



April 4, 2019

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

Docket: AMS-NOP-18-0071

RE: Materials Subcommittee – Excluded Methods Terminology (Proposal)

Dear Ms. Arsenault:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comment on the Materials Subcommittee’s Proposal on Excluded Methods Terminology. The Subcommittee is requesting comments from organic stakeholders on its proposal to clarify transposons as part of the excluded methods terminology chart as well as the definitions of cisgenesis and intragenesis.

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 organic businesses across 50 states. Its members include growers, shippers, processors, certifiers, farmers’ associations, distributors, importers, exporters, consultants, retailers and others. OTA’s Board of Directors is democratically elected by its members. OTA’s mission is to promote and protect organic with a unifying voice that serves and engages its diverse members from farm to marketplace.

The Organic Trade Association recognizes that the definition of “excluded methods” was based on the efforts of NOSB in 1995, and is now outdated. Organic producers and handlers as well as Accredited Certifying Agencies (ACAs) and USDA’s National Organic Program (NOP) must have clear and up-to-date definitions to make consistent and concrete determinations regarding compliance with the prohibition of GMOs. For this reason, we continue to be supportive of the work being done in this area.

We support updating the proposal’s terminology chart with the following definitions:

Cisgenesis: The gene modification of a recipient plant with a natural gene from a crossable sexually compatible plant. The introduced gene includes its introns and is flanked by its native promoter and terminator in the normal-sense orientation.

Intragenesis: The full or partial coding of DNA sequences of genes originating from the sexually compatible gene pool of the recipient plant, and arranged in sense or antisense orientation. In addition, the promoter, spacer and terminator may originate from a sexually compatible gene pool of the recipient plant.

In regard to **transposons**, we did not have enough time to thoroughly research the topic and conduct member outreach. Generally speaking, we understand transposons that are activated or directed through in vitro techniques to fit the definition of “excluded methods,” whereas activation of transposons under natural stress conditions (e.g., drought or heat) would not. The latter are activities that are naturally



occurring, and activate naturally occurring transposons. We do not believe they should be listed in the table of methods.

Transposons activated under chemical and radiation stress warrant further evaluation as part of the “induced mutagenesis” discussion document on this meeting’s agenda, since allowing or disallowing chemical/radiation-induced mutations affect both the determination for induced mutagenesis and the activation of transposons under these types of stress. Unfortunately, we did not have adequate time to address this topic or the associated Discussion Document titled “Excluded Methods: Induced mutagenesis and embryo transfer in livestock.”

The Organic Trade Association continues to be supportive of moving recommendations forward to NOP that will not only improve the practices used to keep GMOs out of organic seed, feed and crops, but will also clarify the standards and terminology used for making clear and consistent compliance determinations.

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,

Gwendolyn Wyard
Senior Director of Regulatory and Technical Affairs
Organic Trade Association

cc: Laura Batcha
Executive Director/CEO
Organic Trade Association