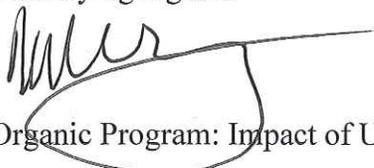


March 15, 2012

TO: National Organic Program Accredited Certifying Agents

FROM: Miles McEvoy, Deputy Administrator 

RE: Certifiers Accredited by the National Organic Program: Impact of U.S. - EU Organic Equivalency Arrangement

This memo provides instructions for National Organic Program (NOP)-Accredited Certifying Agents (ACA). Beginning June 1st, 2012, certified organic products of the United States (U.S.) and the European Union (EU) can be represented as organic in each other's market. The U.S. - EU Organic Equivalency Arrangement will facilitate trade in products produced within the two markets, as well as products where the final processing or packaging occurs within the respective regions.

Previously, operations wanting to trade products in the U.S. and EU had to obtain separate certifications to each standard. This required a second set of fees, inspections, and paperwork. The equivalency arrangement eliminates those additional requirements and costs, especially for small and medium organic operations. All products meeting the terms of the arrangement can be traded in both regions, including certified organic produce, meat, and cereal.

Additionally, this arrangement eliminates the requirement for ISO Guide 65 accreditation to access the EU market. For further information regarding the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) ISO Guide 65 Program please contact James L. Riva, Deputy Director, Grading and Verification Division, at james.riva@ams.usda.gov.

Those ACAs located within EU member states, which only certify organic operations located in EU member states, may elect to voluntarily surrender their NOP accreditation. Accreditation surrender can only be initiated by the ACA. The accreditation of ACAs will continue in effect until such time as the certifying agent voluntarily surrenders their accreditation and ceases its certification activities under the NOP. Please review the following information to determine whether your agency is eligible to surrender its NOP organic accreditation.

Information on NOP accreditation for certifying agents based in the EU

If all clients are located in an EU member state:

EU ACAs that certify only in European Union member states do not need to maintain their direct accreditation to the USDA organic regulations. However, if the EU ACAs certifies organic operations that are outside the EU member states, then the certifying agent should maintain its direct accreditation with the NOP if organic products are to be marketed or sold in the U.S.

Please direct surrender letters to Cheri Courtney, Acting Accreditation and International Activities Division Director, at cheri.courtney@ams.usda.gov

If some clients are located outside the EU member states:

EU ACAs that certify organic operations based in South America, Europe, and Asia must maintain their accreditation with the NOP in order to certify operations based outside the European Union member states to the USDA organic regulations.

NOP Organic Import certificates

All products traded under the arrangement must travel with a NOP Organic Import Certificate. This certificate will be issued by EU-designated certification entities, verify that the terms of the arrangement were met, and allow traded products to be tracked. The NOP will provide a template for the NOP Organic Import Certificate in the coming weeks.