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CCOF comments at California Certified Farmers Market Listening Session- Berkeley, CA
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Introduction: CCOF is a nonprofit organization founded in 1973 and is the largest and one of the oldest organic certification agencies in North America. We serve as a trade association for more than 2300 certified organic producers as well as 350 supporting members, in 38 states and three countries.

Complaint History

CCOF receives between 3 and 7 complaints a year about problems at California's certified farmers markets, typically having to do with inaccurate or incorrect signage. This is usually found where an operation has both organic and non-organic products in the same booth. CCOF recommends that you develop guidelines for this problem, which I know plagues other organizations such as Agricultural Commissioners also. We recommend that the guidelines prohibit the seller from posting a large organic sign near non-organic produce. The guidelines should also require non-organic produce to be labeled as such – "non-organic" or "traditionally grown," or "conventionally grown," in any booth where certified organic is also sold. This will make it very clear to the consumer what they are purchasing.

CCOF has filed complaints about farmers market issues with the State Organic Program. We do not know if they were followed up on. In one instance the SOP asked us where the market was located and that's all we heard. Given new staffing levels and a soon-to-be-launched data base system, would it be possible for the State Organic Program to identify the location of a market that's part of the certified farmers market program? This kind of electronic posting would be a great teaching tool for consumers.

Inspection Protocol

Because there is a serious lack of inspections by CDFA and county staff for farmers market infringements, CCOF has been working on our own farmers market inspection protocols but we have not implemented them completely. We welcome the opportunity to work with CDFA and county staff as we move forward on this project.

Verifying Signage

We read the article in the LA Times and were concerned with one of the suggestions in that article: specifically, #7) which reads: *Managers and inspectors (both state and county) should control bogus claims that produce is "organic" or "no spray." Verify claims by correlating them with county records of pesticide use and by random laboratory tests. (The CDFA is "exploring a pilot program" to address this issue, Lyle says.)*

All certified markets are required to display their organic certification if they're making organic claims. Verifying organic certification would be the appropriate issue here. We welcome the chance to work with you as you clarify this issue to reporters, consumers, and others. We would like to work with you

as we develop our own communication tools so that we can all be communicating the same issue in a consistent manner.

Fees

CCOF's members would probably oppose any fee increase, since they would feel that any organic claims could be effectively monitored by county agents using revenue from the State Organic Program fund.

No Spray and Other Signs

CCOF feels that it is essential that such claims as "no spray" and exempt "organic" be verified by the market managers or by CDFA. Quite often, these claims are verbal, and not written, so no certificate may be present. Claims like "no spray" on crops like strawberries, which are fumigated, and not sprayed, are also misleading.

Working with CCOF

Again, we look forward to working with you on this important issue, and we welcome you to contact either Claudia Reid, CCOF's policy director or myself. Thank you.