

OMRI Materials REVIEW

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News and Information for the Organic Community

Spring 2016

Organic Mexico

Guidelines support growth of verified inputs

BY MATT SIRCELY

A new era began in the Mexican organic sector with the publication of Mexico's organic guidelines, known as the Lineamientos or LOOA, its acronym in Spanish. The passage of LOOA in 2013 essentially flipped the switch to bring the 2006 Organic Products Law (LPO) into effect, including the corresponding regulations adopted in 2011. The Lineamientos have been under review since 2014, and a large number of refinements and changes are expected to be published this year after they undergo a formal review and approval process.

Mexico's equivalent of the USDA, SAGARPA (Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentación) is actively negotiating bilateral international equivalency agreements with the U.S., Canada and the E.U. As the guidelines continue to be refined, SAGARPA intends to begin its program of organic audits under the direction of SENASICA (Servicio Nacional de Sanidad Inocuidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria). SENASICA/SAGARPA maintains a central role in LPO implementation and has an established presence in farming communities nationwide as the agency historically tasked with ensuring food safety.

For organic producers in Mexico, with dollars exchanging at a rate nearly twice as favorable as ten years ago, there is great incentive to gain access to the U.S. market and other export destinations. Rules dictate that exporters must be certified according to the standard

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OMRI hosted a booth at the AgroBaja event March 3-5.

The Next Level for Product Review

New challenges propel efficiency and growth

BY KELSEY MCKEE

The 2016 edition of *The World of Organic Agriculture* reports that there were over 2.3 million organic producers world-wide in 2014, an all-time high. The report, published by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) and IFOAM – Organics International, quantifies the rapid growth of consumer demand for organic products and the resulting increase in certified organic acreage. Here at OMRI, the response by input suppliers to meet this increasing demand is readily apparent. The *OMRI Products List*[®] includes products from over 1,100 suppliers, with twenty-five percent of those suppliers located outside of the United States representing 29 different countries. In total, there are nearly 4,000 OMRI Listed[®] products, a 15% increase over last year. And the trend continues; we've recently experienced several months

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Worldwide Organic

BY PEGGY MIARS

The annual co-located BioFach and Vivantes conferences and trade shows in Nuremberg, Germany, once again proved to be the place to be to hear updates about organic standards and policy issues, and to be engulfed in a sea of organic products from around the globe. The four-day event is the world's largest gathering for the organic industry, this year attracting 48,000 visitors from 132 countries, a 9% increase over 2015. More than 2,500 exhibitors showcased their organic food and cosmetic products and services.



Two themes flowed throughout the event – 1) Organic 3.0, and 2) the continued growth of organics. The concept of Organic 3.0 was launched at BioFach in 2014 and has continued to gain momentum. The overall goal of Organic 3.0 is to enable a widespread uptake of sustainable farming systems and markets based on organic principles and infused with a culture of innovation, progressive improvement toward best practice, transparent integrity, inclusive collaboration, holistic systems, and true value pricing. The concept of Organic 3.0 seeks to address the tremendous challenges faced on our planet by positioning organic as a modern, innovative system which puts the results and impacts of farming in the foreground. Organic 3.0 is not prescriptive but descriptive; instead of enforcing a set of minimum rules to achieve a final static result, this model is outcome based and continuously adaptive to the local context. Organic 3.0 is still grounded in clearly defined minimum requirements such as those maintained by many government regulations around the world. But it also expanded outward from these base requirements.

The continued growth of organic is evident each year when the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) and IFOAM – Organics International

introduce their annual statistics book, *The World of Organic Agriculture*. The industry eagerly awaits the information, and an annual BioFach session announcing the latest data always involves a standing room only audience. Global retail sales of organic food and drinks reached 80 billion U.S. dollars in 2014. North America generated the largest percentage at 38.5 billion U.S. dollars, or 48% of the global market. That's an impressive statistic given that North America has less than 7% of global organic farmland.

Organic food sales represented nearly 5% of total U.S. food sales.

In the United States, sales of organic food and non-food products set another record in 2014, reaching 39.1 billion U.S. dollars, up 11.4% over 2013. Organic food sales reached 35.9 billion U.S. dollars. Organic food sales represented nearly 5% of total U.S. food sales, and its 11% growth outpaced total U.S. food sales which grew just 3%. The USDA National Organic Program certifies 27,814 operations around the world, including 19,474 in the United States. Since the count began in 2002, the number of domestic operations has increased by over 250%.

