



October 7, 2014

Ms. Michelle Arsenault  
National Organic Standards Board  
USDA-AMS-NOP  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Room 2648-So., Ag Stop 0268  
Washington, DC 20250-0268

**Docket:** AMS-NOP-14-0063

**RE: Handling Subcommittee: Sunset 2015 Review of Gellan Gum**

Dear Ms. Arsenault:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comment on the Handling Subcommittee's proposal regarding the renewal of delisting of Gellan Gum on the National List as a "non-synthetic" allowed in "organic" and "made with organic (specified ingredients or food group(s))" products. As expressed in the proposal, the subcommittee has included a "motion to remove" Gellan Gum for the purpose of forwarding the proposal to the full Board for a vote. While the motion for consideration is to remove, the Subcommittee unanimously voted to renew Gellan Gum for another five years.

The Organic Trade Association (OTA<sup>1</sup>) is supportive of the Sunset process and the role it plays in driving innovation and the development of alternatives in the marketplace. We are confident that the Board will carefully consider the comments received, and base its final decision on the information presented by Board members, public comments and scientific data from other sources.

OTA supports the relisting of Gellan Gum on the National List provided: 1) it is essential to and compatible with organic production and handling practices; 2) there are no commercially available alternative materials (natural, organic) or practices; and 3) no new information has been submitted demonstrating adverse impacts on humans or the environment. Based on our outreach and the Sunset Surveys we have had in circulation since July 2014<sup>2</sup>, we are not aware of any organic (vegetarian) gums

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<sup>1</sup> 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 49 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 the growth of organic trade to benefit the environment, farmers, the public and the economy.

<sup>2</sup> OTA has created an electronic survey for each input under review for 2015 and 2016. We will be creating surveys for all of the 2017 materials as well. The surveys are user-friendly, available to **every NOP certificate holder**, and include 5-7 questions addressing the essentiality of the National List input under review. The goal is to collect information for NOSB to consider at the first stage of the two-step process to inform their recommendation, and again prior to the vote at the second meeting. The information collected will help OTA identify the inputs that should be **renewed or removed** from the National List and ultimately shape comments to NOSB.

in the marketplace that have the same unique properties, provide the same function, and would serve as a suitable alternative to Gellan Gum.

OTA believes it's important that the Board recognize that many companies voluntarily chose to remove Carrageenan from their products as result of the controversial discussions and information that came out of its Sunset review in 2012. Gellan Gum was identified as the acceptable and suitable alternative to Carrageenan; therefore, several companies invested into reformulating and relabeling their products to meet consumer demand. Because Gellan Gum is the choice alternative to Carrageenan and it is essential to the handling of many organic processed products, we request that the Board focus its attention on public comment whether any other suitable alternatives are available.

With respect to the classification of Gellan Gum, the processing methods and materials used appear to render the substance "non-synthetic" based on the National Organic Program's Draft Classification of Materials Guidance (NOP 5033). OTA agrees that the use of isopropyl alcohol does not render Gellan Gum "synthetic" since it does not bring about a chemical change and is removed from the product. It is only used to separate the finished Gellan Gum from the fermentation materials. If this remains a concern, OTA believes the most orderly approach would be to address the re-classification of gums and other similar substances such as alginates, agar-agar and gelatin as a group once the NOP guidance on the Classification of Materials is finalized.

In closing, we thank the Board for the time and commitment on this round of Sunset materials and wish to respectfully remind the Board that any decision must be transparent, non-arbitrary, and based on the best current information and in the interest of the organic sector and public at-large. Any final recommendation to remove a material from the National List must be justified by criteria established by the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA).

Again, on behalf of our members across the supply chain and the country, OTA thanks NOSB for the opportunity to comment and for your commitment to furthering organic agriculture.

Respectfully submitted,



Gwendolyn Wyard  
Regulatory Director of Organic Standards and Food Safety  
Organic Trade Association (OTA)

CC: Laura Batcha, Executive Director and CEO, Organic Trade Association (OTA)