



April 1, 2022

Ms. Michelle Arsenault
Advisory Committee Specialist
National Organic Standards Board
USDA-AMS-NOP
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Room 2648-S Mail Stop 0268
Washington, DC 20250-0268

RE: Docket Number AMS-NOP-21-0087

Dear Ms. Arsenault:

On behalf of International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA), we respectfully submit the following comments on the upcoming Sunset Review of organic materials on the National List, listed in the Spring 2022 National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) Work Agenda in addition to other topics of consideration listed in the agenda that are relevant to those we represent.

Established in 2022 and founded on a deep-seated history of leadership from the Produce Marketing Association and United Fresh Produce Association, our trade association represents over 2500 companies from every segment of the global fresh produce supply chain, including over 500 companies directly involved in the organic fresh fruit, vegetable, and floral supply chain. IFPA is committed to serving all sectors of the produce industry through government advocacy, global engagement, and expertise in food safety, technology, supply chain management, sustainability, marketing, and leadership. Through these efforts, IFPA will enable the produce industry to grow and drive increased fruit and vegetable consumption, including those organically produced, which is a vital cornerstone of public health.

The IFPA Organics Committee is comprised of 17 passionate produce industry professionals, representing a diversity of organic produce commodity and operation types, regions, and experience, who support and guide the association's efforts and priorities in organic fruit, vegetable, and other specialty crop production and sales. Our comments are informed by members of this committee, other IFPA members who are part of the organic produce supply chain, and other industry stakeholders on whom the NOSB's work and proposals have direct impact and influence.

IFPA recognizes the role that the Sunset process plays in maintaining inputs and standards that align with the organic standards philosophy to build a food system based on enhancing ecological balance of natural system, limiting the use of synthetic materials. However, it should be recognized that the organic crops industry,

including fresh produce, exists in the marketplace at a significant disadvantage compared to conventionally grown product as a result of having fewer ‘tools in the toolbox’ with which to mitigate pest and disease issues that may occur. This often may lead to the destruction of unsaleable crops, sometimes entire fields, that have been destroyed by these pests, ultimately wasting finite environmental energy resources, and necessitating increased consumer prices to maintain financial viability. Because growing seasons can be highly variable and production challenges unpredictable, the removal of items from the National List can cause further constraints to organic farmers and further hinder mitigation efforts. For these reasons, IFPA encourages judicious, objective, science-based decision making when considering sunseting allowed materials.

We offer comments on those materials and agenda items that are of particular important to organic produce growers, as listed below.

Highly Soluble Nitrogen Fertilizers (Ammonia Extracts)

IFPA urges NOSB not to further restrict the use of ammonia extracts, as limiting their use would put organic produce growers at a disadvantage and limit their ability to be successful in production.

Carbon Dioxide

Carbon Dioxide enrichment is used by greenhouse growers to maximize not only the yield, but also the efficient use of resources in this growing environment. IFPA supports its continued use.

Herbicides, soap-based

These products are used in a variety of scenarios when advantageous over alternative methods, especially for use with automated weeders and thinners, as well as in roadways, building perimeters, and ditches. The option to use these products should remain available. They are considered safe to humans and are environmentally benign, decomposing rapidly so to not persist in the environment. For these reasons, IFPA supports their continued use.

Biodegradable biobased mulch film (BBMF)

Biodegradable biobased mulch film has potential to be one of the few options available for situational use to suppress weeds and conserve water under particular conditions for some produce growers. Especially in light of a lack of sufficient alternatives, IFPA supports the continued use of this material.

Boric Acid

Boric acid may be used in produce packing facilities to combat ant and/or roach infestations. Boric acid is effective and is a much simpler and less processed compound than most available commercial pesticides. Boric acid also is relatively safe for non-targeted organisms and is not routinely applied, but is applied only when ant and/or roach infestation is detected in a break room, lunchroom, kitchen, or other employee facilities. It would not be used on or near produce handling equipment, therefore it is not a risk for chemical contamination of organic produce. For these reasons, and as a fertilizer source for boron, IFPA supports the continued use of this material.

Sticky Traps/Barriers

IFPA supports the continued use sticky traps and barriers due to their essential role in integrated pest management (IPM). Routine biological monitoring of pest insects allows the grower to know what pests are present, when they are present, and at what population levels they are present, and it is the foundation of organic pest management. This allows for precise application of pest management tools. Without the use of sticky traps to manage codling moth and other key moth pests that directly damage fruit, injury levels would be unsustainable. Without these tools, growers are making uninformed decisions on whether and when to initiate a control decision. There are no viable options to replace use of sticky traps.

Elemental Sulfur

IFPA supports the continued use of elemental sulfur as a soil amendment, to control pH level, and as a fungicide.