OMRI's nonprofit mission is to support the growth and trust of the global organic community through expert, independent and transparent verification of input materials, and through education and technical assistance. Through Organic 3.0, more consumers and stakeholders will recognize the importance of organics as the key to sustainable agriculture. This will in turn reduce dependence on non-organic practices and products. We look forward to pursuing our mission and providing ongoing support for this new phase of global organic growth. ○



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recognized in the destination country.

Adrián González Nieves is editor of *Cultura Orgánica*, a leading magazine in Mexico's organic community. He explains that he believes producers are seeking certifiers and organizations who can "help them in any way with this process of certification, about exporting, about knowing the rules in Mexico, and knowing the rules in other countries to fulfill everything that they need in order to complete the whole process."

Along with the growth in the Mexican organic sector, OMRI has seen dramatic growth in the number of OMRI Listed® products originating in Mexico. Since 2009, the number of products from companies in Mexico grew 24% annually, significantly outpacing the growth of the *OMRI Products List*® overall. Today, nearly ten percent of OMRI Listed products for use under USDA organic standards originate in Mexico. Many of these products stay in Mexico and help produce food for the export market, while other products are exported and purchased by organic producers in the U.S.

The OMRI website recently added webpages and information in Spanish, including a new [video](#)¹ that explains the first steps of the application process. OMRI Review Program Technical Supervisor Ana Negrete and Executive Assistant Rubi Harney also attended the AgroBaja event March 3-5 in Mexicali. According to Harney, "Visitors to the OMRI booth remarked on the great value that has been placed on the OMRI seal in Mexico, not only for the export market but also with regard to using products and practices that are better for the earth, together with the desire to grow the most nutritious produce with which to feed and nourish their fellow countrymen." Ana Negrete also offered a presentation in Spanish about the review process that was well attended by dozens of potential applicants.

Manufacturers of brand name inputs for organic agriculture say that product demand is rising not only in export mar-

kets, but also within the Mexican organic sector. "The sales trend is increasing," says Carlos Román Esquivel of ARGHUSA Agrobiológicos in the northwestern state of Sinaloa, noting that his company's OMRI Listed fertilizers primarily supply the domestic market.

José Gerardo Corona Mata agrees. He is the Sales Manager of the Apelsa Group, a producer of fertilizers including the NUTRITEC line intended for both domestic and international organic markets.

"The increase in the organic market at the global level has transformed organic inputs into a necessity for farming. Not only has this resulted in increased sales, but also in fostering greater awareness within the organic sector in terms of inputs, technical advice and personalized attention." He adds that, "Exports have increased the most, but domestic market growth increasingly offers local consumers products with the same standards of quality as those offered abroad."

Mexican organic exporters are enjoying a booming market accompanied by favorable exchange rates, mostly exporting to the U.S., Europe and Japan. And while the domestic organic market within Mexico is much smaller, there is clearly a strong push from the government to encourage production for local markets. A program to bring small farmers into the organic sector offers matching grants, covering half or more of the cost of certification, along with similar support for organic transition, system plan design, and the procurement of inputs. Incentives are also provided to reduce labeling costs and encourage the prevalence of the new national organic seal, currently applicable only to sales in the domestic market. Labeling procedures also include a non-GMO declaration, emblematic of Mexico's strong stance against genetically modified organisms.

"The increase in the organic market at the global level has transformed organic inputs into a necessity for farming."

– José Gerardo Corona Mata,
Apelsa Group

Although procedures for evaluation of inputs continue to be refined, Homero Blas Bustamante, President of the Mexican Society of Organic Production (SOMEX-PRO) and an active participant in the process, explained via email that he believes the negotiations for equivalency with the U.S. National Organic Program (NOP) and

other international standards will help to guide the technical refinement of Mexico's regulations in the area of materials review. "It is important to know that the Lin-

eamientos, including lists of inputs, are under review. And it is anticipated that, during the course of this year in 2016, there will be a new version of guidelines including the lists. Currently the lists are part of the Lineamientos, but in my opinion, the lists shall be approved upon signature of the equivalency agreement between NOP and LPO."

The way the Lineamientos are being refined reflects the inclusion of diverse voices from throughout the Mexican organic community, according to Mauricio Soberanes, General Manager of METROCERT. He explains that the Lineamientos were "published at the beginning of the present administration of the federal government, which facilitated the dialogue between the authorities and the non-state actors of the Mexican organic sector who have been the architects constructing the documents." He says that the recently added "third transitory article of LOOA explicitly opens the possibility of continual improvement and participation in the subjects of regulation, with representation."

