



THE ORGANIC FEDERATION OF CANADA NEWSLETTER

January 2011

NOP Deputy Administrator in Guelph to Promote Organic Integrity from one Country to the Other

Miles McEvoy, Deputy Administrator of the USDA's National Organic Program, likes the [Equivalency Agreement](#) that was signed June 17th 2009 with Canada. "Operators don't need to certify to multiple

standards and only one audit is needed by CBs; it reduces paperwork and costs and expands the market access!" said McEvoy, when presenting the NOP program to Canadian stakeholders in Guelph, January 28th.

Having been involved for a long time in the organic sector, McEvoy, who first started as an inspector, and who plans to be an inspector again after his retirement from higher management because of the pure simplicity of the job, is now managing the NOP agency in Washington D.C., working with a team of 31 employees with a budget of 7 million dollars. The Obama administration plans to increase it up to 10 million in 2011, but this raise has to be confirmed with the Republican now controlling the Senate.



And McEvoy needs this government investment: because the organic sector continues to grow (5% in the last year) despite a recession in US and the fact that the NOP was under resourced for many years and could not implement diligently the National Organic Standards Board recommendations. Moreover, the US Office of Inspector General, the government agency that looks for problems in the US systems, audited the NOP and asked for many improvements. "We were asked to improve enforcement, process complaints in a timely manner, implement testing of pest residues, go through a peer review, revise some inconsistent program requirements and audit foreign NOP certifying agents. Moreover, we were asked to oversee the California State organic program more closely." Quite an agenda....

But McEvoy, a slender and calm person, went step by step to bring the NOP into a new performance era. The Quality Management System was updated to increase oversight over foreign operations and provide training to CBs. "CBs have to be held accountable if we want to get an effective implementation of the standards," says McEvoy.

The Quality Manual was revised, draft guidance published and enforcement procedures enhanced. A newsletter that stakeholders can get by signing up on NOP website is regularly produced to ensure transparency. A list of revoked operations has been published. A big effort has been invested in [enforcement](#); old complaints were resolved, peer review is in

process; even the accreditation process is being reviewed.

There are 27000 certified operators to NOP standards, by 97 CBs (55 domestic CBs and 42 in foreign countries). To maintain consumer's trust in the organic label and to comply with the NOP "Organic Integrity from Farm to Table" motto, NOP has developed [a strategic plan](#) focusing on quality management, standards consistency, enforcement, management strategy (a better coordination with NOSB, implementation of cost share programs, better communication).

Technical assistance is provided to CBs to make them effective in applying standards. McEvoy observes that "A vast majority of operations are complying with the standards and samples are free of pesticides residues. "

Canadian audience was very attentive to the Miles McEvoy presentation. 80% of the imported organic products that are distributed in Canada come from US; the Canada/US Equivalency Agreement is quite new and rules are now perfectly clear.

McEvoy is confident that the Canada/US Technical Committee Workgroup and the Steering Committee will coordinate the implementation of the terms of the agreement. The two groups will meet in Quebec city in June 2011. The NOP has made it clear that an equivalency attestation is now required to accompany organic raw and processed products shipped from US to Canada. Moreover, there are efforts to harmonize Canada and US standards. The NOP is currently implementing a new pasture rule that will require a 30% feeding from pasture in the grazing season and is considering prohibiting the use of sodium nitrate and hydroponic crops to be labeled as organic. US organic aquaculture standards should be implemented in 2012, while Canada proposed aquaculture standard are under CGSB scrutiny.

How can two countries agree on organic trade ?

Miles McEvoy described three possible agreements:

Export Arrangements are agreements between the U.S. and a foreign country that allow U.S. organic products to be sold as organic in the receiving country, provided specific requirements are met.

Recognition Agreements allow foreign governments to accredit certifying agents in their country to certify organic products only in that country to the NOP standards. US signed recognition agreements with Israel and Denmark and is actually negotiating with India, Japan and New-Zealand.

Equivalency – standards are equivalent; accreditation and certification requirements are similar. Canada is the only country having signed this type of agreement with US.

What remains different is the labeling; US label can have the "100% organic" and "made with organic" on front panel of the products; Canada does not allow this. And Canadian labels have to be bilingual.

NOP will soon remove the list of Canadian NOP certified operators from its website as Canadian products exported to US have now to be certified to the terms of the Canada/US Equivalency Agreement. There will no longer be “Canadian NOP certification”. That is how equivalency is handled. The COO manager, Michel Saumur, confirms that good working links are now established with NOP and that effective communication is the key: “We need to talk more and we will gradually eliminate critical variances”, says Saumur.

So, communication is the key: the participants felt better about the NOP system at the end of the presentation as it is obvious that the Canadian and American organic systems are facing similar management challenges. Moreover, McEvoy congratulated the Canadian organic sector for its ownership and control of the national organic standards. In the US, the NOSB is the standard developer and manager. That will encourage the Canadian sector to work hard for finally getting funding for the standards revision and interpretation.

The [Organic Council of Ontario](#) was the sponsor of Miles McEvoy’s visit to the Guelph Conference.