



October 8, 2025

Ms. Michelle Arsenault  
National Organic Standards Board  
USDA-AMS-NOP

**Docket:** AMS-NOP-25-0034

**RE: Crops Subcommittee  
Petitioned Material Proposal: Synthetic Compostable Polymers**

Dear Ms. Arsenault:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide feedback to the Crops Subcommittee on its proposal regarding the petition brought forward by the Biodegradable Products Institute (BPI). The Organic Trade Association (OTA) is the membership-based business association for organic agriculture and products in North America. OTA is the leading voice for the organic trade in the United States. Our members include growers, shippers, processors, certifiers, farmers' associations, distributors, importers, exporters, brands, retailers, material input providers, and others. OTA's mission is to grow and protect organic with a unifying voice that serves and engages its diverse members from farm to marketplace.

OTA appreciates the Board's thoughtful consideration of compost and the feedstocks that go into its production. As noted in our previous comments on this issue, we have not taken a position on the Subcommittee's approach to the evaluation of synthetic feedstocks in compost, however we appreciate the Subcommittee's position that synthetic feedstocks be reviewed within the existing National List evaluation process.

We identify five main stakeholder groups in this issue: the biodegradable products industry; companies using biodegradable inputs (i.e., packaging); composters; organic producers and handlers; and organic consumers.

1. The biodegradable products industry is pushing for market adoption of compostable packaging.
2. Companies using these products want to avoid landfill disposal and satisfy governments and consumers requesting more sustainable packaging. However, in this instance we are primarily reacting to AB1201, California's 2021 law regulating compostable packaging.
3. Composters are divided on the law's regulatory rollout, with some supportive of the petitioner's approach and others concerned about contamination, generally preferring a Technical Review process over blanket approval.
4. For organic producers and handlers, our primary membership, while there is wide use of compost, there is no known demand for municipal compost by our members for their compost needs.

5. Consumer trust and willingness to pay premiums for organic is central. Trust could be undermined if organic is linked to new contamination risks, especially with heightened interest in soil health as well as public concern about PFAS, microplastics, and other “forever chemicals.”

From OTA’s perspective, this issue has been driven primarily by California’s law and is most relevant within California. We recognize that compostable packaging circulates nationally, and we understand why the biodegradable products industry sees broader implications for interstate commerce for compostable packaging. At the same time, when we look specifically at organic production, we have not seen demand from producers or handlers for municipal compost irrespective of biodegradable packaging materials. If USDA chooses to act on the petition, it should do so in a way that maintains or enhances consumer trust in the USDA Organic brand.

### **Federal Composting and Recycling issues should be addressed for all agriculture first.**

OTA has not taken a position on the specific inclusion or exclusion of synthetic feedstocks in compost, and we encourage the Board and the organic community to consider this issue within the larger context of organic agriculture’s relationship with plastics. In considering the process, we see challenges in both directions. A blanket de minimis approach may be too blunt and could risk sidestepping the NOSB for non-organic sector issues. On the other hand, requiring full Technical Reviews for each potential material raises questions about USDA’s limited resources and whether this would be the best use of USDA or NOSB’s time relative to other pressing priorities.

Both approaches are organic-specific when organic is only a subset of the broader national conversation between agriculture and compostability, recyclability, and the challenges between local patchwork versus federal solutions. A federal approach for all food and agriculture should address the issue first, and then organic should establish policy under OFPA within that context. Our primary concern is that whichever path is considered, it should protect consumer trust in the organic seal while weighing real world trade-offs of plastic pollution and reduction and ensuring an ongoing supply of high-quality compost access for organic growers.

### **Subcommittee motions in this proposal**

In its Spring 2025 recommendation on this topic, the Subcommittee passed a proposal confirming that synthetic compost feedstocks – regardless of ASTM certification – must be individually petitioned for National List inclusion. Given this, we question whether it is necessary then to move forward with the additional motions in this proposal to define compostable materials, classify them as synthetic, and motion to add them to the National List as allowable synthetics in compost feedstocks. The Subcommittee concludes this proposal with a recommendation to deny the petition in its current form. Further, it reiterates the Board’s encouragement to the community to make use of the petition process for inclusion of any synthetic to be added to the National List.

It would seem most straightforward for the Board to simply deny the petition. Rather than categorically define a range of substances and present a recommendation to deny their listing for allowance as synthetic compostable feedstocks, the Subcommittee and Board could remain open to a review of these substances on an individual basis, much as it has with the listing for biodegradable biobased mulch film.



Organic production, like conventional, relies heavily on nonbiodegradable plastics, and the sector is already exploring how to move beyond that reliance through research and regulatory pathways such as biobased mulch.

Again, we reiterate our stance that retaining consumer trust in the organic seal is paramount, however we see value in embracing a deliberative approach that remains open to the possibility there may be acceptable alternatives to the pervasive use of nonbiodegradable plastics in organic production. The organic sector weighing in on this issue is premature as the materials are already not allowed. Compostable feedstocks need to be resolved on a federal level for all agriculture, then organic can access if such substances are appropriate for the organic farm per the criteria in the Organic Foods Production Act.

On behalf of our members across the supply chain and the country, OTA thanks the National Organic Standards Board for the opportunity to comment, and for your commitment to furthering organic agriculture.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott Rice", is positioned above the printed name.

Scott Rice  
Sr. Director, Regulatory Affairs  
Organic Trade Association

cc: Tom Chapman  
Co-CEO  
Organic Trade Association