According to Soberanes, grassroots movements have been the primary drivers behind increasing domestic production. "The increase in organic consumption in

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Laminarin

BY TINA JENSEN AUGUSTINE

What is laminarin, how does it work, and is it allowed?

Laminarin is a relatively new pesticidal substance that was recently discussed by the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB). It is a naturally occurring polysaccharide in plants that is commercially extracted primarily from the brown algae *Laminaria digitata*. It functions by stimulating a plant's natural defense mechanisms against disease pathogens. The laminarin triggers chemical signaling pathways that lead to increased production of defense proteins and enzymes, and these elements help accumulate compounds with anti-fungal and antibacterial activities. This response can both limit infection and deter its spread throughout the plant. Laminarin has also been found to attract parasitic wasps, thereby enhancing the biological control of crop pests. It is considered toxicologically innocuous and does not adversely affect non-target organisms. It is intended for preventative use, before infection occurs. EPA-registered label uses cover a wide variety of crops such as strawberries, bush berries, bulb crops, brassicas, cereal grains, leafy greens, tree fruit, grapes and others. Laminarin can help protect against blights, rusts, leaf spots, mildews, fruit rot and other plant diseases.



The extraction of laminarin from brown algae often involves pH adjustment with acids such as sulfuric or hydrochloric acid, followed by several filtering steps and finally neutralization with sodium hydroxide. The use of acid in this process does not change the chemical composition of laminarin. The lowered pH prevents the co-extraction of other compounds from the brown algae, such as alginates. This makes the filtering step much easier. Neutralization with sodium hydroxide does mean that there are residual sodium and sulfate ions in the solution once extraction is complete. These are not removed. However, there is expected to be so little that the EPA would not even consider the impurities reportable on a Confidential Statement of Formula, and the NOSB determined that they would not have a technical effect in a final product.

Laminarin was originally petitioned for addition to §205.601 (allowed synthetics) of the National List in 2013. Other aquatic plant extracts obtained using the bases potassium or sodium hydroxide are already listed as synthetic on the National List at §205.601(j)(1). However, in 2014, the NOSB Crops Subcommittee issued a proposal in which the majority considered the substance to be nonsynthetic. The minority, on the other hand, felt that the substance as described in the petition could contain residual levels of sodium sulfate that would render the material synthetic. OMRI was contracted by the National Organic Program (NOP) to produce a limited-scope technical report for the NOSB on the manufacturing process of laminarin. The report suggested that the extraction process does not chemically change the laminarin, and concluded that residual levels of sodium and sulfate ions would not have a technical effect in the product. Based on this information, the NOSB voted at the October 2015 meeting to classify laminarin, as petitioned, as nonsynthetic. Nonsynthetic substances used for organic crop pest control are allowed unless specifically listed at §205.602. Since the NOSB did not recommend listing the substance at §205.602, laminarin is thereby allowed as a pest control substance in organic crop production.



Derived from *Laminaria digitata*, laminarin is allowed as a pest control substance in organic crop production.

The EPA lists laminarin as exempt from the requirement of a tolerance on food when applied pre-harvest. Vacciplant, the trade name under which laminarin is marketed, is currently EPA registered. ○

Q&A

ASK US YOUR QUESTIONS

Email or mail your materials questions to OMRI. OMRI wishes to help address common questions about the organic standards. If we select your question for the Q&A section of the newsletter, then you will be notified prior to printing it. Email info@omri.org with 'Q&A' as the subject or mail your question to: OMRI, Newsletter Q&A, PO Box 11558, Eugene, OR 97440.



Glucono delta-lactone

BY JOHANNA MIRENDA

What are the allowable sources of glucono delta-lactone and how is it used in organic processing?

Glucono delta-lactone is derived from gluconic acid, with numerous uses as a food processing aid. Nonsynthetic forms of glucono delta-lactone are allowed for use in organic processing in accordance with its listing at §205.605(a) of the National List. Glucono delta-lactone is produced when gluconic acid crystallizes in water. It is then isolated by filtering or centrifugation. Since glucono delta-lactone is generally sold in pure form, the review of ancillary substance is typically not a concern.



