

## **National Organic Program (NOP) – Organic Aquaculture Standards Development**

### **Issue**

The USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), National Organic Program (NOP) is preparing to publish proposed standards for the production of organically grown aquatic animals and their products. The new standards would include fin fish, mollusks, crustaceans and other vertebrate and invertebrate aquatic animals. They would not include birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians or plants. These products may already be certified under existing USDA organic standards.

### **Background**

The Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) authorizes the NOP to regulate organic claims on fish used for food. The NOP already has standards for crops, livestock, wild crop harvesting, and handling (processing). However, the USDA organic standards do not currently include organic standards for the production or certification of farmed aquatic animals or their products. The new standards would create an additional area of certification for fish and other aquatic animals. The standards will provide for organic certification of several types of aquaculture production, including ponds, raceways, closed recirculating water systems, and net pens.

In general, organic production requires farms to produce crops or animals under a strict set of standards that maintains or improves the natural resources of the environment. Natural materials are generally allowed and synthetic materials are generally prohibited. Exceptions to this rule are found in a national list of allowed synthetics and prohibited natural substances, which is a part of the USDA organic standards.

Participation under the NOP is voluntary. However, if organic producers or handlers choose to sell, represent, or label more than \$5,000 in organic products, certification under the USDA organic regulations is required. Certification of organic operations under the NOP is provided as a user-fee service by USDA-accredited private sector certifiers and state agencies. AMS provides accreditation services to certifiers on a user-fee basis.

The cost for existing conventional aquaculture operations to convert and participate in this voluntary marketing program will generally be incurred in the cost of changing management practices, increased feed costs, and obtaining organic certification. The NOP manages an Organic Cost Share Program that provides up to \$750 to operations to help defray the cost of certification. This program is available to all participants, including operations on tribal lands.

### **Possible Benefits to Tribes**

This action has significant potential benefits to tribes. Tribes currently engaged in aquaculture or interested in farming aquatic animals such as fish, shrimp, or oysters, would be able to implement practices described in the new standards. Once certified, they would be eligible to sell, label, or represent their products as “organic” and display the USDA organic seal on their labels. While retail markups on organically produced products vary, we are aware of some organic aquatic animal products, such as salmon, that retail for twice the price of similar non-organic products.

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