



February 2016 Newsletter

Table of Contents

- 1 Leveling the Playing Field**
- 3 AMS Welcomes New Acting Administrator**
Engaging the Community: EcoFarm
National List Updates
- 4 Compliance & Enforcement/ Appeals Summary**
- 5 Hydroponic and Aquaponic Task Force Update**
- 6 Sound and Sensible Initiative Projects**
- 9 An Ounce of Prevention: Organic Produce**
- 10 Celebrating Organic INTEGRITY**
- 11 USDA Appoints New Board Members**
- 12 USDA Lowers Risk for Producers Transitioning to Organic**
- 13 NOP Staff Updates**
- 14 Program Handbook + Web Updates**

Organic Integrity from Farm to Table, Consumers Trust the Organic Label.

Compliance & Enforcement: Leveling the Playing Field for Organic Operations



Protecting organic integrity is the most important goal for the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) National Organic Program (NOP). NOP is committed to responsive, thorough and consistent enforcement. To protect consumers and to provide a level playing field for all organic farms and businesses, our Compliance and Enforcement (C&E) Division investigates and takes action on complaints alleging violation of the USDA organic regulations.

Investigating complaints is the Compliance and Enforcement Division's primary activity. Our goal is to bring operations into compliance and keep agricultural products that violate the USDA organic regulations out of commerce. When appropriate, we encourage and assist non-certified operations with becoming certified. In Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15), at least 17 non-certified operations became certified as a result of Division investigations.

The number of cases closed reached a record number in FY15 - we closed 390 cases. Nearly 76 percent of cases we received concerned non-certified operations representing products as produced using organic methods. Complaints regarding the use of prohibited substances and methods account for 16 percent of those received in FY15; while labeling complaints made up the remaining 8 percent.

FY15 complaint investigations resulted in a record number of initial enforcement actions, including:

- 36 orders to cease and desist representing agricultural products as organic;
- 121 Notices of Warning, which typically concern minor violations that have been corrected and advise businesses of penalties that may result from future violation; and
- 64 referrals of investigations to accredited certifying agents, other Federal agencies, State Programs and international trading partners.

continued on page 2



Leveling the Playing Field, cont'd



Our FY15 enforcement activities also resulted in 13 settlement agreements and levied civil penalties that total \$1,872,815.

Where needed, the NOP works with the USDA Office of General Counsel to take further enforcement action through USDA administrative court proceedings. These proceedings may result in the suspension or revocation of organic certification or accreditation, as well as civil penalties of up to \$11,000 per violation for noncompliant sales of agricultural products.

In FY15, the NOP prevailed in several administrative proceedings.

- A USDA Administrative Law Judge Decision and Order resulted in suspension of the land owned by operation Ernest D. Miller, d/b/a Stoney-M Farm, from organic certification for a period of three years due to the application of a prohibited substance.
- Through a Consent Decision and Order, AMS/NOP suspended the accreditation of certifying agent, The Organic Food Chain, for two years for violation of the USDA organic regulations.
- AMS/NOP also prevailed in a formal administrative complaint proceeding to revoke the certification of operation Paul A. Rosberg, d/b/a Rosberg Farm, for a period of five years for willful violation of the USDA organic regulations. A subsequent USDA Judicial Officer order adopted and upheld the ruling.

AMS continues to strengthen NOP enforcement to ensure a fair market for compliant organic products. Enhanced enforcement authority, included in the 2014 Farm Bill, now

authorizes the NOP to issue subpoena orders for records relevant to investigations. During FY15, the program issued six subpoena orders to gain evidence for cases.

In addition, we have outlined plans to enhance enforcement activities with increased reporting and improved technology. As a start, we posted the NOP Compliance & Enforcement/Appeals Summary report on the AMS website in October 2015. The report outlines NOP's compliance, enforcement and appeals activities for FY15. The most recent quarterly edition was issued in January 2016 and is included in this newsletter. By publishing this enforcement information, AMS demonstrates its commitment to consistency, transparency, and organic integrity.

The Organic INTEGRITY Database provides additional support for organic enforcement by allowing certifying agents to regularly update the list of organic operations they certify.

