

Board Considers Artificial Ingredient Use in Organic Foods

SAN ANTONIO (PRNewswire-USNewswire) — Today, Consumer Reports is releasing a nationally representative survey of more than 1,000 adults focused on the organic label. Many of the findings are directly relevant to the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) meeting, which begins today in San Antonio, TX. The poll results are available here: <http://www.greenerchoices.org/organicsurvey> [1].

While federal law prohibits synthetic substances in organic agriculture and food processing, including synthetic pesticides, fertilizers, antibiotics, growth hormones and artificial food ingredients, the law also allows exempted materials to be used for five years. The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) is the 15-member expert citizen panel charged by Congress with the important task of determining which synthetic substances can be listed as exempt.

This week's NOSB meeting in San Antonio will include deliberations on several material exemptions, including the antibiotic streptomycin's use on apples and pears, synthetic materials for aquaculture (before standards for organic fish have been defined), artificial ingredients (methionine) in poultry feed, and how these exemptions are handled after the five-year permitted-use period has ended.

The organization has long opposed the proliferation of exemptions and their renewed listing given this does not represent what consumers expect from the organic label. The recent survey from the Consumer Reports National Research Center underscores this point with 7 out of 10 Americans expressing they wanted as few artificial ingredients as possible.

"Despite the fact that the public does not want a host of artificial ingredients in their organic food, some national advisers and decision-makers in the National Organic Program have overtly expressed a desire to grow the exemption list in order to grow the organic market. We believe this violates the public's trust of what organic means," says Dr. Urvashi Rangan, Executive Director of Consumer Reports Food Safety and Sustainability Center.

Other highlights from the Consumer Reports National Research Center's national representative survey include:

- **Organic Produce.** The majority of consumers think organic produce should not have pesticides (91% of consumers) or antibiotics (86%). The NOSB will vote on ending the exemption for streptomycin on apples and pears, which has been re-listed many times.
- **Organic Fish.** Nearly all consumers (92%) want at least one federal standard for organic fish. The vast majority of consumers think federal

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standards should require that: (1) 100 percent organic feed is used, (2) no antibiotics or other drugs are used, and (3) no colors are added. The NOSB is considering aquaculture materials—despite the absence of standards—at this meeting.

- **Sunset Process.** An overwhelming percentage of consumers (84%) think the use of artificial ingredients in organic products should be discontinued, if not reviewed, after 5 years; few consumers (15%) endorse continued use of the artificial ingredient without review.

In September 2013, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program changed the review process. Under the new policy, an exempt material could be permitted indefinitely unless a two-thirds majority of the NOSB votes to remove an exempted (synthetic) substance from the list. The new policy allows USDA to relist exemptions for synthetic materials without the recommendation of the independent board and outside of public view, which used to be required.

The original authors of the organic law, Senator Patrick Leahy and Representative Peter DeFazio, have urged the USDA to reverse this policy change, saying that it "turns the sunset policy of the Organic Foods Production Act on its head" and is "in conflict with both the letter and the intent of the statute."

The issue of sunset will be raised as part of the public comment portion of the NOSB meeting.

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[1] <http://www.greenerchoices.org/organicsurvey>