



THE ORGANIC FEDERATION OF CANADA NEWSLETTER

Notes from COO Liaison Committee Meeting of September 14th 2009

Present: Betsy Hui (CHFA), Nicole Boudreau (OFC/FBC), Deb Foote (CHFA), Matthew Holmes (OTA), John Hollinger (MAFRI), Anne Macey, Tomas Nimmo, Gunta Vitins (Sunopta), Julie Belzile (FBQ), Ted Zettel (OFC), Dag Falck (Nature's Path), Kristy Whipperman (COABC), Priscilla Reimer (MOA), John Hollinger (MAFRI), Kristen Wasylenchuk (OPAM), Larry Lenhardt, Jennifer Scott (CSI), Jodi Koberinski (OCO), Betsi Hui (CHFA), Dawn Robinson (Kraft Foods), Arnold Taylor (SOD)

COO office: Michel Saumur, Stephane O'Neil, Elizabeth Corrigan, Ken Bruce

Regulations

Questions received by the COO are continuously compiled, classified and answers are prepared; the sector will be notified via the OFC listserv when updates are posted to the COO website (the actual subscriber service does not work). Questions should be sent by email to:

Elizabeth.Corrigan@inspection.gc.ca

Standards

The fifth ballot: The COO has been instructed to hold the 5th ballot. Elizabeth Corrigan and Anne Caron (CGSB) met with convenors of the workgroups last week to establish priorities and a timeline for the presentation of amendments; the CGSB will then determine how much clerical work is needed; there is funding to hire a contractor to assist workgroups. The workgroups should present their amendment proposals in early December; CGSB will have those proposals translated and ready for a January meeting, so that the work can be completed in the current fiscal year (ending March 31st 2010).

The fourth ballot: Discussions to resolve negative votes continue. If no solutions are found, the negative issues will be resubmitted to a CGSB ballot. The 4th ballot modifications should be published soon.

The issues of standards ownership and the cost of obtaining a copy were raised when Ted Zettel met with Elizabeth and CGSB staff to propose solutions. CGSB is working on a cost-recovery basis and fees charged are designated for the maintenance of the standards. Only a small number of copies have been sold to date (205 copies), which means that the cost recovery approach is not working. The following proposal has been made: CGSB will outline the cost to be incurred for the maintenance of the standards and OFC-COO-AAFC will negotiate funding to cover those costs so that stakeholders will not have to pay to get their copy. The sector is waiting for the CGSB's cost outline.

Since very few copies have been sold, Julie Belzile suggests that operators must be getting their certification without reading the standards. Michel Saumur responds that file sharing of electronic copies cannot be controlled; music producers, for example, are well aware of the problem.

CGSB manages standards independent of one another; money raised for the maintenance of one standard cannot be transferred to the maintenance of another standard.

The budget for the Standards Interpretation Committee (SIC) has not yet been approved but Ted Zettel (Chair) is going ahead and drafting a work plan; so far, 20 to 25 questions have been received; most require a simple, straightforward answer and do not require a standards revision. The SIC is an advisory body to the COO; the COO is responsible for the final decision but wants the sector to interpret what their standard means. All questions should be addressed to Elizabeth.Corrigan@inspection.gc.ca.

The COO is bound to confidentiality and will not publish the names of the persons or organizations asking the questions.

Standards questions are transferred to the SIC; questions about the regulations are answered by the COO. The OFC board will meet to determine the length of the terms of the SIC members that have been elected; they need to be staggered to avoid a complete changeover of committee members in a given year.

Equivalency Agreement

EU-Canada – The EU submitted a list of critical variances in July; the Technical Committee responded in August to the EU points. COO met internally (COO-DFAIT-AAFC-CFIA) to draw up a strategy; an EU-Canada agreement may need to be a treaty between the two jurisdictions rather than a letter of agreement as is the case with the US. The COO will prepare written analysis and explanations based on sector comment and meet with EU representatives; they hope that EU will delete some of the variances from the list. Michel hopes to have an agreement with the EU by the end of the calendar year; it will depend on the meeting schedule and the communication flow.

USA- Canada – The COO plans to create a working group to establish procedures for verification, communications, and the management of complaints. Terms of references for meetings and a draft agenda have been sent to NOP partners but the NOP Director, Barbara Robinson, is retiring and there has been little progress; the COO does not know who will replace Ms Robinson. Agreement with the NOP will be adjusted as the standards evolve. In the US Equivalency Agreement, countries are bound to communicate any changes to respective regimes. There are five points to agree on: the Regulation, the Standards, the accreditation, the certification and the monitoring-enforcement.

Information has been exchanged with other countries (Chilli, Cambodia, China, Thailand), but no further action has been taken so far. Costa Rica sent their program in Spanish; it is in translation. Discussions were held with Taiwan, a country that has an organic regime and that has signed an agreement with US. Products certified organic under NOP from Taiwan cannot actually be imported in Canada; they have to be certified to the COS by a CB registered on the COO list (par 27 (1) a of the COR) or to be certified to the conditions of the agreement by a CB that is on the NOP list (par 27 (2)). But the NOP has not submitted a CB list classified by country.

South Korea has delayed the implementation of its own organic regime. Japan has asked questions about the COR, specifically residue testing; the COO has not heard anything since then.

Tomas asks for COO opinion on a “Beyond Organic” designation printed on advertizing tickets for a growers’ show in Ontario. The COO monitors labels, not flyers. A “Certified Organic” mark or designation on the main label of a product is not acceptable for interprovincial or international market because all organic products have to be certified anyway. The term “organic” is complete and cannot be associated with other qualifications such as “super organic” or “organic plus”. But on the BC trademark approved by COABC is fine with the COO and “certified by” in association with a certification body is also acceptable if not affixed on the front label.

The COO has no authority on the content of radio talk shows.

Next Meeting is scheduled for 1pm EST on Monday, September 28th.

Call-in Number is: 1-866-646-2080. Pass code is 2217165.