Compliance and enforcement activities are key to maintaining organic integrity. Moving forward, we will use all enforcement tools at our disposal to protect consumers and ensure a level playing field for the organic community.

Sincerely,

Miles V. McEvoy
NOP Deputy Administrator



The NOP Organic Insider
USDA National Organic Program

Want to become an organic insider?

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[Get the NOPOrganicInsider](#)

AMS Welcomes New Acting Administrator



On January 20, the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) welcomed its new Acting Administrator, Elanor Starmer. Starmer first joined USDA in 2011 to support the Deputy Secretary before becoming a Senior Advisor to Secretary Tom Vilsack.

Starmer has coordinated the Department's work on local and regional food systems, including running the Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food initiative; acted as liaison to U.S. Food Drug Administration (FDA) on the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and developed Department-wide strategy to support industry on FSMA implementation; and handled a variety of other issues, including specialty crops and value-added agriculture. Across this portfolio, Starmer's focus has been the creation of new market opportunities for farmers, ranchers and food business of all sizes. That focus has connected her to much of the work that AMS does on a daily basis.

Growing up in rural New Hampshire, she saw first-hand the impact of what AMS does—the valuable services we provide to stakeholders and the impact on communities. Over the next year, she looks forward to helping AMS programs continue to build on the already great foundation that has been established, and we also look forward to the opportunity.

Welcome to AMS, Acting Administrator Starmer!

Engaging the Community: EcoFarm



As part of AMS efforts to foster community engagement, NOP Deputy Administrator Miles McEvoy and Materials Specialist Devon Pattillo attended the 36th Annual EcoFarm Conference in California. EcoFarm is one of the country's largest conferences on organic and sustainable agriculture. Attendees receive updates on current topics in organic farming and hear diverse perspectives from people representing all parts of the organic community.

Deputy Administrator McEvoy, National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) member Jean Richardson, and Hydroponics Task Force member Amy Lamendella presented talks. Mr. McEvoy provided a program update and spoke at a meeting of the California Organic Products Advisory Committee about the program's enforcement and complaint management activities. Dr. Richardson discussed NOSB activities, and Ms. Lamendella provided an overview of the task force's work. She also presented a slideshow with examples of hydroponic and aquaponic production systems.

National List Updates

New Petitions

The following new petitions have been posted on the AMS website and sent to the NOSB for review:

- Fatty alcohols, petitioned to 205.601
- Oat protein concentrate, petitioned to 205.606

New Technical Reports

- Carrageenan, 205.605(a), Sunset 2018
- Glucono delta-lactone, 205.605(a), Sunset 2018
- Cellulose, 205.605(b), Sunset 2018
- Potassium hydroxide, 205.605(b), Sunset 2018
- Squid and squid byproducts, petitioned to 205.601

View petitions and technical reports:
www.ams.usda.gov/NOPNationalList



Compliance & Enforcement/Appeals Summary

Reporting Period: FY 2016 –Q1 (October 2015 – December 2015)



COMPLIANCE & ENFORCEMENT: OVERALL SUMMARY

Incoming Complaints	94
Completed Complaint Reviews and Investigations	82

APPEALS: OVERALL SUMMARY (Refer to [NOP 4011: Adverse Action Appeal Process](#) for more information)

Number of Incoming Appeals by Disposition	4
Decisions	6 (includes five received in FY15 and one received in FY16)
Dismissals	0
Closures	6 (includes four received in FY15 and two received in FY16)

Note: Total reflects appeals closed in FY 2016 regardless of when cases were initiated.

SUMMARY OF INITIAL ACTIONS TAKEN

Cease & Desist Orders	8
Notices of Warning	22
Investigation Referrals	7

SUMMARY OF DISPOSITIONS (All NOP)

Total Number of Settlement Agreements *	5
Total Number of Consent Decisions	1
Total Amount Civil Penalties Levied **	\$929,750

Notes:

* In FY16, not all settlement agreements include civil penalties and not all civil penalties were levied via settlement agreements.

** Total reflects the amount of penalties initially levied. Amounts may change during negotiation of settlements and individual penalty payments may be outstanding.

