



September 30, 2024

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

Docket: AMS-NOP-24-0023

**RE: Handling Subcommittee
Petitioned Material Discussion Document: Ethylene Annotation change**

Dear Ms. Arsenault:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comment on the Handling Subcommittee's Discussion Document on the proposed change to the Ethylene annotation. 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 offers the following input on the questions from the subcommittee:

1. Should HS consider this substance any differently than it does for ripening tropical fruit because in the petitioned use it would be inhibiting growth rather than encouraging it?

The subcommittee should apply the criteria outlined in 7 CFR § 205.600. None of these criteria differentiate between inhibiting or encouraging growth as allowable activities for substances. Several physical processes, such as temperature control, are already permitted in organic processing to both inhibit and encourage growth. Since this is not part of the regulatory criteria, it should not influence the NOSB's deliberations. The more relevant criterion is § 205.600(b), which states that the substance must be "essential for the handling of organically produced agricultural products."

OTA did not have extensive time to consult with its membership, but in our limited feedback we heard differing opinions on expanding the scope of ethylene usages. It could be beneficial for extending storage life and reducing waste in organic potatoes and onions however the benefit needs to be weighted against consumer expectations in the label. We have also heard from producers of onions that temporal controls have proven sufficient for their needs and do not see the expansion of ethylene's use as essential.

2. How should HS consider petitioned synthetic substances which may pose less of a human health concern than natural alternatives?

In evaluating a synthetic substance, under § 205.600(b)(1), the NOSB must evaluate alternative organic and natural substances, and under § 205.600(b)(3), the NOSB evaluates whether synthetic substances have adverse effects on human health. Additionally, § 205.600(a) references the

Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA), which includes the potential prohibition of a natural substance if it is “harmful to human health” (§ 6517 National List(c)(2)(A)(i)). While OFPA and the NOP regulations consider both natural and synthetic substances in terms of harm, they do not evaluate relative harm between different types of substances. However, human health impacts are clearly a priority, so the NOSB should weigh the relative harm of using a synthetic material versus the benefits of reducing harm to farm workers. OTA believes that minimizing harm to workers should take precedence over a strict preference for natural substances, in line with organic principles protecting farm and food worker safety (§ 6517 National List(c)(2)(A)(iii)). If a synthetic substance is essential for handling and is safer than a natural alternative, OFPA and § 205.600(b) could support its listing.

For this specific petition, we have heard concerns from some producers about the flammability of ethylene and its potential risks to workers. Similarly, while clove oil is natural, there are concerns about its health risks and effectiveness.

3. If the HS recommends an annotation change to ethylene to permit its use as a sprout inhibitor, should HS consider any additional revisions to the annotation related to ripening of tropical fruit or degreening citrus for these allowed uses to be more clear?

OTA does not have further input on this question.

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,



Scott Rice
Sr. Director, Regulatory Affairs
Organic Trade Association

cc: Tom Chapman
Co-CEO
Organic Trade Association