Crop Production Recommendations -- 1994

NATIONAL ORGANIC STANDARDS BOARD
FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS
ORGANIC CROP PRODUCTION STANDARDS

Adopted June 1-4, 1994
Location: Santa Fe, New Mexico

E. PLANTING STOCK POLICIES

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS FOR SEED, SEEDLINGS,
AND PLANTING STOCK

OFPA § 2109: "For a farm to be certified under this title, producers on such farm shall not apply materials to, or engage in, practices on seeds or seedlings that are contrary to, or inconsistent with, the applicable organic certification program."

TRANSPLANTS

OFPA § 2109(c)(3): "For a farm to be certified under this title, producers on such farm shall not . . . use transplants that are treated with any synthetic or prohibited materials."

RECOMMENDATION

In addendum to the statutory requirements, the NOSB proposes the following standards:

Definitions

Commercially Available: The determination of commercial availability shall be at the discretion of the certifying agent and entail the following good faith efforts documented in writing by the producer: (a) the good faith efforts made to locate or develop a source of organic transplants or untreated seed; and (b) progress made over the previous year to eliminate non-organic transplants or untreated seed.

Annual Transplants

Recommendation: All annual transplants utilized in a certified organic farming operation shall be organically grown in accordance with the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 (OFPA), with the following exception: If organically grown transplants are destroyed by frost, flood, or other natural disaster, resulting in non-availability of organically grown transplants for replanting, the use of non-organic transplants may be permitted. Determination of disaster status and organic transplant availability shall be determined by the certifying agency.

Perennial Transplants

Recommendation: One year of organic management is required prior to harvest from perennial plant material which is not produced from organic stock.

Commentary: The term "perennial transplant," for the purposes of the above standard, identifies tree fruits, grapes, and small fruits of genus Rubus, Ribes, and Vaccinium, including transplanted mature bearing stock. In general, the NOSB considers perennial planting stock from any source to be "organically produced" after one year of organic management. Although there is some organically produced stock currently available, there are not enough of all varieties of all crops yet available to require perennial trees and vines be organically produced.

Specific Transplant Standards

The types of transplants described specifically below are plants propagated vegetatively, by means of division, specialized organs, such as bulbs or corms, layering, cuttings, and tissue culture to reproduce an individual plant without genetic change.

In all situations where availability of organic planting stock is an issue, the NOSB urges organic producers to persistently request that organic stock and transplant growers research and develop organic propagation.

Asparagus

Recommendation: One year of organic management is required prior to the harvest of spears from asparagus crowns that were not organically produced.

Commentary: Asparagus is a perennial plant. Direct field seeding of asparagus is practiced by few growers. Most asparagus plants are started by planting one year old crowns. Typically, the crowns are grown in a nursery in early spring. The following spring, the plants are dug, separated, and replanted in permanent beds. Harvesting of asparagus spears usually begins the third spring from planting.

Garlic

Recommendation: Garlic cloves utilized for the propagation of garlic plants shall be organically produced, with the following exception: if the producer can document to the satisfaction of a USDA accredited certifying agency that organic garlic cloves are not commercially available, non-organic garlic cloves shall be permitted.

Commentary: Garlic is vegetatively propagated through the cloves. Garlic seed is rarely produced.

Onion

Recommendation: Onion sets, top sets, and multipliers utilized in a certified organic farming operation shall be organically produced, with the following exception: if the producer can document to the satisfaction of a USDA accredited certifying agency that organic onion sets, top sets, or multipliers are not commercially available, non-organic stock shall be permitted.

Commentary: Although the common field onion is propagated directly from seed, other varieties of the same species are propagated asexually, by 1) sets; 2) top sets; or 3) multipliers. Sets are small onions halted in development by being grown very thickly from seed and ripened off early in the season. When planted the following spring, they resume their growth and produce mature bulbs earlier than direct seeded onions of the same variety. Top set onions are little bulbuls that appear on the flower cluster in the place of flowers and are handled in the same way as sets. Multipliers or "potato onions": are a form in which the bulb divides into separable parts and each part is planted the following spring.

Rhubarb

Recommendation: One year of organic management is required prior to harvest from rhubarb roots that were not organically produced.