Want to become an organic insider?

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Hydroponic and Aquaponic Task Force Update



The Hydroponic and Aquaponic Task Force is off to a successful start. The group was appointed in September 2015, and is tasked with examining hydroponic and aquaponic production methods to determine how they align with the USDA organic regulations and the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA). The group began meeting virtually in November. On January 18-19, 2016, the task force met for its first in-person meeting in San Diego, California.

Since beginning its work, the task force has focused on three primary topics: 1) determining the components of the final report they will submit to the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB); 2) developing a work plan to address each of these components; and 3) exchanging knowledge about hydroponic and aquaponic production.

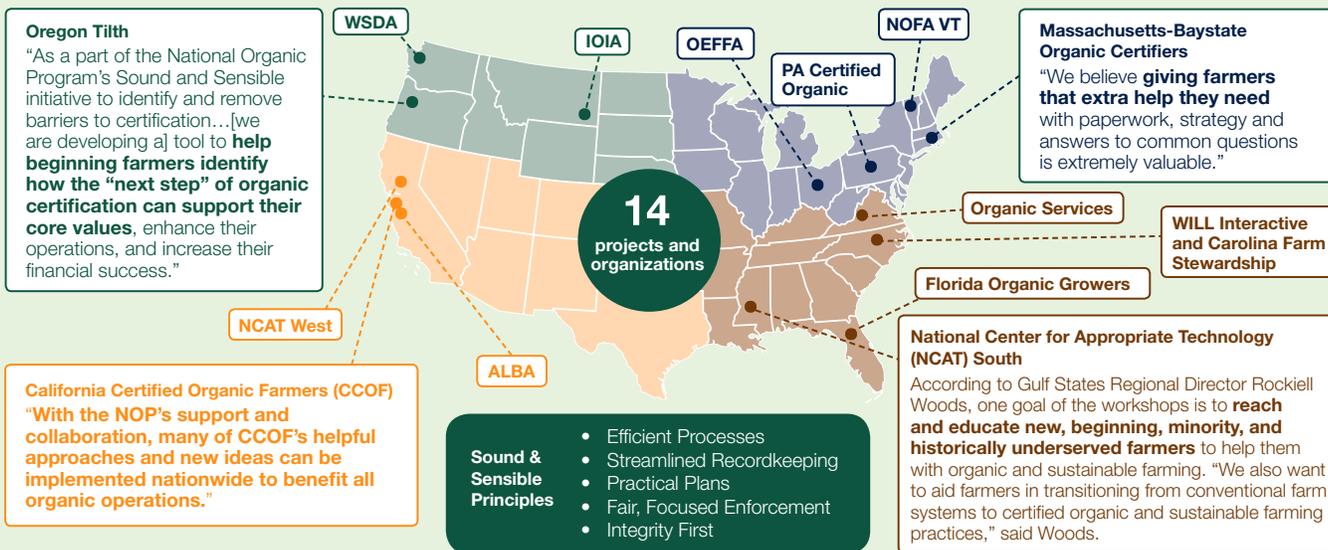
The recent meeting in San Diego was very productive. It provided the group with team-building and educational opportunities to help move the task force more effectively towards their goal of completing a final report to the NOSB. Over the two-day meeting, the group held work sessions, shared presentations in their areas of expertise, and visited two hydroponic operations that have achieved organic certification—Go Green Agriculture in Encinitas, CA and Archi's Acres in Escondido, CA. Members also became better acquainted and strengthened their working relationships.

In the coming months, the Hydroponic and Aquaponic Task Force will continue to hold regular virtual meetings and plans to submit a final report to the NOSB in early summer of 2016.



Sound & Sensible

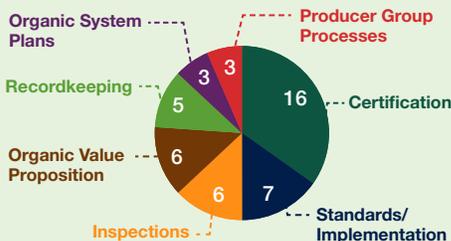
In 2014, the National Organic Program's (NOP) Sound and Sensible initiative funded 14 year-long projects across the United States aimed at making organic certification more accessible, attainable, and affordable while maintaining high standards, ensuring compliance, and protecting organic integrity. Project leads worked directly with organic farmers and businesses to identify and remove barriers to certification, streamline the certification and recordkeeping process, and conduct education and outreach.