Gluconic acid is naturally occurring in various foods and can be commercially

manufactured in a number of ways. Production by oxidation of D-glucose with bromine water is specifically prohibited by the annotation for glucono delta-lactone on the National List. The most common commercial source of gluconic acid that is allowed for glucono delta-lactone production under organic regulations is produced by microbial oxidation of glucose during fermentation. The fermentation process utilizes *Aspergillus niger* as the active microbe and a submerged culture medium.

Glucono delta-lactone was originally petitioned for use as a coagulant in tofu production. It can be used in production of “silken” tofu (which may have a yogurt-like consistency) by mixing with hot soy-milk directly into retail containers. This process reduces the chance of microbial contamination and extends the product’s shelf life.

Glucono delta-lactone has several other

applications in food production because of its acidic and chelating properties. It is used as an acidifier in the production of dairy products that require a slow reduction in pH, such as cottage cheese, feta cheese and mozzarella. It is also used as an acidifier in salad dressings and ready-to-eat pasta and rice. Glucono delta-lactone is used as curing agent in processed meat products. It is also used as a leavening agent in bread and pastries, and causes a slower rate of carbon dioxide release compared to other leavening agents. All of these Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS) applications of glucono delta-lactone are allowed in organic food processing. ○

Glucono delta-lactone is used as an acidifier in the production of dairy products such as feta cheese.



Poultry Litter

BY TINA JENSEN AUGUSTINE

What can be used as a poultry litter amendment?

Poultry litter, a mix of manure, feathers, bedding, spilled water and feed, is commonly known to be high in nitrogen and is also a significant source of ammonia emissions. As uric acid and organic nitrogen in the litter break down, ammonia is released into



the air, or volatilized. Volatilized ammonia not only has a strong, distinctive odor, but it can also be detrimental to the health of the poultry, causing eye and lung irritation and increasing susceptibility to respiratory disease. Ammonia emissions from poultry litter can also create atmospheric particulate matter, which can be detrimental to the environment.

In order to reduce ammonia volatilization from poultry litter, operators often

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MATERIALS Q&A

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apply amendments to help control emissions and maintain better living conditions for the birds. Litter amendments function by a variety of methods to reduce ammonia emissions, such as inhibiting the release of ammonia by reducing litter moisture levels, or by scavenging gaseous ammonia that has already been emitted. The use of some litter amendments will also increase the level of nitrogen in the litter, making it more valuable as a fertilizer. Some amendments have also been observed to lower pathogen levels, making it safer to subsequently use the litter as fertilizer on food crops.

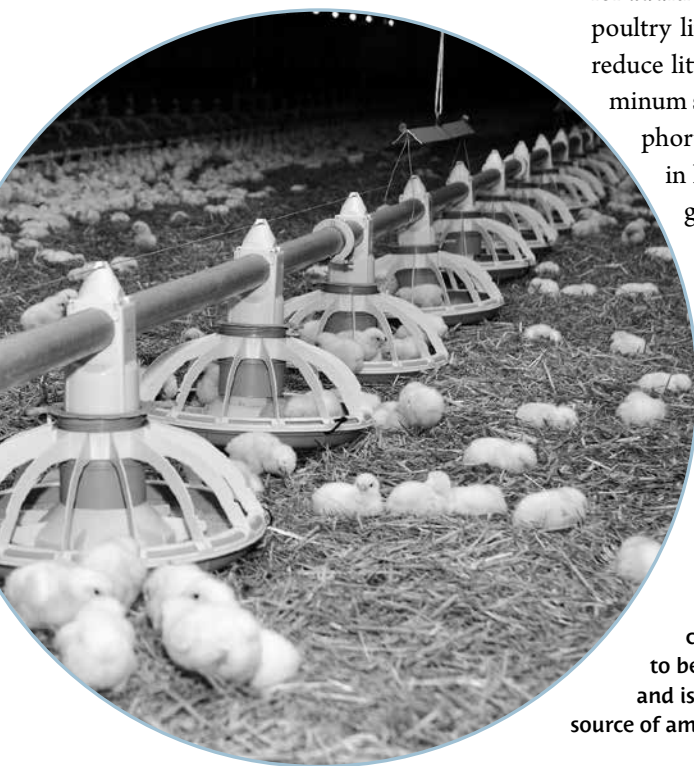
Currently there are no synthetic litter amendments approved for use in organic livestock production. Several nonsynthetic

materials can be used, and a number of OMRI Listed® products are marketed for this use. The substances include clay-based materials such as naturally-occurring zeolite, diatomaceous earth, and montmorillonite, which function by adsorbing¹ ammonia onto the clay surfaces. Peat moss can also adsorb 2.5 times its weight in ammonia, and 20 times its weight in water.

