

WSDA ORGANIC PROGRAM UPDATE

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THE US AND EU UNVEIL HISTORIC EQUIVALENCY ARRANGEMENT

On February 15, 2012, the European Union (EU) and the US signed an organic equivalence arrangement between the world's two largest markets for organic food. Under this equivalency arrangement, raw agricultural products and processed products certified to the USDA National Organic Standards are not required to obtain additional certification to market the products as organic in the EU. Full implementation of the US-EU Equivalency Arrangement comes into effect June 1, 2012. Details of the arrangement can be found on the National Organic Program website (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/NOP>).

Operations certified under the WSDA International Organic Program (IOP) in 2011 hold valid certifications through May 31, 2012. Compliance with IOP Additional Requirements (AGR 2313 and AGR 2318) must be maintained throughout the certification period. Evaluations of organic apple and pear producers and handlers with the new US-EU Equivalency Arrangement will begin in the spring and summer of 2012.

CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR SELLING ORGANIC IN EU

These requirements are in addition to the USDA organic regulations for certification and take effect June 1, 2012

- ◊ Apples and pears must be produced without the use of antibiotics
- ◊ Products must travel with an EU import certificate that has been completed by a USDA-accredited certifying agent
- ◊ Products must be either produced within the US or have had final processing or packaging occur within the US

All EU organic products are allowed for import into the US EXCEPT for the following

- ◊ Agricultural products derived from animals treated with antibiotics
- ◊ Aquatic animals (e.g. fish, shellfish)

For information on how the WSDA OP evaluates compliance with the US-EU Equivalency Arrangement, as well as how to obtain export documentation, download the WSDA Organic Program guide to International Markets (AGR 4004) (<http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/Organic/international.aspx>).

2011 ORGANIC STATISTICS AVAILABLE

Each year David Granatstein and Elizabeth Kirby, both of WSU's Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources (CSANR), compile a wealth of statistics about the state of organic agriculture in the Northwest. These statistics offer excellent insight into organic trends in tree fruit, field crops and livestock, and year-to-year growth for each of these sectors. According to their 2011 report, while overall organic acreage fell slightly, growth in organic sales continue to grow. In 2010, the latest year for which complete sales statistics are available, the organic sector saw 11.8% growth in fruit and vegetable sales. For a complete breakdown of statistics, including specific data for the organic tree fruit industry, please visit CSANR's website at http://csanr.wsu.edu/pages/Organic_Statistics.

DRAFT GUIDANCE HANDLING BULK, UNPACKAGED PRODUCTS

The NOP regulations require handlers of organic products to be certified, unless specifically exempt or excluded as described in § 205.101(b) of the NOP regulations. In an October 2010 recommendation, the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) expressed concerns regarding the potential for fraud in the organic market place due to the movement of organic products through unregulated segments of the marketing chain.

The NOSB requested that the NOP clarify the limits of §205.101(b), which excludes handlers of packaged organic products from the certification requirement if they receive in and ship out products in the same container without opening, relabeling or otherwise handling the products. The NOSB noted that uncertified brokers, distributors, and traders lack the regular oversight of accredited certifying agents and the NOP.

While the regulations at §205.101(b)(1) exclude handlers of finished packaged products from certification, they do not exclude handlers of unpackaged organic products such as bulk grain, soybeans, hay, milk, and livestock. In response to the NOSB, the NOP is issuing guidance to clarify the requirements of §205.101 regarding the organic certification of handlers and the handling of bulk, unpackaged organic products. The full text of the guidance may be found at <http://tinyurl.com/NOPBulkHandler>.

