

Organic group responds in USDA lawsuit

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

The Organic Trade Association has filed its response to USDA's motion to dismiss a lawsuit over repeated delays in implementing new organic livestock and poultry standards.

"USDA's motion to dismiss the Organic Trade Association's lawsuit would be unremarkable except for its clear failure to consider the overwhelming public support for the delayed rule," OTA said in a statement.

OTA's legal response argues for a strong National Organic Board role and grounds for going forward with necessary improvements to the organic standards.

The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., in September, alleges USDA violated the Organic Food Production Act and unlawfully delayed the rule's effective date.

It also alleges USDA violated the Administrative Procedure Act and abused its discretion by proposing action to indefinitely delay or kill the rule and issued repeated delays without any public process.

OTA is asking the court to reverse USDA's decision

to delay implementation and eliminate its proposed options to further delay, rewrite or permanently shelve the rule, making it effective immediately.

The rule was finalized in the final days of the Obama administration and set to go into effect March 20, 2017. A regulatory freeze by incoming President Donald Trump delayed implementation until May 19, 2017.

USDA delayed implementation again until Nov. 14, 2017, citing significant policy and legal issues warranting further review.

In November, the agency again delayed implementation until May 14, 2018, and published a notice to solicit public comment on whether to implement the rule or suspend, delay or withdraw it.

In December, the agency announced it intended to withdraw the rule, saying it exceeds its statutory authority.

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service reported it received more than 47,000 comments on the four options, with more than 40,000 (including more than 34,600 form letters) supporting implementation.

Only 28 comments supported withdrawal, a few

supported suspension and one supported delay. Other comments didn't indicate a clear preference.

OTA believes USDA seeks dismissal of the lawsuit "to avoid explaining to America's organic producers and consumers why it is blocking necessary rule clarifications and the strengthening of organic production practices," OTA stated.

USDA's motion, however, claims OTA lacks standing because it pleads no facts showing that it or its members have suffered or will suffer any injury as a result of the delays.

"OTA advances abstract and unsubstantiated concerns that consumers might lose confidence in organic certification ... but the undisputed facts show no actual or imminent danger of that occurring," the motion states.

It also argues that several of OTA's claims are moot, including challenges to the first two delay rules on the basis they were issued without notice and comment. Those rules are no longer operative, having been replaced with the third rule in November, which delayed the effective date until May of this year.



Washington FFA

students attended 212 Degrees and 360 Degrees leadership conferences Feb. 10-11 in Randle, Wash.

Washington FFA students attend leadership conferences

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Washington FFA students attended the 212 Degrees and 360 Degrees Leadership Conferences Feb. 10-11 in Randle, Wash.

The conference based on 212 degrees — the temperature at which water boils — focused on taking students to the "boiling point of leadership," according to a Washington FFA press release.

"At 211 degrees water is extremely hot, but just one

more degree gets us to the next level," the press release states.

The two-day conference was focused on student development and helped FFA members become aware of their personal growth. FFA members attended sessions on making positive decisions and setting specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time (SMART) goals.

The 360 Degrees Conference took students "full circle" in terms of chapter

leadership. The two-day conference focused on the importance of influence and how to become an influential leader. Students also conducted chapter needs assessments, crafted influence plans for their chapters and developed strategies.

More than 8,000 students across the country will participate in 212 Degrees or 360 Degrees leadership conferences, activities of the National FFA Organization, sponsored by Syngenta.



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4-H Helps with Bio-Security Research Project



Above: 4-H youth with a poster of the research study

Right: Signs made by members of the Franklin 4-H Club

Above right: 4-H researcher at the home pen of a Hamp/Duroc pig

Members of the Franklin 4-H Club in Sutter County, Calif., and Browns Valley 4-H Club in Yuba County, Calif., participated in the Mitigating Zoonotic and Animal Disease (MZAD) Project, a bio-security research study and curriculum developed by the University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC ANR).

"It taught me how fast a health issue can transfer to your animals," said Mason Serger, a member of the Browns Valley 4-H Club.

The 4-H youth studied the curriculum and tested bio-security risk assessment and mitigation procedures that focused on keeping animals and people healthy at county fairs. The researchers were hosted by 4-H families at their homes so they could collect samples from the feed troughs, flooring, and bedding of their animals. Researchers also collected data at county fairs.

Helping to keep animals and people healthy at fairs

The 4-H members created signs to display at the fair to encourage patrons to wash their hands. They also engaged more with the public about their projects, encouraging people to wash their hands and keep strollers outside the barns. The result was a positive change in the amount of pathogens found in the areas.



Creating positive change

Members attended the Junior Livestock Auction Advisory Committee to ask for changes at the fairgrounds to benefit the animals and the public. Members also gave a presentation to the Fair Board asking for changes. Both groups were very receptive. One of their recommendations was the elimination of "Champion Row," where the winners of various species are kept together. As a result, champions will now be displayed within their own species' barn.

"Many livestock youth are aware of how to keep their animals safe and healthy," noted 4-H Program Representative Tracy Bishop. "However, this project allowed them to know the 'Why' and how to educate others. It allowed them to expand their knowledge and empowered them to talk with adults to create positive change by using research that they helped gather."

Videos for fair administrators, exhibitors, and visitors

The University of California-Davis, in collaboration with the California Department of Food and Agriculture, produced videos to share the findings publicly with fair administrators, youth exhibitors, and fair visitors. The videos feature some of the 4-H'ers and their animals, along with the researchers.



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