



October 11, 2017

Ms. Michelle Arsenault
National Organic Standards Board
USDA-AMS-NOP
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Room 2642-So., Ag Stop 0268
Washington, DC 20250-0268

Docket: AMS-NOP-17-0024

RE: Crops Subcommittee – Anaerobic Digestate (Proposal)

Dear Ms. Arsenault:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comment on the Crops Subcommittee's Proposal on Anaerobic Digestate.

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, representing over 9,500 organic businesses across 50 states. Our members include growers, shippers, processors, certifiers, farmers' associations, distributors, importers, exporters, consultants, retailers and others. OTA's mission is to promote and protect organic with a unifying voice that serves and engages its diverse members from farm to marketplace.

Position

The Organic Trade Association supports the Crops Subcommittee's (CS) assessment that the petition for anaerobic digestate did not specify any synthetic feedstocks, and therefore should not be considered a synthetic substance. Additionally, since the petition requested that anaerobic digestate be allowed in organic production without pre-harvest restrictions applied to inputs containing raw manure, we agree with CS's process to propose an amendment to 7 CFR 205.203(c). **OTA supports CS's vote to deny this particular petition for anaerobic digestate because it lacks the necessary time, temperature, or similar metric, validated by testing, to ensure that an anaerobic digestate has undergone a process to reduce pathogens.**

Anaerobic digestate is an important organic waste product that should have a place on organic operations. However, NOSB must consider two important aspects to anaerobic digestate prior to making any future recommendations on this input:

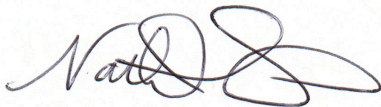
- **Feedstocks:** All carbon-based waste inputs (manure, compost, anaerobic digestate) are made up of feedstocks that undergo certain processes. Currently, only recycled paper without colored or glossy ink is allowed as synthetic feedstock to organic approved compost. NOSB should always evaluate which feedstocks should or should not be allowed in these types of inputs before moving forward with recommendations on rulemaking.
- **Human Pathogens:** Despite the fact that organic standards are not a food safety regulation, it is

imperative that NOSB evaluate and include standards for reducing pathogens from inputs that have the potential to harbor human pathogens. These standards are contained in the regulations themselves for compost (7 CFR 205.203(c)(2)) and in Guidance Document NOP 5006 for dehydrated manure. Similar standards should be researched and established for anaerobic digestate containing manure, and perhaps even for anaerobic digestate that does not contain manure. Regardless, any metric used to eliminate the 90- or 120-day pre-harvest interval for inputs containing manure must be clear, widely accepted, and validated by science.

Lastly, the Organic Trade Association recommends that CS prioritize a comprehensive review of anaerobic digestate products as a whole to ensure that Material Review Organizations (MROs) and Accredited Certifying Agents (ACAs) are evaluating these materials consistently, to consider if any synthetic feedstocks should be allowed in approved anaerobic digestate, and to evaluate whether specific metrics to reduce pathogens can be adopted to remove pre-harvest intervals for anaerobic digestate that contains manure. Encouraging the recycling of carbon-based wastes aligns with organic principles, and OTA supports the use of manure, compost and anaerobic digestate. However, allowance of any of these types of inputs must be balanced with an evaluation of all feedstocks entering into the process, and whether a specific process adequately reduces pathogens to justify elimination of pre-harvest restrictions.

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

Respectfully submitted,



Nathaniel Lewis
Farm Policy Director
Organic Trade Association

cc: Laura Batcha
Executive Director/CEO
Organic Trade Association