



International Organic Inspectors Association
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March 30, 2022

Ms. Michelle Arsenault, Advisory Committee Specialist
National Organic Standards Board
USDA-AMS-NOP 1400 Independence Ave. SW
Room 2642-S, Mail Stop 0268
Washington, DC 20250-0268
Re: Docket # AMS-NOP-21-0085

Dear Ms. Arsenault:

IOIA is commenting on the following two recommendations.

- Organic Aquaculture Production Standards
- Eliminate Incentive To Convert Native Ecosystems to Organic Production

IOIA is the leading worldwide training and networking organization for organic inspectors. Though a United-States based nonprofit 501(c)(3), IOIA operates globally with nearly 250 inspector members in over a dozen countries. Our members are the “boots on the ground” at the annual inspections of certified operators. The inspector is often the first representative in-person at the operation and sometimes the only one. We see first-hand successes and failures of the many administrative and technical innovations which are implemented in the name of ensuring organic integrity.



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Organic Aquaculture Production Standards

In March 2013 NOP issued Guidance document NOP 5027 – The Use of Kelp in Organic Livestock Feed required that “...all kelp used in livestock feed should be certified organic...”. In addition, NOP §205.606 lists 3 marine plants, Kelp, Pacific Kombu and Wakame seaweed that require a commercial availability search. These requirements are rapidly growing the demand for organic seaweed.

Historically, seaweed has been harvested as a wildcrop, with many species still gathered in this way. In the last 10 years there has been significant development of organic seaweed mariculture where seaweed is propagated in land-based seaweed nursery facilities, seeded onto ropes and allowed to grow to a size that can survive transfer to the marine environment. The ropes are then deployed to plots/areas in the marine environment, sometimes associated with bi-valve production, and grown to maturity.

With no current standard for aquaculture and the expectation of organic seaweed in the organic rule, applying land based organic standards to the marine environment is a difficult task. Without clear regulations to inspect to, it is challenging for inspectors to reference the standards if and when potential issues of concern are observed. For example, how does one establish buffers from commercial/industrial/municipal and private wastewater discharge areas, from underwater nuclear power plant cooling tunnels, and from overboard discharge areas, major harbors and shipping lanes? How are the manure application standards to be applied to areas where fish are plentiful and everywhere and townships dump filtered human waste into the sea?

Tides both bring in and flush potential contaminants. Should areas where the tide is known to expose sea life to prohibited inputs need a 3 year transition and how many tides does it take to clean an area where a spill has occurred? Activity along a coastline is significantly different than activity on land.

Because the NOP already expects seaweeds to be certified organic and available in the marketplace, we think that standards for the growing and harvesting of both cultured and wild cropped seaweeds in the marine environment need to be proposed as soon as possible as a first step in developing an Aquaculture Production Standard.



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Eliminate Incentive To Convert Native Ecosystems to Organic Production

IOIA encourages the NOP to prioritize the discussion of this NOSB recommendation, although the proposed rule change as drafted by the NOSB may need thorough discussion and probably further editing. We are concerned about large areas of native ecosystems being turned to organic production simply as a shortcut to 205.202. Mass acreage that is destroyed simply to turn a profit defies the very heart of organic agriculture.

However, IOIA is an international organization with boots on the ground all over the world. We must not forget that many hands grow our food and they are not all large farms looking to circumvent a three year transition period. Our inspectors work in developing countries and engage with those who have barely made the transition from subsistence farming to the market that organic certification provides. At times the only option to transition out of poverty is to farm small plots of native ecosystem because that is the only land available. As the organic community focuses on diversity and equity, we must broaden that inclusion globally. As a leader in world markets, it is imperative to take into consideration that every change to our regulations can impact global inequality, access to land, root causes of poverty in rural areas and the relationship of small farmers with native ecosystems and agroecosystems. Let's make sure that changes to the definition of organic agriculture have a positive effect.

IOIA supports the idea of limiting an operation with available conventional agricultural land to convert native ecosystems to avoid the three-year conversion of the conventional land. One question that we are confronted with is whether the ten-year proposed prohibition will protect native ecosystems from being cleared for conventional agriculture *instead* of organic, simply because more land is needed?

IOIA welcomes the opportunity for a proposed rule on native ecosystems where public comments can continue to shape and strengthen conservation practices. We look forward to the continued improvement that both embraces our ecosystems and promotes equality.

Respectfully,

Margaret Scoles

Margaret Scoles, Executive Director, on behalf of the IOIA Board of Directors