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It is time for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to follow through on its duty to assess individual “inert” ingredients used in organic production. In creating the original regulations for the National Organic Program (NOP), USDA—based on the recommendation of the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB)—decided to postpone the evaluation of so-called “inert” ingredients until active materials had been reviewed for the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances. The first regulation and all subsequent revisions have allowed the use of “inert” ingredients on EPA Lists 4A (“minimal risk inert ingredients”) and 4B (“other ingredients for which EPA has sufficient information to reasonably conclude that the current use pattern in pesticide products will not adversely affect public health or the environment”). A limited number on List 3 (“inerts of unknown toxicity”) were allowed in pheromone products. I ask that the USDA officially and publicly acknowledge the following:

A. “Inert” ingredients are not necessarily biologically or chemically inert. The report by Beyond Pesticides entitled “‘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.

B. The NOSB has repeatedly passed recommendations telling NOP to evaluate individual “inerts.” In light of the years already spent on this issue [16 years since the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that it was no longer supporting the lists to which NOP regulations refer] no more delay is warranted with regard to the following actions:

- 1) 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.
- 2) The USDA must allocate resources needed to review substances that are identified.
- 3) Former List 3 “inerts” must be relisted according to the Spring 2012 NOSB recommendation.
- 4) USDA must establish a process for production of technical reviews of substance on former Lists 4A and 4B.
- 5) 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.
- 6) 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.
- 7) Every five years the materials will be subject to sunset review.