44 public-facing products

The Sound and Sensible projects have resulted in a trove of valuable tools, guides, and training materials. These resources will benefit the broader organic community, including the nearly 20,000 certified organic producers and processing facilities across the United States. Many of the projects focused on outreach to underserved communities, such as non-native English speakers and Plain/Amish communities, about the benefits of organic certification.

Product Topic Areas



Types of Products



75
tip sheets / fact sheets



16
training workshops & curricula



15
informative videos

Acronym Definitions: ALBA - Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association; IOIA - International Organic Inspectors Association; NOFA VT - Northeast Organic Farmers Association Vermont; OEFFA - Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association; PA - Pennsylvania; WSDA - Washington State Department of Agriculture

Sound and Sensible Initiative Projects Simplify Organic Certification

The Agricultural Marketing Service's (AMS) National Organic Program (NOP) works every day to ensure that products with the USDA organic seal meet consistent, uniform standards. In addition to protecting the integrity of the organic seal through a rigorous certification process and oversight, we are committed to connecting organic farmers and businesses with USDA resources, including conservation assistance, access to loans and grants, funding for organic research and education, and mitigation of pest emergencies.

Organic certification has helped organic producers and businesses achieve unprecedented levels of growth for organically produced goods. The retail market for organic products has nearly doubled in value since 2009, and the number of USDA certified organic operations continues to grow year to year.

Last year, AMS made contract awards to 14 organizations to support the Sound and Sensible organic certification initiative, which focuses on making organic certification more accessible, attainable, and affordable. Now, USDA is sharing the results of these projects, including an array of valuable tools and resources – templates, decision-making tools, trainings, guides, tip sheets, and videos – with the entire organic community, from certifying agents to certified organic operations, to producers who are considering organic certification for the first time.

continued on page 7

Sound and Sensible Initiative, cont'd

continued from page 6

All of the projects share a common goal – making organic certification more accessible, attainable, and affordable while maintaining high standards, ensuring compliance, and protecting organic integrity. These projects educate producers and provide them with tools and information resources needed to streamline certification, inspections, recordkeeping, and compliance.

Over the past year, the awarded organizations have helped more than 2,000 U.S. farmers, handlers, and producers by:

- Conducting training workshops with hundreds of farmers on certification, transitioning to organic, inspections, recordkeeping, and standards compliance.
- Interviewing dozens of farmers to hear first-hand certification experiences and share challenges, benefits, and lessons learned through training and outreach videos.
- Engaging more than 50 farmers in peer partnership programs, including “farm walks” led by certified organic farmers to share best practices and a mentorship program that partnered newly certified producers with more experienced operations.
- Conducting outreach to more than 1,600 producers in typically under-served populations, including Plain/Amish communities, non-English-speaking communities, direct-market farmers, and producer groups.
- Developing cost-benefit analysis and readiness assessment tools, templates for organic system plans and recordkeeping practices, and guides and tip sheets that address high-interest topics.

Over the next several months, these projects will have an even greater impact on the organic community, as AMS releases more than 40 tools and resources resulting from the Sound and Sensible Initiative, including:

- Templates for certifiers, USDA field offices and other organizations to develop their own outreach programs, training workshops, and peer-to-peer programs
- 75 tip sheets or factsheets on the certification process and standards compliance
- 16 training presentations on a wide range of certification topics
- 15 informative videos on topics including inspection processes and the value of organic certification

Products from three launches are now available on the AMS website, grouped by theme and audience. With these valuable tools and resources, farmers and producers will be better able to understand the benefits of organic certification and decide whether organic certification is right for them. Find them at: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/report-presentation/sound-sensible>

USDA's commitment to supporting organic agriculture has been critical to the sector's continued growth. In addition to protecting the integrity of the organic seal through a rigorous certification process and oversight, we are committed to connecting organic farmers and businesses with USDA resources, including conservation assistance, access to loans and grants, funding for organic research and education, and mitigation of pest emergencies.

continued on page 8

Upcoming Events

National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) Spring 2016 Meeting

NOSB meetings, held twice a year, are an important forum for public comment, and support transparency in the organic standards development process. Learn more at www.ams.usda.gov/nosb.

