for products produced and sold as organic within the state.

On January 14, 2010 the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF) requested to withdraw its SOP. The NOP has accepted Utah's withdrawal and Utah no longer has an approved SOP. This withdrawal does not affect the status of the UDAF organic certification program which retains its good standing as an accredited certification program.

California remains the only SOP under the NOP.

NOP Staff Update

Lars Crail joined the NOP Accreditation and International Activities Division on January 19. Mr. Crail has been an organic inspector for the California Certified Organic Farmers and is assigned to be an NOP technical expert on NOP accreditation audits.