

National Organic Program (NOP) –Organic Apiculture Standards

Issue

The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service's (AMS) National Organic Program (NOP) is preparing to publish proposed standards for the production of organic apicultural (i.e. beekeeping) products. This action will establish certification standards specifically for organic bees and bee products, including provisions for transition to organic apiculture production, replacement bees, hive construction, forage areas, supplemental feeding, health care, pest control practices and an organic apiculture system plan. This action does not regulate the use of bees for pollination of organic crops.

Background

The definition of livestock provided in the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) authorizes the NOP to regulate organic claims on apiculture products. In the absence of species-specific standards, the NOP has allowed apiculture operations to be certified under the organic livestock standards. However, the livestock standard requirements were developed for traditional mammalian and avian farm animals and do not accommodate the distinctive production needs of bees and bee products. Further, without clear provisions, certifiers do not uniformly adapt the livestock standards for apiculture operations, leading to inconsistent treatment of operations in organic inspection and certification.

The proposed standards are based upon a recommendation of the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), which responds to requests from consumers, producers, certifying agents, and trade associations seeking greater detail on the appropriate practices for the certification and inspection of organic apiculture operations. They are also motivated by the recent establishment of organic apiculture standards by major trading partners, including the EU and Canada. The adoption of organic apiculture standards will ensure consistency across certifying agents and a level playing field for certified producers. It will also reduce uncertainty in the industry, support enforcement activities, and increase consumer confidence in apiculture products marketed under the USDA organic seal, thereby improving the marketing potential for organic apiculture products.

Possible Benefits to Tribes

This action has potential benefits for Tribes engaged in, or interested in transitioning to, organic apiculture production. Clear standards for USDA organic apiculture products will increase marketing opportunities for organic apiculture products and are not anticipated to result in any significant costs to certifiers or producers.

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