Commentary: Rhubarb is a perennial plant, usually propagated by division of the fleshy roots, small pieces of which will grow if separated from the old established roots and planted in rich soil. Planting is typically in the spring.

Seed Potatoes

Recommendation: Seed potatoes utilized for the propagation of organic potato plants shall be organically produced, with the following exception: if the producer can document to the satisfaction of a USDA accredited certifying agency that organic seed potatoes are not commercially available, non-organic seed potatoes, including those treated with synthetic post-harvest fungicides, shall be permitted.

Commentary: Potatoes are vegetatively propagated through the tubers, commonly known as "seed potatoes" within the trade. To the knowledge of the NOSB, sources of potatoes produced organically for seed are scarce, particularly because of the strict phytosanitary requirements of various State seed certification programs which encourage post-harvest use of fungicide and other prohibited materials prior to storage.

Strawberries

Recommendation: Strawberry crowns utilized in a certified organic farming operation shall be organically produced, with the following exception: If the producer can document to the satisfaction of a USDA accredited certifying agency that organic strawberry crowns are not commercially available, non-organic strawberry crowns, including those treated post-harvest with prohibited substances, shall be allowed.

Commentary: Strawberry plants are typically propagated by the formation of new plants called "crowns" that are formed on runners, and are abundantly produced during the growing season. Commercial strawberry producers usually set nursery-grown plants. Although strawberries are perennial plants, in California and most southern States, strawberries are planted in the fall and will produce their first crop the following spring, about six months from planting. To the knowledge of the NOSB, organically produced strawberry crowns are not commercially available, particularly because in many areas they must be certified disease-free by county or State order which necessitates fumigation.

Sweet Potatoes

Recommendation: Sweet potato slips and vine cuttings must be organically produced. "Seed" tubers may be obtained from non-organic sources and post-harvest treatment with synthetic fungicides is allowed if the producer can document to the satisfaction of a USDA accredited certifying agency that organically produced seed tubers are not commercially available. Such tubers must have been grown without the application of pesticides prohibited by the National List to the plant or soil.

Commentary: Propagation of sweet potatoes is asexual, using transplants or vine cuttings. Transplants are called "slips," and arise from "seed" tubers placed in either heated or unheated beds and covered by about 2 inches of sterilized sand. Two or three pullings of slips are often practiced. In areas of long growing seasons, after early plantings are established with transplants,

later plantings may be established with vine cuttings obtained by cutting eight to ten inches of tips of growing vines. This involves considerable labor and tends to reduce yields of the mother plantings, but has the advantages of requiring less seed stock and reducing danger of spreading diseases and pests.

TREATED SEEDS

OFPA § 2118(c)(1)(B)(i): "The National List may provide for the use of substances in an organic farming or handling operation that are otherwise prohibited under this title only if . . . the substance . . . is used in production and contains an active synthetic ingredient in the following categories: . . . treated seeds . . ."

As an addendum to the statutory requirements, the NOSB proposes the following standards:

Recommendation: Seed treated with substances prohibited by OFPA are prohibited, with the exception of seed treated with synthetic fungicides appearing on the National List. The requirements appearing in the section addressing commercial availability must be fully satisfied. Pelletized seed is allowed unless it contains prohibited substances. Plastic polymer pelletization of seed shall be prohibited. Seed originating from recombinant DNA technology shall also be prohibited.

Commentary: Synthetically treated seeds have been historically exempted for use in organic production and are exempted in the OFPA. It is the understanding of the NOSB that fungicide treatment plays a critical role in germination and establishment of certain seeded crops planted into heavy, wet, cold soils. Furthermore, to the knowledge of the NOSB, treated seed may be the only seed commercially available for certain crop varieties. While some work is being done to find alternatives to chemical treatment of seed by treating with naturally occurring substances, this research has not yet resulted in practical alternatives to chemical seed treatments. The NOSB strongly supports the efforts of seed companies to offer untreated seed and the efforts of researchers to develop organically acceptable seed treatments.

Seed for Sprouts

Recommendation: Seed utilized for the production of edible sprouts shall be organically produced.