April 25 – 27, 2016 | 8:30 am to 5:00 pm daily | Omni Shoreham Hotel | 2500 Calvert St NW, Washington, DC 20008

Sound and Sensible Resources: Why Go Organic and Where to Start!

continued from page 7

Exploring the Organic Option

Interactive Video: "The Road to Organic Certification"

What's the Organic Value Proposition? - Brochure | Video Series

Planning the Path Forward

Organic Certification Made Simple - Bite by Bite Document Series

1. Why Get Certified Organic?
 - a. Growers' Perspectives
 - b. What Does "Organic" Mean?
 - c. What Does Organic Certification Cost?
 - d. Consumers' Perspectives
2. Considerations Before Certification
 - a. Why Consider Organic Certification?
 - b. Three-year Transition
 - i. New Land and Getting it Certified
 - ii. Transitioning to Organic
 - iii. Transitional Story: D&J Blueberry Farms: A Successful Transition to Organic
 - iv. Transitional Story: LNB Grove: The Continuing Transition of a Split Operation
 - c. Communicating With Your Certifier to Avoid Mistakes
 - d. Marketing Opportunities with Organic Certification
3. The Roles of Certifiers and Consultants: How to Choose Them
4. The Application
 - a. What is an Organic Systems Plan?
 - b. Organic Production: A Systems Approach
 - c. Inputs
 - d. Labeling
 - e. Experiences with Organic Systems Plans
5. Examples of Types of Records
6. Inspection: Preparation and What to Expect
 - a. Inspection: The Basics
 - b. Non-compliances
7. How to Renew Your Organic Certification
8. Split/Parallel Operations
 - a. Split/Parallel Operations
 - b. Parallel Conventional/Organic Operation
9. Accessing Certified Organic Grower Resources
 - a. Grower Resources
 - b. USDA NRCS Resources on Certified Organic Farm
10. Siembra Farm: Our Path to Organic Certification

Self-Assessment Video and Tool for Prospective Producers Transitioning to Organic

What's the Demand for Organic?

What's Organic Certification Like?

¿Quisiera certificarse como orgánico? (Do you want to get certified organic?)

Self-Assessment (pdf)

"Steps to Certification" Videos and Costs of Certification Web Application

Video Series

Self-Assessment

An Ounce of Prevention—Organic Produce



Enacted at the request of the fruit and vegetable industry to promote fair trade in the industry, the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act (PACA) protects businesses dealing in fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables by establishing and enforcing a code of fair business practices and by helping companies resolve business disputes. The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) administers PACA and offers many PACA-related services to the produce industry, including a regular newsletter feature called “PACA’s Ounce of Prevention.”

As part of a recent article series on certain traded commodities that have a tendency to result in disputes, the PACA team explores the topic of “Preventative Medicine” for your produce business, highlighting organic produce. In the case study below, they address important issues regarding use of the term organic.

Q. What does Organic Produce mean anyway?

A. Organic is a labeling term for food or other agricultural products that have been produced according to the USDA organic regulations. These methods integrate cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that support the cycling of on-farm resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity. Synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, irradiation, and genetic engineering may not be used.

Q. Who makes sure the produce is organic?

A. The National Organic Program (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/>) regulates all organic crops, livestock, and agricultural products certified to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) organic standards. Organic certification agencies inspect and verify that organic farmers, ranchers, distributors, processors, and traders are complying with the USDA organic regulations. USDA conducts audits and ensures that the nearly 80 organic certification agencies operating around the world are properly certifying organic products. In addition, USDA conducts investigations and enforcement activities to ensure all products labeled as organic meet USDA organic regulations. In order to sell, label, or represent their products as organic, operations must follow all of the specifications set out by the USDA organic regulations.

