

Jason Fish

The Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) requires that no synthetic substance may be used in organic production unless evaluated and recommended by the NOSB and entered on the National List, which is contained in NOP regulations. Now USDA is accepting comments on an advance notice of proposed rulemaking (ANPR) on “inert” ingredients used in organic production. The ANPR reflects a lack of understanding on the part of the USDA authors of the character of so-called “inert” ingredients and the requirements of the Organic Foods Production Act, as well as the history of efforts by the NOSB to address this issue. USDA refers to time, effort, and work required to implement the NOSB’s recommended reviews of individual “inert” ingredients. These references are disingenuous at best, considering the time that has elapsed since the issue became critical when the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that it was no longer supporting the lists to which NOP regulations refer—16 years ago. Some crucial facts must be acknowledged by USDA: “Inert” ingredients are not biologically or chemically inert. The Beyond Pesticides report “‘Inert’ Ingredients in Organic Production” compares the toxicity of active substances and “inert” substances used in organic production. In almost every category, there are more harmful “inerts” than active substances. OFPA allows the use of a synthetic substance in organic production only if it is listed on the National List “by specific use or application” based on a recommendation by the NOSB, following procedures in OFPA. The NOSB has repeatedly passed recommendations telling NOP to evaluate individual “inerts.” In moving forward, there must be no more delay: The first step must be the immediate publication in the Federal Register of all “inerts” known to be used in organic production, with a request that registrants of products approved for use in organic production to notify AMS if their products contain other “inert” ingredients. USDA must allocate resources needed to review substances that are identified. Former List 3 “inerts” must be relisted according to the Spring 2012 NOSB recommendation. USDA must establish a process for production of technical reviews of substance on former Lists 4A and 4B. The NOSB must evaluate the substances according to a process designed to complete the review of all “inerts” within five years of publication of the list, and USDA must complete rulemaking in accordance with OFPA and NOSB recommendations. Known endocrine disrupting and persistent organic pollutants—such as nonylphenol ethoxylates (NPEs), per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), bisphenols, and ortho-phthalates—should not be permitted. Every five years, the materials will be subject to sunset review.