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March 30, 2020

Ms. Michelle Arsenault
National Organic Standards Board
USDA-AMS-NOP
1400 Independence Ave. SW.,
Room 2648-S, Mail Stop 0268
Washington, DC 20250-0268

Docket ID # AMS-NOP-19-0095

Re. CS: Sodium carbonate lignin

These comments to the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) on its Spring 2020 agenda are submitted on behalf of Beyond Pesticides. Founded in 1981 as a national, grassroots, membership organization that represents community-based organizations and a range of people seeking to bridge the interests of consumers, farmers and farmworkers, Beyond Pesticides advances improved protections from pesticides and alternative pest management strategies that reduce or eliminate a reliance on pesticides. Our membership and network span the 50 states and the world.

Beyond Pesticides opposes the listing of sodium carbonate lignin because it is not compatible with organic practices and is not necessary.

Sodium carbonate lignin is not consistent with organic production.

The petitioner relies on a stated equivalence of sodium carbonate lignin and sodium lignin sulfonate, which is on the National List –and, in fact, originally petitioned for a change to the annotation to sodium lignin sulfonate. There is, however, a crucial difference between sodium carbonate lignin and sodium lignin sulfonate –the latter contains sulfur, while the former, the petitioned substance is “sulfur free.”

Section 6517(c)(1)(B)(i) of the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) states,
The National List may provide for the use of substances in an organic farming or handling operation that are otherwise prohibited under this chapter only if—
(B) the substance—
(i) is used in production and contains an active synthetic ingredient in the following categories: copper and sulfur compounds; toxins derived from bacteria; pheromones, soaps, horticultural oils, fish emulsions, treated seed, vitamins and minerals; livestock parasiticides and medicines and production aids including netting, tree wraps and seals, insect traps, sticky barriers, row covers, and equipment cleansers. . .

The Technical Review for Lignin Sulfonate responds to the question, “What category in OFPA does this substance fall under: (A) Does the substance contain an active ingredient in any of the

following categories: copper and sulfur compounds, toxins derived from bacteria; pheromones, soaps, horticultural oils, fish emulsions, treated seed, vitamins and minerals; livestock parasiticides and medicines and production aids including netting, tree wraps and seals, insect traps, sticky barriers, row covers, and equipment cleansers?” “Lignin sulfonate is listed by inference as part of the group ‘copper and sulfur compounds’ in the OFPA, Section 2118 (c)(1)(B)(i).”¹

The Technical Review submitted by the petitioner states, “By comparison, the sodium carbonate lignin is sulfur-free.”²

Therefore, under OFPA, sodium carbonate lignin is not eligible to be included on the National List, and allowing its use would be inconsistent with organic farming and handling.

Sodium carbonate lignin is not necessary for organic production.

The petitioner does not present any justification based on the need for sodium carbonate lignin. In fact, the petitioner’s whole case is based on its (failed) claim of equivalence with a material already on the National List –sodium lignin sulfonate.

Sodium carbonate lignin presents environmental hazards.

The petition lists a number of impacts of sodium carbonate lignin. Most are shared with sodium lignin sulfonate –spills or runoff can result in high biological oxygen demand (BOD) in receiving waterbodies and hence, low dissolved oxygen that is harmful to aquatic organisms. Other impacts specifically result from the sodium carbonate fraction—increased salinity and pH in the soil (and, presumably runoff). These impacts, though noteworthy, are not as significant as the lack of necessity and the inconsistency with organic production.

Conclusion

The petition for sodium carbonate lignin should be denied because it is not compatible with organic practices and is not necessary.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,



Terry Shistar, Ph.D.
Board of Directors

¹ Lignin Sulfonate Technical Evaluation Report, 2011. Lines 218-228.

² Khalil Jradi, 2019. Memo: Assistance for the Sodium Carbonate Lignin petition submitted by Legnochem. P. 4. (P. 65 of petition.)