



April 12, 2016

Ms. Michelle Arsenault
National Organic Standards Board
USDA-AMS-NOP
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Room 2648-S Mail Stop 0268
Washington, DC 20250-0268

Docket: AMS-NOP-15-0085

RE: Materials Subcommittee – Seed Purity, Next Steps (Discussion)

Dear Ms. Arsenault,

We thank each member of the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) for their extraordinary volunteer efforts on behalf of the organic community.

We appreciate the work of the Materials Subcommittee in considering the input of stakeholders and initiating this proposal to determine the best path forward to ensure that the organic farming community has access to seeds with the least risk of contamination for their crops. The four suggestions put forward by the Subcommittee are, in combination, an approach that can work well. However, we believe that priority should be given to strengthening the organic seed requirement and establishing a Seed Purity Advisory Task Force.

In order to strengthen the organic seed requirement, we ask the NOSB to make a recommendation to the National Organic Program (NOP) to revise the March 2013 seed guidance document (NOP 5029). The current state of the organic seed industry has changed since 2013 and should be reflected in the guidance document. Also, the guidance document should include additional guidance specific to the use of “at-risk” non-organic seed. We support the Organic Trade Association (OTA) comments on revisions to NOP guidance document – NOP 5029 – submitted during this comment period.

The intent of the allowance in 7 CFR § 205.204(a) to use non-organic seed under certain conditions was to provide a transition time for the industry while the production of organic seed and planting stock caught up to its demand. However, almost 15 years later, the increase in use of organic seed and planting stock has been less than robust. Commercial availability has been applied inconsistently since the implementation of the rule, and the level at which certifiers monitor and enforce the use of organic seeds and planting stock varies significantly. Therefore, a regulatory change or improved NOP guidance is crucial to help remedy the situation.

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P.O. Box 458, New Castle, VA 24127
Tel 540-864-5107 • Fax 540-864-5161 • Info@OrganicSpecialists.com
www.OrganicSpecialists.com

A seed purity standard, if established, must be done so through a careful and deliberative process based on adequate data and established per crop. A standard will likely include thresholds and should also be set on a crop-by-crop basis. This is a project that demands rigorous process, sampling protocols and testing specifications. It will also need funding to be done and result in meaningful results. Collecting data from Accredited Certification Agents (ACA) is not adequate or the right approach. We support the establishment of a Seed Purity Task Force appointed by USDA to take on this task.

We recognize and appreciate the commitment of the NOSB members to consider the full range of stakeholder opinion and through a deliberative process, without individual bias, make recommendations to advance the organic sector. Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,

Bill Wolf, Katherine DiMatteo and Sandy Mays
Partners

The partners and associates of Wolf, DiMatteo + Associates have over 100 years of combined experience in the organic sector. We have served hundreds of farms and businesses with their organic production systems and regulatory compliance, both nationally and internationally. We have been involved in the founding of several key organic organizations including the Organic Trade Association, Organic Materials Review Institute and the Organic Center. We are fiercely committed to continual improvement and to provide our clients and the organic sector with the tools to advance organic, environmental, and social practices.