



Accredited Certifiers Association, Inc.

Accredited certifying agents working together to ensure the integrity of organic certification in the United States

May 9, 2014

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
US Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

The Accredited Certifiers Association (ACA) represents 49 foreign and domestic USDA-accredited certifying agents. Our primary mission is to ensure the integrity of organic certification in the United States through the development of uniform criteria for implementation of the USDA National Organic Standards. We do this through certifier training and support, networking opportunities, and providing a forum for discussion of issues impacting organic certification. Our organization is somewhat unique in that we foster open and respectful communication and collaboration across a diversity of certification agencies that otherwise exist in a competitive marketplace.

The ACA depends on a strong and effective National Organic Program (NOP). We believe that the USDA National Organic Standards are stronger than they've ever been. They are consistently being strengthened. The NOP has provided rule making, guidance and instructions to certifiers and industry while improving nearly every facet of compliance. The Program's trainings are excellent and their rationale sound. We support their work and have faith in their leadership to the highest degree in the history of the NOP.

As certifiers the NOP frequently forces us to make changes or adjust to their expectations. These changes and updates are often challenging but in spite of this we respect and value the NOP's efforts to ensure a strong organic program.

Certifiers and their clients depend on rational standards and a fair and reasonable process. Instead the ACA has recently observed a tendency towards vitriol, sensationalism, and negativity at the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) Meeting. Activities observed included demeaning comments to the National Organic Program and a protest of a recent revision regarding the NOSB Sunset Process which resulted in the delay of the meeting for all those attending. Activities such as this halt the process and demean the sincere companies and certifiers that participate genuinely. As a result, standards are not evolving and crucial decisions important to real people who produce real goods and the certifiers that work hard to meet their needs are held hostage at the National Organic Standards Board meetings. If our work

as certifiers and the work of the NOSB is to remain productive, sound, and sensible to the clients and consumers we serve, we must move beyond this caustic communication.

We hereby issue this vote of confidence in the National Organic Program, its leadership and the quality of organic production and certification in the United States. We look forward to continued partnership with the program in our shared goal of upholding the integrity of the organic label.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Rice', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Scott Rice
Chair, Board of Directors

cc: Miles McEvoy, Deputy Administrator
National Organic Program