

All there is to know about organic farming and sustainable living, Mother Nature has handed to us in three easy to understand volumes, She titles Simplicity , Symbiosis, and Logic. I know Her works rarely, if ever, are used by our federal government, which has become painfully evident in it's publication of the " Final Rule" for the NOP. We understand simplicity and symbiosis are not easy to achieve when trying to craft one rule to govern and satisfy such diverse groups as organic farmers, manufactures, and politicians. The nit-picking that will go on over the 554 pages is inevitable, and how much conventionally grown sugar is allowed in a pound of certified organic spam is of little concern to organic farmers.

The core issue however, needs to take a few pages from the book of logic. Organic farmers are the center and the backbone of the NOP, indeed they are the REASON for NOP. Yet we are being pushed not only off the playing field but behind the bleachers.

There exists today over 40 associations (most of them regional in scope) that provide organic farmers the opportunity to share ideas, discuss problems, and formulate standards that govern their stewardship of the soil. They are in most cases predominantly directed, quite naturally, by the farmers themselves. In a highly disturbing move, the USDA, at the very last minute of 11 years of discussion and formulation, and without prior publication, added the conflict of interest standards which effectively will kick all organic farmers off their respective boards, leaving these essential grass roots organizations in the hands of cookie makers, bureaucrats, and probably hypnotherapists to formulate and guide our noble quest. In analogy, by the USDA perspective all the law makers in the US House of Representatives and the US Senate should come from foreign countries, because as US citizens, with ultimate control over the salaries and appointments of judges, whose interpretations of law impact directly on US citizens a conflict of interest is present. This is rubbish. In the same vein it was at the very last minute that the USDA departed from clear implications that their rule governing NOP would be a floor from which the separate certifying agencies could work, to the absurd extreme of making it a ceiling!

Everyone impacted by the " rule" can work within the system to " tweek" this paragraph or that over the coming years, but if these two core issues are not dealt with swiftly and logically, organic farmers, en masse, will leave this process and the NOP for the soy burger makers and politicians to argue over. A very large percentage of organic farmers, including myself, will shuck off all connection with the USDA and its NOP if we are not permitted to control our grass roots organizations including options to stiffen parts of the " rule".

As the organic movement grows we who are at the heart of it do not want it steered by interests that will constantly be applying pressure to ease standards. Certainly this will be the case if food manufacturers, health store deli's , wine makers, politicians, the OTA, and big money control the agenda.

Wake up people, organic farmers are the ONLY ones to guard the hen house, and the" rule" will only function if we are.

May the logic be with you!

Sincerely,

Frank Oakes