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Report on NOSB meeting

In the US the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) met in Washington, DC from 4-6 May 2009. The 15 member advisory body provides recommendations concerning the US Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program (NOP), and makes decisions concerning additions and other changes to the National List.

The meeting began with an NOP update from Barbara Robinson, Acting Director. Key developments included an expansion of NOP staff supported by the allocation of additional funding, the announcement that an equivalency agreement with Canada is expected to be signed soon, and a call for nominations for five seats on the NOSB. The meeting was also addressed by Kathleen Merrigan (see box below), newly appointed Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, who announced additional funding for in-conversion organic farmers and the plan to make the NOP its own division within the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) at USDA.

Several discussion documents were presented, including a clarifica-

tion of the meaning of 'synthetic' from the *ad hoc* Materials Working Group. Other controversial issues discussed included a plan to include organic cosmetics and personal care products under the NOP, whether to permit retail multi-site certification, and recommendations on peer review procedures for the NOP. The NOSB also approved a recommendation to emphasise biodiversity conservation in guidance for organic system plans. The bulk of the meeting, however, was taken up with discussions on the National List, resulting in approval of the following:

Crops materials

- Sulphurous acid (for pH adjustment of water).

Livestock materials

- Vitamins and minerals injected as supplements.

Processing materials

- Sodium chlorite, acidified (as a sanitizer) on 205.605(a) (synthetic substances allowed).
- Removal of lecithin, bleached from 205.605(b) (nonsynthetic, non-organic substances allowed).

Kathleen Merrigan now Second in Command at USDA

Kathleen Merrigan is well known to the NOSB, having served as its Chair in the 1990s and more importantly, as the Senate Agriculture Committee staffer credited with creating the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA). She also served as Administrator of the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) from 1999 to 2001, at a critical moment in the publishing of the NOP final rule. As Deputy Secretary she is responsible for day to day operations at USDA, and plays a key role in trade discussions. Her appointment was cause for celebration by all advocates of sustainable agriculture.

For more information, please see: www.whorunsgov.com/Profiles/Kathleen_Merrigan