

# Formation of a Task Force on Standards for Aquatic Animals

## Background

- USDA NOP in 2000 convened several public meetings in different locations around the country concerning potential organic certification of wild caught and farmed aquatic animals (chiefly finfish and shellfish, or "fish").
- Subsequent to these public meetings, the NOSB established an Aquatic Animal Task Force, which completed a report to the NOSB in May 2001.  
<http://www.ams.usda.gov/nosb/FinalRecommendations/Oct01/AquaticTaskForce.html>

The NOSB in October 2001 accepted unanimously the Task Force's recommendations as follows:

*Aquatic Animal Task Force Recommendations* - The NOSB accepted the report of the aquatic animal task force and approved the following recommendation:

1. No standards be developed for wild caught aquatic animals;
  2. Standards be developed for the production of farmed aquatic animals that reflect an innovative approach to organic certification while remaining fully consistent with the statutory requirements of the Organic Foods Production Act;
  3. If standards are developed for farmed aquatic animals, we recommend that the National Organic Program and the National Organic Standards Board use the aquatic animal task force report as guidance.
- Since 2001, interest in organic production of farmed fish has increased. For example, one US certifier is now developing guidance for organic production of pond-raised aquatic animals.
  - A rider to the Supplemental Appropriations Bill, passed by Congress in April 2003, resolved any previous uncertainty about whether organic standards for wild caught fish can be developed under OFPA:

Notwithstanding the requirement of section 2107(a)(1)(A) requiring products be produced only on certified organic farms, the Secretary shall allow, through regulations promulgated after public notice and opportunity for comment, wild seafood to be certified or labeled as organic.

## Proposed Task Force:

The Livestock Committee recommends the establishment of a new task force on standards for wild-caught and farmed aquatic animals. The task force would be structured similarly to the earlier Task Force on Aquatic Animals, with two working groups -- one on wild caught and one on farmed species. These working groups will

develop recommendations for consideration by the full task force, which will in turn issue recommendations to the NOSB.

Task force participants would be drawn from the NOSB and elsewhere. Non-NOSB participants should include fishermen, fish farmers, feed experts, marine conservationists, consumer representatives, academics, and certifiers.

### **Task Force Responsibilities:**

The task force will pursue a two-step process concerning potential organic production of wild caught and farmed aquatic animals:

- 1) After consideration of the 2001 Aquatic Animals Task Force report, recommend to the NOSB whether organic standards for wild caught and farmed aquatic animals should be developed at the present time, and if so, the scope of the standards.
- 2) If standards should be developed at the present time, recommend draft standards to the NOSB.

The task force shall at appropriate times solicit public input into the task force process.

### **Conduct of Task Force members:**

All task force members shall agree to review and abide by all applicable provisions of the NOSB Policy Manual concerning the conduct of Board members.

(<http://www.ams.usda.gov/nosb/BoardPolicyManual/BoardPolicyManual4-29-04.pdf>)

Provisions of particular importance include those concerning Duties of the Board and Officers, especially:

NOSB members, committee and task force members, and contractors and agents of the NOSB shall not engage in a financial transaction using nonpublic information, not allow the improper use of nonpublic information to further his/her own private interest or that of another, whether through advice or recommendation, or allow the unauthorized disclosure of nonpublic information.

Task force members shall also agree to review and consider in their deliberations the NOSB's Principles of Organic Production and Handling, as published in the NOSB Policy Manual.