The most common litter amendments used in the conventional poultry industry are acidifying agents, and the predominant forms are synthetic. These amendments function by lowering the pH of litter, inhibiting the bacteria that transform manure nitrogen into ammonia. Aluminum sulfate, sodium bisulfate, and acid-activated bentonite are three such amendments that have recently been petitioned for addition to the National List for use as poultry litter treatments. These materials reduce litter pH and bind ammonia. Aluminum sulfate, or alum, also binds phosphorus, reducing soluble phosphorus in litter fertilizer. The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) plans to discuss these materials at the spring 2016 meeting. ○

¹ Adsorb refers to binding to the surface rather than being absorbed.

Poultry litter is commonly known to be high in nitrogen and is also a significant source of ammonia emissions.



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Mexico is due to organic ‘tianguis’: temporary markets, one day a week where organic farmers of the region sell directly to consumers, of which the best known are Chapingo (Mexico’s oldest agricultural college), San Miguel de Allende, Huatulco, Guadalajara, Mexico City among others.”

Organic food is often considered a luxury good in Mexico — major supermarkets are increasingly importing products from the U.S. at prices that are prohibitive for many income levels. Organic advocates envision that certifying more small farmers to the Mexican standard can help boost availability of local organic products without the burden of importation and transportation costs, while also providing small farmers with greater income stability.

Carrie-Anne Palmeri, the Latin American Specialist for Oregon Tilth Certified Organic (OTCO), cites the growth of cooperatives, local farmers market organizations and independent verification networks as significant forces which are helping to refine the LPO to meet the needs of the Mexican organic community. In the five years she has worked and lived in Baja California, Mexico, Palmeri says she has witnessed the “social impact that organics can have for families, especially those who engage in cooperative models, which are quite prevalent in Mexico. Small scale farmers who join a cooperative capable of making their product available on international markets are often able to access a level of financial stability that allows the first generations of their families to reach university.” Many times, she says, graduates return home to “work with these cooperatives because they want to continue to develop that opportunity for their

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community. Whether an operator chooses to engage in a cooperative model or produce independently, we're beginning to see very positive intergenerational impacts here, and it's really inspiring."

Although based in Mexico City, González Nieves of *Cultura Orgánica* spoke from Culiacán in Mexico's northwestern state of Sinaloa when contacted for a telephone interview. "The people here who are exporting bell peppers, tomatoes — it's the biggest tomato exporter — they are having the best time of their lives due to the exchange of the dollar when exporting their products. So it's a really great time for someone like

"It's a really great time for someone like OMRI to become known by the market and to get information down to the people so that they know what you do."

– Adrián González Nieves,
Cultura Orgánica

OMRI to become known by the market and to get information down to the people so that they know what you do."

Recognizing the growing importance of OMRI Listed products in the Spanish speaking organic community, OMRI has offered bilingual support for the application process for more than a decade. However, application materials are always required to be completed in English. Several consultants also offer bilingual help with the OMRI application process. OMRI staff will continue to monitor important changes as refinements in the LPO proceed. ○

1 OMRI's video in Spanish explains the first steps of the application process.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ABuRxPzdIA

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with over 100 applications received per month – a new high for OMRI.

While this growth is remarkable, it has had a noticeable impact on our review time. At one point recently, applicants were experiencing a seven-month average review time as we struggled to keep up with demand. And although it is always a pleasure to hear from our clients regarding our performance, the message was clear that suppliers can't plan for a new product launch with that type of lead time. So, we have made some changes. We created new positions and hired more incredibly talented and knowledgeable staff. We refocused our review procedures and revised our application materials to reflect a more sound and sensible approach¹ to input review. We set an ambitious goal to improve review time and measured our performance against that goal. We started assessing incoming applications to allow simple, straightforward reviews to move through the process more quickly while maintaining our rigorous review that's expected by the industry. We increased our budget, logged overtime, and invested in IT improvements and web-based functionality. And although we are still looking ahead at continued improvement, I am pleased to report that we are on track to achieve a median four-month review time by July 2016.