Q. Who must be certified?

A. All operations that sell, label, or represent their products as organic or as having been produced or handled using organic methods must be certified, except:

- Those whose gross annual income from organic products is less than \$5,000.
- Retail food establishments, such as grocery stores or restaurants.
- Brokers, distributors, and traders who handle only pre-packaged items.
- Those that handle products containing organic ingredients (excluding salt and water), but make no organic claims other than identifying organic ingredients on the product information panel.

Q. My imported shipment of organic produce was treated to destroy plant pests that were detected. Can I still sell my product as organic?

A. Treatments involving the use of ionizing radiation or fumigation with prohibited substances, like methyl bromide, affect the status of imported organic produce. When an imported shipment is fumigated using a substance prohibited for use in the handling of organic agricultural products, and that product comes into contact with the fumigating agent, or the product, in any instance, undergoes treatment using ionizing radiation, it can no longer be sold, labeled or represented as organic.

The sale or labeling of such products as organically produced or handled may result in compliance action against certified operations.

continued on page 10

An Ounce of Prevention—Organic Produce, cont'd

continued from page 9

Q. What can happen to a business who labels something organic and it is not?

A. Depending on the nature of the violation, a business could be subject to civil penalties of up to \$11,000 per violation and/or suspension or revocation of its organic certification. A suspended or revoked operation cannot sell, label, or represent its products as organic. Once the suspended operation meets any specified waiting period and can demonstrate full compliance with the USDA organic regulations, it can request that the National Organic Program reinstate its organic certificate.

Q. Can an organic violation affect my PACA license?

A. Absolutely. If you label your cartons organic and the product is not organic, that is a misbranding violation under PACA. The PACA regulations state that it is a violation of section 2(5) of the Act for a licensee to misrepresent by word, act, mark, stencil, label, statement, or deed, the character, kind, grade, quality, quantity, size, pack, weight, condition, degree, or maturity, or State, country, region of origin of any perishable agricultural commodity received, shipped, sold, or offered to be sold in interstate or foreign commerce.

Q. What are the penalties for misbranding under PACA?

A. Misbranding violations under PACA range from serious, very serious or repeated and/or flagrant, depending upon the circumstances. The penalties start as a written warning and can go all the way to having your PACA license revoked.

We hope this sheds some light on issues that come up frequently when encountering the trade term Organic Produce. Of course, you can always reach PACA at our customer service line 800-495-7222 or online at <http://www.ams.usda/paca>.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Robert Parker
Assistant to the Chief, Dispute
Resolution Branch
PACA Division
robert.parker@ams.usda.gov

Celebrating Organic INTEGRITY

In January 2016, the AMS National Organic Program (NOP) and Information Technology Services (ITS) released new capabilities for the Organic Integrity Database, an important modernized tool for the organic industry and consumers.

The database, called INTEGRITY, allows industry and the public to easily search for organic farms and businesses, by name, certification status, state, country, and products. It also allows organic certifying agents to report new operations and changes in existing operations at any time. This allows USDA to report updated counts of certified organic operations throughout the year.

INTEGRITY will deter fraud by providing updated and accurate information about all certified operations, reduce the hundreds of phone calls currently made to confirm certification status, provide data for market research and supply chain connections between buyers and sellers, support international verification of operator status, and will establish technology connections with certifiers to share more accurate and timely data.

INTEGRITY was made possible by funding in the 2014 Farm Bill, and this project is a great example of how technology investments and strong partnerships support organic integrity and market development. The system was built in less than 10 months with input and feedback from an engaged group of certifying agents and other organizations, including industry and advocacy groups. Development will continue in the future, with additional modules that are informed by ongoing stakeholder involvement. Access INTEGRITY: <http://apps.ams.usda.gov/integrity/>.



USDA Appoints Members to the National Organic Standards Board

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has appointed six new members to the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) adding valuable perspectives to the 15-member advisory board. Appointees began their service on the NOSB on January 24, 2016.

