

J Sarr

The USDA must act on its duty to assess individual so-called “inert” ingredients used in Organic production. In the original regulations for the National Organic Program (NOP), USDA decided to postpone the evaluation of “inert” ingredients until ‘active’ materials had been reviewed for the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances. The original and all subsequent revisions have allowed the use of “inert” ingredients on EPA Lists 4A (“minimal risk”) 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”), with a limited number on List 3 (“inerts of unknown toxicity”) being allowed in pheromone products. The Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) requires that No Synthetic Substance may be used in organic production unless evaluated by the NOSB and entered on the National List (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. Consider the time that has elapsed since then: The issue became critical 16 years ago, when the EPA announced that it was no longer supporting the lists to which NOP regulations refer. 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.”
- * The USDA must act now.
- * The first step must be the immediate publication (in the Federal Register) of all “inerts” known to be in use 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 should Not be permitted (e.g.: nonylphenol ethoxylates (NPEs), per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), bisphenols, and orthophthalates).

Thank you for your consideration of this very important issue that affects human lives (from the embryo to the grave), animal lives, and the environment.