These improvements also mean faster responses for product change requests, updated certificates for suppliers who renew online, and timely re-reviews to ensure continued compliance. Many are surprised to learn that initial product applications account for only about one-third of our total review workload. In addition to annual renewals, approximately 30% of all OMRI Listed products report changes each year. A complete re-review is also required every five years to ensure continued compliance with organic standards. With nearly 4,000 products on the *OMRI Products Lists*, that means that this year we plan to open over 2,000 re-reviews on top of the hundreds of new applications coming in the door! And that's not

counting on-site inspections, random surveillance reviews, and for-cause investigations. These surveillance activities are an essential part of OMRI's Review Program, focusing on continued compliance of OMRI Listed products. In addition to monitoring a random selection of OMRI Listed products annually, we identify high-risk products for on-site inspection and investigate complaints that indicate a potential noncompliance.

While compliance is confirmed in the vast majority of all re-reviews, each review can result in a change to the product's OMRI Listed status. Listing restrictions are revised and product names change regularly. Products come off the list as a result of noncompliant product changes, or failure to prove ongoing compliance with the organic standards. New products are listed almost every day, and suppliers with products that have been evaluated under the National Organic Program standards are choosing to have their products reviewed to the Canadian Organic Standards as well. Our goal is to ensure that all of this up-to-date listing information is accessible to the organic community as quickly as possible. And we know we can do better.

It is an honor to support the growth and trust of the global organic community through expert, independent material review. We appreciate your patience as we adapt to the global demand for organic food, the increase in organic acreage, and the resulting number of input materials that are being developed for organic use. In particular, your feedback regarding our performance has been valuable in identifying and supporting the recent improvements we've made. Readers are welcome to download the comment form from our website at OMRI.org/commentform to suggest additional changes, or contact me directly (kelseym@omri.org) to discuss how we can better serve industry needs. ○

1 The USDA National Organic Program is actively promoting "Sound and Sensible" approaches to certification. Read more at www.ams.usda.gov/report-presentation/sound-sensible

CALENDAR

April 4-7 BioCycle San Diego, CA This year's theme is "Advancing Organics Recycling." BioCycle provides an excellent venue to get hands-on information and tools for starting, expanding and investing in composting, organics recycling, and renewable energy to build sustainable community infrastructure. This year marks its 30th anniversary. www.biocyclewestcoast.com

April 15-16 The 34th National Pesticide Forum Portland, ME The Forum provides an opportunity for grassroots advocates, scientists and policymakers to share efforts and build local, state and national strategies for strength and growth. This year's conference will focus on the adoption of policies to protect human health and the environment, and on organic land and building management strategies. www.beyondpesticides.org/forum

April 25-27 NOSB Meeting Washington, D.C. The bi-annual National Organic Standards Board meeting brings together industry leaders and stakeholders to discuss new materials and input policies. www.ams.usda.gov/event/nosb-spring-2016-meeting-washington-dc *

April 29-30 IFOAM World Board Meeting Bonn, Germany IFOAM – Organics International unites an enormous diversity of international stakeholders contributing to the organic vision. OMRI's Executive Director/CEO and IFOAM - Organics International World Board member Peggy Miars will participate. www.ifoam.bio *

May 23-25 Organic Week in Washington Washington, D.C. This intensive conference brings together industry leaders from around the country for an opportunity to take the organic message to Capitol Hill. The event includes conference sessions, networking opportunities and in-person visits with policymakers. ota.com/programs-events/policy-conference-hill-visit-days *

June 4-5 Mother Earth News Fair Albany, OR Held throughout the year in locations around the country, this gathering offers practical, hands-on training and experience taught by leading experts in the areas of renewable energy, organic gardening, sustainable agriculture, green home building and more. www.motherearthnews.com/fair/home.aspx

June 22-24 ExpOrgánicos Mexico City, Mexico This annual organic tradeshow draws participants representing all aspects of the Mexican organic industry and internationally, and is meant to establish commercial relationships between certified organic producers in Mexico and buyers, while providing educational opportunities. exporganicos.com.mx

* OMRI staff will attend, present, or exhibit at this event. Compiled from a variety of sources. OMRI welcomes your calendar suggestions. Email to info@omri.org.

THE WAIT IS OVER CLEAR AND CONSISTENT OMRI LABELING IS ON THE WAY



In 2012, OMRI launched an updated seal with a four-year transition period. All suppliers should update the labels for their OMRI Listed® products by the end of 2016.



DOWNLOAD THE NEW SEAL NOW!

Suppliers with OMRI Listed® products can log in to the OMRI website and visit OMRI.org/suppliers/seal, or contact info@omri.org for assistance.