The new members fill positions that are specifically designated to represent various sectors of the organic community. The appointees include: Harriet Behar from Wisconsin as an environmental protection and resource conservation expert; Jesse Buie from Mississippi and Emily Oakley from Oklahoma as the two new organic producer representatives; Scott Rice from Oregon as the new accredited certifying agent representative; and Vena Romero-Briones from Hawaii and Daniel Seitz from Massachusetts as the two new public interest or consumer interest group representatives.

Made up of dedicated public volunteers appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture, NOSB members include four organic farmers; two handlers; three experts in environmental protection and resource conservation; three representatives of public interest or consumer groups; an expert in toxicology, ecology, or biochemistry; an organic retailer; and an organic certifying agent representative.

The NOSB was established under the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990, and operates in accordance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), to assist in developing standards for substances used in organic production and to advise the Secretary on aspects of the National Organic Program (NOP).

For further information about the NOSB, visit www.ams.usda.gov/nosb.

2016 NOSB Appointees...Welcome to the Board!!



Harriet Behar - Wisconsin



Jesse Buie - Mississippi



Emily Oakley - Oklahoma



Scott Rice - Oregon



Vena Romero-Briones - Hawaii



Daniel Seitz - Massachusetts

USDA Expands Insurance Options for Farmers Transitioning to Certified Organic Agriculture

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has announced a new step to support farmers transitioning to certified organic production, by expanding a crop insurance option to allow producers to purchase insurance coverage that better reflects their product's actual value. The expanded coverage is part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) continued commitment to provide farmers with resources and tools to meet the growing demand for certified organic products.

"Consumer demand for organic products continues to increase and the industry has experienced remarkable growth, representing more than \$39 billion in U.S. retail sales," said Vilsack. "This growth creates opportunities for farmers and businesses across the country. Expanding the safety net for farmers wanting to enter the organic market ensures they have the tools and resources they need to meet this growing demand while protecting their operation."

The organic sector is growing, and certified organic products often return higher profits for farmers. It can take producers three years, however, to transition from conventional to certified organic production. Previously, producers of transitional crops were only able to insure them at the same price as a conventional producer. But today's announcement enables producers to insure transitional crops to their contract price (within approved limits).

Producers transitioning to certified organic production can now use the Contract Price Addendum to cover their crops at a higher price than traditional crops. The Contract Price Addendum allows farmers transitioning to organic production to insure certain crops at their contract price rather than the published U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Risk Management Agency (RMA) price election.

RMA has also expanded organic premium price elections to 57 crops, up from four in 2011, providing organic producers the option to protect their 2016 crops closer to the market value. Barley, rice and wheat are among the

crops for which organic price elections have been added. New additions for 2017 will include grapefruit, lemons and oranges.

Since 2009, USDA has strengthened programs that support organic producers as they grow, thrive and respond to increasing consumer demand for organic products. Last year, USDA reported that U.S. certified and exempt organic farms sold a total of \$5.5 billion in organic products in 2014, up 72 percent since 2008. The U.S. retail market for organic products is valued at more than \$39 billion, and in 2014 there were 19,474 certified USDA organic operations in the United States, representing nearly an over 250 percent increase since 2002. Worldwide, in 2014 there were nearly 28,000 certified organic operations in more than 120 different countries. More information about USDA's support under this Administration for organic producers and businesses can be found at www.usda.gov results.

Crop insurance is sold and delivered solely through private crop insurance agents. Contact a local crop insurance agent for more information about the program. A list of crop insurance agents is available at all USDA Service Centers or online at www.rma.usda.gov/tools/agent.html.

The sales closing date is the last day to buy a new policy or change an existing policy's coverage level. Producers can find sales closing dates for the crops in their states by referring to RMA's regional office state directory. Current policyholders also have until the sales closing date to make any changes to their existing contracts.

A list of commodities eligible for the Contract Price addendum is available online at www.rma.usda.gov/news/currentissues/organics/cpa_eligibility.html.

More information on risk management tools available for organic farmers can be found on the RMA organic crops website. Visit www.usda.gov/organic to learn more about USDA's resources for organic agriculture.