Furthermore, we would like for elemental sulfur to also be permitted as a form of pest control. Currently, there are few options for preventing the spread or treatment of powdery mildew in organic greenhouse/indoor systems. The use of elemental sulfur would help meet the demand of consumers for “no spray”, “pesticide free”, “synthetic free” claims. The issue of limited powdery mildew treatments can make this difficult for some growers. It should also be noted that the method of burning sulfur is approved by other organic boards such as the EU organic standards, and the byproduct released from burning sulfur at a temperature of 119-159C is sulfuric acid which acts as a biocide- no oxides will be released at this temperature. This eliminates the fear of sulfur dioxide being released into the atmosphere.

Coppers, fixed

These compounds have protectant activity against several bacterial and fungal diseases. A combination of broad spectrum of activity, ability to withstand frequent wet weather events, and inexpensive cost makes this group of compounds valuable in pest management programs. These are an especially useful tool in the absence of some prohibited antibiotics. Especially in the absence of sufficient alternatives, IFPA supports the continued use of this material.

Copper, sulfate

Copper sulfate is essential for production in the absence of alternatives, and IFPA supports its continued use, in a manner that minimizes accumulation in soil and water and decreases harmful effects for soil and water biota.

Polyoxin D zinc salt

This material is an essential fungicide for both fruit and vegetable production, and has a notable efficacy, low toxicity, is considered safe to human health, and is critical for use with other fungicides in managing against the evolution of pathogen resistance. IFPA supports its continued use.

Humic Acids

IFPA supports the continued use of humic acids. Humic acids are commonly used by produce growers. Previous reviews by NOSB members found humic acids to be compliant with all Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) criteria, while posing no human or environmental concerns.

Micronutrients: Soluble boron products

Boron is an essential nutrient for plant development, and soluble boron products are necessary for growers to be successful in organic production. IFPA supports their continued use.

Micronutrients: Sulfates, carbonates, oxides, or silicates of zinc, copper, iron, manganese, molybdenum, selenium, and cobalt

These essential mineral elements are required for a plant to complete its life cycle. Given the range of soil types and growing conditions for different types of fresh fruit and vegetable production, all of these are needed and IFPA supports their continued use.

Diatomaceous earth

IFPA supports the continued use of diatomaceous earth as a pest deterrent.

Squid byproducts

Squid byproducts are biostimulants that act on the metabolic and enzymatic processes of plants to facilitate plant acquisition of nutrients, including nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorus. The use of fish waste products in agriculture recycles nutrients that would otherwise be wasted. This use of squid waste is one way of addressing food waste reduction. For these reasons, IFPA supports their continued use.

**National Organics Standards Board Certification, Accreditation and Compliance Subcommittee (CACS)
Discussion Document: NOSB Technical Support Initiative February 13, 2022**

Technical support to the NOSB should be limited to career scientists at all agencies within the USDA, EPA, and FDA who could receive and vet input from scientists at public Land-Grant Universities. Government agencies are answerable to the public. Advisory panels like the NOSB are not. The NOSB is a 15-person, volunteer federal advisory board setting policy for a multi-billion-dollar industry, and the scientific expertise of the board is extremely limited. Congress recognized the natural limits of NOSB expertise in 1990 when the Organic Food Production Act was established, which is why the NOSB is given authority to convene technical advisory panels to consider specific issues. Unfortunately, this rarely, if ever, occurs.

To properly vet the full scope of work NOSB members consider, technical support should be limited to the above mentioned, career scientists at all agencies within the USDA and the EPA. The impacts of decisions under consideration by the NOSB impact the livelihoods of many, and encompass scientific and economic implications for producers, consumers, and rural communities. Transparency of this entire process is critical to maintain trust in the decisions delivered by the board. Concerns already exist with NOSB member composition not reflecting the realities of farming for the preponderance of organic producers, and in some instances

representing or being influenced by highly partisan points of view. To prevent erosion of trust in NOSB decision-making, technical support to the NOSB should be limited to vetted scientists at public agencies who understand the impacts of regulatory actions across society and are less susceptible to outside influence of partisan organizations with biased agendas. Land-Grant University scientists could contribute their expertise for consideration by scientists at government agencies in development of their responses to the NOSB.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we urge the NOSB to approach consideration of recommendations to the NOP with specific attention to the need for adequate tools for fresh produce growers, for objective scientific review and with an understanding of the diverse needs for the many crops, growing regions, and production methods in the organic universe. With a limited toolset already, organic growers can lose their ability to produce in the absence of options to combat pests and nurture plants in a variety of scenarios. Objective, science-based decision making is required to propose changes to the national list.

We appreciate your consideration of these comments in support of the fresh produce industry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Szczepanski".

George Szczepanski
Director, Production, Supply Chain & Environmental Policy
International Fresh Produce Association

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emily Griep".

Emily Griep, PhD
VP Regulatory Compliance & Global Food Safety Standards
International Fresh Produce Association