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Another year to go for Canada

One year after its publication, there is reportedly still lots to do on the Organic Products Regulations before its two-year transition period ends in Canada and it comes into force on 14 December 2008.

Deliberations within the Standards Committee on Organic Agriculture, the group responsible for updating the National Standard, reportedly often turns into a debate between ‘trade expedience’ versus ‘organic values’. However, Laura Telford, Executive Director of Canadian Organic Growers (COG), who was earlier concerned that the ‘big interests’ would want to push things through, while the ‘purists’ would hold things up, is generally pleased with how the process is progressing.

The full committee appointed by The Canadian General Standards Board consists of more than 100 representatives from across the organic community. The committee is federally funded, administered by the COG, which is responsible for ensuring continuous consultation between government and industry. Amendments to the Standard are provided by ballot and approval is by consensus, i.e. substantial agreement, not necessarily unanimity.

The next round of meetings is scheduled for April 2008. The main differences identified between the US

and Canadian organic standards are particulars in the lists of permitted substances, including:

Chilean nitrate is not permitted as a soil amendment in Canada but is conditionally permitted in the United States, where it is used to boost nitrogen uptake.

Antibiotics in organic dairy. Canada has a ‘last resort’ clause for veterinarians to use antibiotics, requiring the milk to be withdrawn from supply for 14 days (this could be extended in April 2008 meeting) or twice as long as the medication’s withdrawal period, whichever is longer. Animals treated with antibiotics in the United States are required to be removed from the organic herd.

Synthetic and natural permitted substances. Both Canada and the United States are debating the terms ‘synthetic’ and ‘natural’ substances and their regulation. There are some synthetics on Canada’s Permitted Substances List, but synthetics are prohibited in the Standard. ■

For more information please see www.newfarm.org/features/2007/1207/CAcertorg/irving.shtml

Excerpt of an article, ‘Canada’s efforts to make organic official have come a long way, but there’s still work to be done before December 14, 2008’ by Pamela Irving, published by The New Farm.

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