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April 4, 2019

Ms. Michelle Arsenault, Special Assistant
National Organic Standard Board
USDA–AMS–NOP 1400 Independence Ave. SW.,
Room 2648-So., Mail Stop 0268
Washington, DC 20250–0268

Re: Docket Number: AMS-NOP-18-0071
Crops Subcommittee Proposal on Strengthening the Organic Seed Guidance

Dear Ms. Arsenault:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments to the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) Crops Subcommittee (CS) on the most recent Strengthening the Organic Seed Guidance Proposal. The Accredited Certifiers Association (ACA) is a nonprofit educational organization, and our membership includes 58 certification agencies that are accredited by the USDA or in the process of becoming accredited.

We appreciate the time the CS has put into this topic. Because we agree it is an important conversation, the ACA formed a working group in 2018 to answer many of the same questions the proposal seeks to address. Through this process, we have developed ACA Best Practices for Improving Consistency in Organic Seed Search Requirements, which are soon to be finalized and published. We believe this document is largely consistent with the NOSB proposal currently under consideration and that it offers additional guidance for certifier best practices.

The main concern our members have with the proposal is related to the amendment of NOP Guidance 5029 part 4.1.6: *Use of non-organic planting stock to produce organic crops is subject to commercial availability as per §205.204.(a)(1). If planting stock is from a non-organic source and is used to produce perennial crops, then that planting stock may be sold, labeled or represented as organic planting stock **or an organic vegetative crop** only after 12 months of organic management §205.204 (a)(4).*

Some ACA members found this to provide clarification with regard to 204(a)(1): *Nonorganically produced, untreated seeds and planting stock may be used to produce an organic crop when an equivalent organically produced variety is not commercially available.* However, others found it

to be in conflict with the standard. Others were uncertain how “vegetative crop” would be defined and potential effects on specific crop types.

In general, the ACA supports the direction of the Strengthening the Organic Seed Guidance Proposal, but we would benefit from clarification of the section described above. Thank you for your work on this topic.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jennifer Cruse".

Jennifer Cruse
ACA Executive Director