



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

JUL 28 2009

Mr. Steve Etko  
Executive Director  
National Organic Coalition  
steveetka@gmail.com

Dear Steve:

I enjoyed meeting with you and several members of the National Organic Coalition on June 4 2009. I am writing to follow up on your request about a review of the National Organic Program's (NOP) accreditation function.

The NOP has applied to the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) for recognition of its accreditation function. NIST's National Voluntary Conformity Assessment Systems Evaluation (NVCASE) program offers recognition of the accreditation function of NOP, just as was provided for the Livestock & Seed Program's Audit, Review, and Compliance Branch Program (ARC) in USDA. After the evaluation, NIST provides recognition to qualified U.S. organizations that effectively demonstrate conformance with established criteria.

Applying for and receiving recognition will support the NOP's credentials as an accrediting body and satisfy regulatory requirements to obtain peer review. Beginning with the 2010 fiscal year, NOP anticipates working with NIST to complete this review. The program will report its results to the organic industry upon completion.

Third-party recognition is important for many of USDA's audit-based programs. We understand the value of this step as we continue working to strengthen the integrity of the NOP and to build the organic community's trust in the program.

Again, it was good to see you. Stay in touch, and of course, please share this information with the members of your organization.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathleen A. Merrigan".

Kathleen A. Merrigan  
Deputy Secretary