



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Agricultural
Marketing
Service

1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Room 2646-S, Mail Stop 0268
Washington, D.C. 20250-0268

April 24, 2014

MEMORANDUM TO THE NATIONAL ORGANIC STANDARDS BOARD (NOSB)

FROM: Miles V. McEvoy
Deputy Administrator
Agricultural Marketing Service
National Organic Program (NOP)

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Miles V. McEvoy", with a stylized flourish at the end.

SUBJECT: Improved Guidance on Preventing GMO Presence in Organic Products

The NOSB Materials Subcommittee has submitted a work plan request to develop prevention strategy guidance for excluded methods in crops and handling. The NOP supports the work plan item and would like the NOSB to provide recommendations on best practices for avoiding contact with genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in organic production and handling.

The use of GMOs is prohibited in organic production and handling. The USDA organic regulations prohibit the use of GMOs as “excluded methods” under 7 CFR § 205.105, “Allowed and prohibited substances, methods, and ingredients in organic production and handling.” Excluded methods are defined as:

A variety of methods to genetically modify organisms or influence their growth and development by means that are not possible under natural conditions or processes and are not considered compatible with organic production. Such methods include cell fusion, microencapsulation and macroencapsulation, and recombinant DNA technology (including gene deletion, gene doubling, introducing a foreign gene, and changing the positions of genes when achieved by recombinant DNA technology). Such methods do not include the use of traditional breeding, conjugation, fermentation, hybridization, in vitro fertilization, or tissue culture. (7 CFR § 205.2-Terms defined)

Compliance with the organic standards entails that operations have verifiable practices in place to avoid contact with GMOs. Since organic certification is process-based, presence of detectable GMO residues alone does not necessarily constitute a violation of the regulation. The NOP relies on organic certifiers and producers to determine preventative practices that most effectively avoid contact with GMOs on an organic operation.



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NOP Policy memo 11-13 describes preventive practices that can be employed with respect to avoiding contact with excluded methods. The organic community, NOSB and USDA would like to provide additional guidance and best practices for prevention of unintended GMO presence in organic products. Therefore, the NOP requests that the NOSB provide recommendations regarding best management practices for prevention of unintended GMO presence.

The NOP thanks the NOSB for their willingness to evaluate this issue.