

National Organic Standards Board Meeting, September 17 – 19, 2002, Washington, D.C.

Processing Committee: Recommendation Hydroxypropyl Methyl Cellulose

Introduction: Hydroxypropyl methylcellulose (HPMC) was petitioned as an ingredient of hard capsules used for encapsulating powdered herbs.

Background: HPMC is considered to be part of the group of compounds known as cellulose ethers. Various reaction products with methyl chloride are known as methyl celluloses. This group includes HPMC. HPMC is included on list 4B, "Inerts which have sufficient data to substantiate they can be used safely in pesticide products."

Methyl chloride is considered hazardous and is highly flammable. It is considered an ozone depleting substance. It has less effect than other ozone other ozone depleting compounds (CFCs) and is not thought to be a significant contributor to global warming.

HPMC is an approved food additive and is used to make hard capsules for herbs and supplements as an alternative to gelatin. Gelatin poses certain challenges for herbs in capsule form. Primarily gelatin can compromise the quality of herbal supplements that are water unstable. In other words, gelatin can cause unwanted reactions with herbal supplements resulting in an unsuitable product. Also, vegetarian consumers' desire products produced without the use of animal products.

Alternatives exist through herbs in bulk powdered form and tincture form. However, these alternatives are challenging for dried herb produces and are not desirable for many consumers. The reviewers felt (as did the committee) that HPMC does not meet the established environmental criteria for organic production. However, the reviewers also found no alternatives to HPMC for the production of hard capsules.

The processing committee recognized the hazardous status of methyl chloride used in the manufacturing of HPMC and therefore chose to prohibit the use of HPMC for the "organic" category. Both the reviewers and the committee found that alternatives currently do not exist for the manufacture of hard capsules suitable for use with dried herbal supplements. In light of this fact the committee chose to approve HPMC for the "made with organic" category.

Recommendation:

205.605 (b) Synthetics allowed:

Made With Organic Only – only for hard capsule application.

Committee Vote:

Approve – 6
Disapprove - 1
Recuse – 0
Absent - 0
Abstain - 0

Conclusion: This recommendation recognizes the environmental challenges of HPMC in organic production while embracing the urgent need for an alternative for hard capsules used to encapsulate dried herbs produced as organic.