



National Organic Coalition

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National Organic Coalition Enthusiastic About USDA/OIG Report On National Organic Program

Washington, DC—March 19, 2010. The National Organic Coalition (NOC) today expressed its enthusiasm for reinvigorated and ongoing oversight of the National Organic Program (NOP), as recommended by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) in its just released evaluation of the Program (<http://www.usda.gov/oig/webdocs/01601-03-HY.pdf>). This report presents data from several years of audit and review of the NOP and outlines several gaps and outstanding areas in need of improvement.

Most of the shortcomings identified in the OIG report have been routinely raised by NOC in its communications to NOP for more than a decade. "The OIG report is gratifying not only because it documents the holes in organic oversight that we have identified but also because it shows that the new NOP leadership is taking these concerns seriously, quickly acting upon them, and fixing the critical problems that are the legacy of the Bush Administration," said Liana Hoodes, Director of the National Organic Coalition.

The three main areas of the greatest deficiency identified in the Report can be characterized as a significant lack of:

- 1) compliance with procedures for a Quality System, including a Program Manual and of clear, written, published procedures
- 2) clear and consistent process for responding to complaints and instituting enforcement actions
- 3) consistency of standards and implementation for certifiers.

"The substance of the report and subsequent in-depth response of the NOP demonstrates how the evolving organic standard and implementation is meant to operate. It shows how maintaining and improving the integrity of the organic label is an ongoing, transparent process and that organic is still the most rigorous food label out there," said Steve Etka, also from NOC.

One of NOC's ongoing critiques of the NOP has been its lack of compliance with commonly accepted Accreditation procedures which provide both consistency and ongoing oversight. This report details a pathway to this oversight through external review by a separate, internationally recognized agency, and the maintenance of a Quality System that meets International Standards Organization (ISO) requirements.

In sum, the development of such a rigorous organic label requires continual refinement and oversight that has been weak in the past.

"Again, consumers and farmers can be assured that the organic label is the highest value food and agriculture label and will continue to live up to its standards," said Michael Sligh, from the Rural Advancement Foundation, International-USA (a NOC member).

About the National Organic Coalition (www.NationalOrganicCoalition.org)

The National Organic Coalition (NOC) is a national alliance of organizations working to provide a “Washington voice” for farmers, ranchers, environmentalists, consumers and progressive industry members involved in organic agriculture. NOC seeks to work cooperatively with, and add value to, existing organic and sustainable agriculture organizations, networks and coalitions to ensure a united voice for organic integrity.