NOP Staff Updates

The NOP is committed to developing its current staff and hiring new team members to strengthen our ongoing support for the organic community. We are pleased to welcome new employees to NOP's Standards Division, Office of the Deputy Administrator, and the Accreditation & International Activities Division. We also want to congratulate a long-term staff member on her upcoming retirement.



Valerie Frances

Standards Division team member returns...

The NOP Standards Division welcomes Valerie Frances' return from a long-term detail with NRCS in the Office of the Chief. Valerie has extensive experience in NOP including standards development, National List materials review, and NOSB support. Previously she was the director of Maryland's Organic Certification Program. She has an MPH in Nutrition from University California, Berkeley.



John Reid

New Program Analyst joins Office of the Deputy Administrator...

On January 25, John Reid joined the Organic Integrity Database team as a Program Analyst. John is a Veteran, and most recently worked for MedStar Health, where he was a Rehabilitation Care Technician. John previously served as a Project Officer and Operations Officer with the U.S. Army National Guard. John will be providing data analysis and reporting support, and will be assisting external users of INTEGRITY.



Graham Davis

Accreditation & International Activities Division Hires New Accreditation Manager...

On February 8, Graham Davis joined the Accreditation and International Activities Division as an Accreditation Manager. For the past year, Graham managed NRCS's Norman A. Berg Plant Materials Center in Beltsville, Maryland, which contains a certified organic greenhouse. Prior to that position, he spent six years at the Smithsonian Institution as the Integrated Pest Management Specialist. He holds a BS in Plant Sciences from The University of Arizona, and two Masters degrees in Agronomy and Integrated Pest Management.

Congratulations on Your Retirement... Mary Lou Croisetiere

Mary Lou Croisetiere is retiring at the end of February after over 24 years of dedicated federal service. What a career! Mary Lou has been a vital part of the Accreditation and International Activities Division (AIA), and over the years, she has worked closely with many of our accredited certifying agents in many many ways. Best wishes, Mary Lou!

Going forward, certifiers should submit emails previously sent to Mary Lou to AIAInbox@ams.usda.gov.

National Organic Program Handbook + Web Updates



Program Handbook. The National Organic Program Handbook provides a wide variety of policy materials and other resources to help certifiers and organic farms and businesses comply with the USDA organic regulations. AMS has updated several of these resources since our last newsletter, available at www.ams.usda.gov/NOPProgramHandbook.

- [Acknowledgement of the California Organic Input Material Program](#) (**issued**)
- General Accreditation Policies and Procedures (**NOP 2000, updated**)
- Submitting Annual Lists of Certified Operations (**NOP 2026, updated**)
- Auditor Criteria (**NOP 2500, updated**)
- Evaluating Auditor Performance (**NOP 2501, updated**)
- Guidance: Natural Resources and Biodiversity Conservation and Response to Comments (**NOP 5020, updated** and **NOP 5020-1, issued**)
- Guidance: Substances Used in Post-Harvest Handling of Organic Products and Response to Comments (**NOP 5023, updated** and **NOP 5023-1, issued**)
- National List Sunset Dates (**NOP 5611, updated**)
- Instruction: Certification of Industrial Hemp (**NOP 2040, issued**)

Rulemaking

- [Proposed Rule](#): 2016 Sunset Review
- [Final Rule](#): 2015 Sunset Review

Fact Sheets

- [Technical and Financial Assistance for Organic Producers](#)
- [Making the Transition to Organic Production and Handling](#)

Sound & Sensible Resources. AMS-NOP launched a group of web pages featuring an array of resources to help simplify and streamline organic certification and compliance for farmers and businesses. Developed in conjunction with many partners across the country and around the globe, these Sound & Sensible resources will help to make organic certification more accessible, attainable, and affordable. Read more: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/report-presentation/sound-sensible>.

- Sound & Sensible, Launch 2: Understanding Rules, Certification, and Inspections
- Sound & Sensible, Launch 3: Outreach and Education for Candidate Farmers

Other Resource Materials

- [Lists of Accredited Certifying Agents](#)
- [Quarterly Compliance & Enforcement/Appeals Summary](#)