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October 3, 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-19-0038
Crops Subcommittee Discussion Document: Paper (Plant pots and other crop production aids)

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 discussion document on Paper (Plant pots and other crop production aids). The Accredited Certifiers Association (ACA) is a nonprofit educational organization, and our membership includes 60 certification agencies that are accredited by the USDA or in the process of becoming accredited. In fact, all USDA accredited certifiers based in the USA are represented by the ACA.

We appreciate the Crop Subcommittee’s work on paper pots and other paper crop production aids. Many certifier members had been allowing paper pots prior to NOP clarification that the use of paper pots was not permitted under current listings of paper on the National List.

After further review of the materials in paper pots, the ACA is in favor of proposing a new annotation for crop as a production aid at §205.601(o): Paper pots, must be produced without organisms or feedstock derived from excluded methods. Both proposed listings reference colored or glossy inks, which is not used in the production of paper pots, so it may be unnecessary to include this in the annotation for paper. The second proposed annotation option includes requirements for synthetic polymer fiber content, percentage biobased, and biodegradation. The ACA does not support verifying these requirements.

Determining synthetic polymer content may be difficult, if not impossible, to measure. In addition, paper pots all contain some type of agricultural component like cellulose or hemp and therefore are inherently biobased. These requirements could result in a listing for paper as a crop production aid that does not actually allow for any products on the market, similar to the



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listing for biodegradable bio-based mulch. These requirements could also lead to inconsistency among certifiers and material review organizations, as some may require testing to verify requirements, which again, may be difficult and unreliable, while others may only require manufacturers to sign affidavits.

An important piece that seems to be missing from the subcommittee's proposed listings for paper is a prohibition of excluded methods. Poly lactic acids (PLA) a component in the paper pot products which is commonly produced from genetically engineered microbes. The ACA's proposed annotation includes an explicit prohibition of excluded methods, which would not only prevent the use of paper pots that included poly lactic acids produced via excluded methods, but it would also prevent the use of paper pots created with paper from genetic engineered trees, if and when they are commercially available.

An additional annotation to prohibit added fungicides, insecticides, or other synthetic materials not typically found in paper is understood and not necessary. The standards of identity of both paper and paper pots do not include those materials and any additional materials added would be reviewed for compliance with the organic standards.

In summary, while other aids such as seed tape, collars, and hot caps were considered, the primary focus for certifiers is allowing paper pots. The ACA supports the ultimate allowance of paper pots, produced without organisms or feedstock derived from excluded methods, as a crop production aid.

We appreciate the NOSB's work on this topic and look forward to future dialog.

Respectfully submitted,

Meagan Collins
ACA Coordinator