



CCOF

Advancing organic agriculture through certification, education, advocacy, and promotion.

Ms. Michelle Arsenault
Advisory Committee Specialist
National Organic Standards Board, USDA-AMS-NOP
1400 Independence Ave. SW., Room 2642-S, Mail Stop 0268
Washington, DC 20250-0268

Docket: AMS-NOP-18-0071-0001

Re: Materials Subcommittee Discussion Document: Marine Materials in Organic Crop Production

April 4, 2019

Dear Ms. Arsenault and NOSB,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Materials Subcommittee's discussion document "Marine materials in organic crop production."

CCOF is a nonprofit organization governed by the people who grow and make our food. Founded in California more than 40 years ago, today our roots span the breadth of North America. We are supported by an organic family of farmers, ranchers, processors, retailers, consumers, and policymakers. Together, we work to advance organic agriculture for a healthy world.

CCOF provides the attached responses and comments on the discussion document. Although CCOF shares the concern that seaweeds and marine materials are under threat of overharvesting and habitat degradation or destruction, CCOF does not support requiring organic certification under the wild crop standards for marine materials used in organic crop production.

NOSB should consider forming a task force with experts in marine ecology, marine algae, organic certification, third-party marine certifiers, scientists, and others to determine which species of marine algae are most at risk and prohibit those specific species from use in organic crop production. Experts in marine ecology and marine algae should work closely with NOSB throughout the development of all recommendations put forth. A requirement of organic certification with complex guidance on how the organic standards would apply to a marine environment would therefore not be necessary.

NOSB should also consider the precedent it may set regarding requiring organic certification of marine algae. Marine algae are only one type of nonsynthetic substance used in organic production. Other nonsynthetic inputs used in organic production, such as peat moss and mined minerals, also have impacts to the environment. Some of these substances raise further questions on how the organic standards may not be the appropriate vehicle to address environmental concerns.

CCOF appreciates the NOSB for taking the time to consider the impacts of nonsynthetic inputs. These materials are not given the same attention synthetic materials are given as they go through the Sunset Review process. Therefore, CCOF would like to continue discussing the suitability of all nonsynthetic inputs sourced from off farm.

Thank you for your review of our comments. Please do not hesitate to contact me for further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Nell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Peter" and last name "Nell" clearly distinguishable.

Peter Nell
Government Affairs Manager

cc: Kelly Damewood, CEO
Jody Biergiel Colclough, Interim Chief Certification Officer, CCOF Certification Services, LLC

CCOF's Comments on the Materials Subcommittee Discussion Document Marine Materials in Organic Crop Production

The following comments are based on CCOF member input, our experience offering organic certification for more than 40 years, and our certification of over 2,500 organic farms throughout North America.

1. If you are not in support of requiring organic certification, what approach do you support? Please describe the method for defining, measuring, and most importantly, enforcing, that the harvest would not be destructive to the environment under an alternative approach.

CCOF does not support requiring organic certification for marine materials used in organic crop production. Certification of marine algae to the wild crop standard cannot happen without extensive, complex guidance on how the standards apply to the ocean. The wild crop standards require producers to harvest from a designated area that has been free of prohibited materials for three years immediately preceding the harvest (§ 205.207(a)). Producers and certifiers cannot prove that portions of the ocean have been free of prohibited materials for three years.

CCOF is concerned about the scalability and economic impact of requiring organic certification of marine algae. While some harvesters may pursue organic certification, others may not be able to. In some coastal areas, municipalities clear marine algae from beaches and the immediate shore. Some then sell or give away the marine algae for agricultural use. Additionally, some input manufacturers may use marine algae from many sources, potentially including global small-scale harvesters. Those small-scale harvesters and municipalities may find it difficult to come under certification.

In our fall 2018 comments, CCOF recommended that NOSB examine the feasibility of integrating fisheries certification, sustainability verifications, or attestations for all ocean-sourced inputs, not only marine algae. The challenge with relying on third-party certifications or references to external documents is that they may change while the references in the organic standards stay the same. However, a guidance document could note which third-party certifications, verifications, or attestations are acceptable for marine inputs. NOSB and NOP could then verify which programs would qualify and be listed in the guidance document.

2. Some existing wild harvest marine algae standards from other certifiers and third-party entities are listed in the Appendix. Please comment on strengths in these standards that could be adapted for NOP guidance. Please identify areas of weakness or areas that are not covered.

CCOF is not an expert on marine ecology and marine algae. Therefore, due to the complexity of the issue and the abbreviated commenting period, we cannot provide thorough comments on the strengths and weaknesses of provided standards. For this reason, CCOF supports NOSB forming a taskforce to evaluate certification of marine materials and other topics. Experts in marine ecology and marine algae should work closely with NOSB throughout the development of all recommendations put forth by NOSB.

3. What existing certification or private standards to support marine algae harvest sustainability have not been included in this document or the Appendix that can help inform the NOSB's understanding of the current work being done?

CCOF is not aware of other standards for marine algae harvest. Additional certifications or standards may exist but may not be relevant to the organic standards.

4. How many crop input products approved for use in organic production currently contain certified organic marine algae ingredients?

Due to the abbreviated commenting period, CCOF is unable to review each of the 138 organic crop inputs that our 774 members are using to determine whether they contain certified organic marine algae ingredients. Additionally, more members may be using blended or multi-ingredient fertilizers and products that may also contain marine algae ingredients. Calculating the total impact to organic input materials and organic producers will be a complex project.

5. Are there any crop input products utilizing or developing farmed marine algae?

As noted in our fall 2018 comment, CCOF is aware of one member who harvests freshwater materials for use in their compost and as an input for their organic production. The farmer harvests the naturally occurring freshwater materials from a pond on their property. It is unclear whether this example serves as a scalable solution for marine materials.

6. Are there enough certifiers able to offer certification services to meet the needs of the crop fertilizer markets if organic certification were required? If organic certification were required of marine algae ingredients, what would be an appropriate phase-in time to allow markets to meet the demand?

A lengthy phase-in period, such as 10 years, will be required if organic certification of marine materials is implemented. A lengthy phase-in period will be required due to the substantial impact organic certification of marine materials will have on organic crop producers, crop input manufacturers, marine algae harvesters, NOP, and NOSB to develop and refine comprehensive guidance on how the organic standards would apply to the ocean.

7. The NOSB hopes to convene an expert panel at the Fall 2019 board meeting to include a marine algae harvester for crop inputs, scientist, conservationist, and certifier, among others. What are some questions that could be posed to help identify the issues and solutions?

CCOF supports convening an expert panel at the fall 2019 NOSB meeting and recommends NOSB form a taskforce of experts to work closely with NOSB throughout the development of all recommendations put forth on marine algae.

NOSB should ask the expert panel the following questions:

- How are input manufacturers sourcing their marine algae currently? Are input manufacturers also harvesting their own marine algae?
- Are input manufacturers using marine algae considering sustainability? If so, how?

- Is there specific evidence that shows that marine algae harvesting for crop input manufacturing is tied to negative environmental impact?
- For what other uses are marine algae being harvested and are there negative environmental impacts of those uses?
- Which species of marine algae are being harvested and are in danger of overharvesting and habitat degradation? Are those species being used for crop inputs?