



CCOF

Organic Certification Trade Association Education & Outreach Political Advocacy

Understanding CCOF Policy Positions

Have you ever wondered how CCOF develops policy positions and determines what issues to engage in?

Developing CCOF Policy Objectives

Each year, CCOF sets policy priorities to assist the Policy Director in managing time and resources, thus enabling the organization to stay focused on issues that are truly important to CCOF and our members.

Any policy position taken by CCOF must relate directly to CCOF's primary program, which is certifying producers and processors to the National Organic Program as well as providing members access to international standards. At our core, CCOF strives to uphold the integrity of the organic system we certify, ensuring consumers that they can trust the labels on their organic purchases. This includes advocating policies that directly support the ability of a producer or processor to meet the standard and, alternatively, opposing policies which harm or damage this ability.

CCOF also takes action on policies that are connected to organic agriculture, such as supporting efforts by like-minded organizations to create an agriculture system that is environmentally sound, economically viable and socially just and fair.

Establishing Policy Priorities

As a democratic organization, CCOF is happy to receive requests from members, staff and partner organizations to elevate an issue, including a local policy issue, to a level high enough to become a priority. In order to create an effective opportunity for such requests, CCOF has developed a process for making specific issues a top priority. This requires sending the Policy Director information about the issue including what it is, why it's important, who else is working on the same issue, who supports and opposes it, what resources the initiating organization can bring to bear on it, where the issue fits within the larger CCOF picture, etc. The initiator, be it an individual, group or affiliated organization, may be asked to make a presentation to the staff and/or Government Affairs Committee. If CCOF decides to take up the issue, the initiator will be asked to become actively involved and organize a portion of the process.

The Policy Director's role is to work closely with the CCOF Executive Director to juggle competing priorities, determine capacity, manage workload and solicit help and guidance from others. The Policy Director also works closely with the Government Affairs Committee which is designed to represent CCOF's diverse membership, to determine:

- Is this a priority that's important to CCOF and our members?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of mounting an advocacy campaign?
- Will the action taken have a significant impact?

- How urgent is the need and does CCOF have adequate resources to carry out the campaign effectively?

Once these questions are answered, the Policy Director defines the issue and makes a recommendation to both the Executive Director and the Committee. If the campaign requires Board approval, the Committee votes to recommend that the Board implement the plan. Generally, CCOF works in the following three policy areas:

Regulations

The Policy Director will draft CCOF comments on proposed regulations posted by USDA National Organic Program (NOP) or other departments dealing with agriculture, such as the California State Organic Program (SOP) and other State agencies and international standards that impact our members. These comments will be reviewed by the Policy Advisor and/or certification staff, if appropriate, with final approval by the Executive Director.

Sponsored Legislation

CCOF will sponsor legislation to support and uphold organic production. The Policy Director will work with the Executive Director, Board and Government Affairs Committee to draft the proposed language, find a legislative author and work with legislative staff and the California Legislative Counsel to write the legislation. The Policy Director will find other supporters, provide members to testify during hearings and coordinate other necessary activities surrounding the passage of legislation. Thus far, CCOF has sponsored very few bills, primarily due to limited capacity.

Supporting or Opposing Legislation

CCOF will sign on to letters circulated by other organizations, as appropriate. For routine issues circulated by organizations with which CCOF has a close working relationship, the Policy Director will simply add our organization to the letter. For issues that require a more thoughtful approach, the Policy Director will use his/her discretion and expertise to determine how much input is needed from the Government Affairs Committee. The Policy Director will routinely provide information on this type of activity to the Government Affairs Committee, Executive Director and Board of Directors.

Some policy issues have, at times, put some of our members at odds with each other or with CCOF. Although this may be inevitable in any organization that has such a diverse membership, it is also evidence of how broadly defined our membership is and how dynamic we must be as an organization.

Contact CCOF Policy Director Claudia Reid at claudia@ccof.org for more information.