

Organic Advisory Board
of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
Division of Agriculture and Resource Marketing

Minutes of Public Meeting of November 15, 2010

Meeting Location: RI DEM Division of Agriculture
Room 370 Conference Room
235 Promenade Street
Providence, RI 02908

Members Present: Brian Simmons, Dan Lawton, Peter Susi, Robert Mastin

Members Absent: Erik Eacker

Staff Present: Ken Ayars, Scott Marshall, Matt Green (RIDEM/Agriculture)

Others Present: Eric Boettger (USDA NRCS)

The meeting began at 10:05 a.m. at the Division of Agriculture, 235 Promenade Street, Providence, RI. A quorum of board members was present.

Board members present designated a Vice-Chairperson of the Board to act as Chairperson in the absence of the Chairperson.

Peter Susi made a motion, seconded by Brian Simmons, to designate Dan Lawton as Vice-Chairperson of the Organic Advisory Board. The motion was approved unanimously.

Dan Lawton made a motion, seconded by Brian Simmons, to approve the minutes from the OAB meeting of January 25, 2010, without corrections. The motion was approved unanimously.

USDA NRCS programs for organic and transitional farms were presented by Eric Boettger. Conservation Activity Plans were discussed. Conservation plan supporting organic transition plan criteria, and Guidance for selection of conservation practices to support organic operations were presented. Rhode Island NRCS and DEM Division of Agriculture will continue to coordinate information between programs and in particular relating to pasture/grazing plans and documentation required of livestock producers by the NOP Pasture Rule.

Matt Green informed that the USDA organic certification cost-share programs administered by the Division are in effect in 2010-2011, through which eligible operations may apply for partial reimbursement of organic certification fees. USDA allocated to Rhode Island \$20,000 through the AMA program to reimburse eligible crops and livestock producers, and \$15,000 through the National program to reimburse eligible handlers in Rhode Island 75%, up to \$750, of the cost of certification or continuation of certification received from 10/1/10 through 9/30/11. Draft procedural guidelines from USDA NOP for cost share programs were discussed.

Results of, and response to, the 2010 NOP mid-term on-site audit of the RIDEM Organic Certification Program were presented and discussed.

A proposal was presented by DEM Organic Program staff for a change to application requirements which was identified by the NOP audit as a potential improvement point, namely the addition of the requirement of farms applying for continuation of certification to submit a full organic farm (crops) plan (RICO form 102) periodically. Farms updating their organic crops category certification currently submit an update questionnaire (RICO form 103) annually including any changes to the original full organic farm plan and previous updates. Submitting a full organic farm plan periodically would improve efficiency of plan reviews and recordkeeping by applicants and the certifier. Fillable PDF forms have been created which would facilitate submission of forms.

Dan Lawton made a motion, seconded by Brian Simmons, recommending that the submission of the Rhode Island Certified Organic Farm (crops) Plan Questionnaire (RICO form 102) be a requirement every three (3) years for farms applying for continuation (update) of certification. The motion was approved unanimously.

2010 certification fees and application deadlines were discussed. Matt Green informed that maintaining the fee for certification at \$200 is expected to cover estimated fees to be charged by USDA to the Division to maintain organic certifier accreditation in 2011; the submission deadline for producer applications of March 15, and for handler update applications prior to the date of the handler's certification, with \$50 application fee, and the remaining \$150 invoiced prior to inspection, was administered in 2010 and could be maintained in 2011.

Dan Lawton made a motion, seconded by Brian Simmons, to recommend keeping the 2011 application deadline for producers at March 15, and for handler updates prior to their date of certification, and fees for certification at \$200, with \$50 due at application and \$150 invoiced prior to inspection, which would cover the cost of the Division to maintain certifier accreditation. The motion was approved unanimously.

National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) Livestock Committee Organic Apiculture Recommendation of 8/17/10 was reviewed and discussed.

Methods of promoting certified status of certified organic operators at farmers markets were discussed. Dan Lawton suggested the possibility of a NOFA-RI educational initiative such as creation of a pamphlet explaining the meaning of organic. It was suggested that the source of funding for such an initiative could potentially be through a federal grant.

Dan Lawton made a motion, seconded by Brian Simmons, to recommend the next OAB meeting be scheduled for Monday, January 24, 2011, at 10:00 a.m. The motion was approved unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 12:05 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Matt Green
Supervisor of Insect Pest and Plant Disease Control
RIDEM Division of Agriculture