SUBMISSION

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Submission on: **Consultation Document on the proposed National Organic Standard**

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Introduction

The Animal and Plant Health Association of New Zealand (Animal and Plant Health NZ) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Consultation Document on the proposed National Organic Standard (the Standard).

Aphanz is the peak industry association representing more than 86 multinational and New Zealand based companies that manufacture, distribute, and sell crop protection and animal health products that keep our animals healthy and crops thriving. Our mission is to protect and enhance the health of crops, animals, and the environment, through innovation and the responsible use of quality products and services.

1 Key Recommendations

1.1 Animal and Plant Health NZ recommends that, to clarify the intent of the Standard document and that the following changes are made, namely:

a) The Standard is missing an overview of who is the audience the Standard is intended for. For instance,
   i) Who should read and follow the standard (organic producers or intending organic producers or certifiers of organic standards etc.);
   ii) Where does the standard fit in the New Zealand context to meet both international and domestic approval;
   iii) What is the process for seeking approval to the Standard and who will administer the Standard;
   iv) What legal standing does the Standard have in New Zealand law (presuming that the Standard is issued under Organic Products and Production Act 2023 although this is not stated in the document).

b) The Standard is a mix of principle, regulation, and guidance. The colour coding has assisted greatly in defining the differences. However, the guidance and supplementary notices are considered as one section, although guidance is not enforceable and supplementary notices are enforceable. It would be advisable to separate the two, with supplementary notices aligning with regulation (enforceable).

1.2 An appendix of definitions should be provided for those terms for which there are several interpretations, including the term organic. The Australian National Standard for Organic and Bio-Dynamic Produce have a comprehensive list of commonly agreed definitions of terms. Specific definitions and guidance are sought in section 2 of this document, where the lack of definitions will cause confusion for approved inputs into an organic system.

1.3 Input specifications are required. Section 9.5 refers to *Use of Inputs* but does not define what acceptable inputs are or provide examples. It may be that this consultation process is enquiring as to what inputs are sought or require guidance.

   i) Organisations such as BioGro certify as organic various weed, pest and fertiliser applications as inputs that meet international organic standards under the BioGro Processed Product Certification. However, consultation on the Standard does not ask for comment on the current input certification process or standard or reference any current approved inputs.
   ii) A stepped approach and further consultation are required should there be any changes to currently approved inputs.

2 Animal and Plant Health NZ supports changes to the below sections of the Standard.

2.1 Section 3.5 Prohibitions

2.1.1 We note that in this section it is proposed that the following are prohibited for use in organic production methods (including growing, manufacturing or processing) and must not be used in products labelled as organic:

- *Genetically Engineered (GE)/ Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)*

- *All materials and/or the products produced from genetically engineered or modified organisms are not consistent with the principles of organic production and are prohibited in organic production and processing systems.*

We presume that this section restricts which veterinary medicines can be used as described in section 5.6 and which plants (section 4.2) and seeds (section 4.3) can be used as inputs. Assuming it does, a clear definition of a GMO and 'the products of genetically engineered or modified organisms' needs to be added.

We note that the definition of a Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) could reference the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act, but that act only covers viable organisms. As the scope of the Standard includes the products produced from genetically engineered or modified organisms it needs to include a detailed definition of these products. This is a complex area, and the definition needs to provide clarity on the following questions:

iii) Does this mean the direct products of genetically modified organisms? Or anything with genetically modified organisms at any stage of production of any of the components? Or something in between?

For example: which of the following would count as products of genetically modified organisms?

(1) A synthetic pharmaceutical active ingredient for which one of the starting materials used the synthesis is derived from a genetically modified organism; or
(2) A product containing an excipient derived from a genetically modified organism (e.g., soya bean oil);or
(3) A vaccine containing inactivated genetically modified bacteria; or
(4) A vaccine containing purified, inactivated bacterial antigen from a bacterium which is not genetically modified, but was grown in media containing genetically modified ingredients; or
(5) An enzyme (e.g., papain or trypsin) produced by recombinant bacteria is used to digest meat, which is used to make growth medium, which is used to grow bacteria, which are inactivated, purified, and incorporated into a vaccine. Is that vaccine a product of genetically modified organisms; or
(6) Veterinary medicines for which genetic modification is involved in the manufacture in even more abstract ways than the above examples; or
(7) An agricultural compound or veterinary medicine produced in a facility which also uses genetically modified organisms or the products of genetically modified organisms.

2.2 Synthetic/Non-synthetic definition throughout the document

2.2.1 We note the wording seems to assume all veterinary medicines are synthetic, which is not the case. The terms synthetic and non-synthetic need to be clearly defined and then wording of sentences containing non-synthetic and synthetic need to be reviewed for accuracy.

2.2.2 We note that some veterinary medicines are listed as “allowable inputs” in the Australian organic standard – for example fermentation product that are not “synthetic”. We would like to see clear recognition that some non-synthetic veterinary medicines may be considered “allowable” for organic farms, and not require the additional WHPs or other controls.

2.2.3 Related to the above comments, who will be responsible for determining if any given agricultural compound or veterinary medicine can be used on an organic farm? Will the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) as a government agency providing oversite of this Standard provide this service, to either farmers, processors, or registrants? We note that if anyone else is going to do this then MPI will need to publish detailed methodology.

2.3 Section 4.2.1 Plant Requirements

2.2.1 Section 4.2.1 proposes in the regulation that ‘*non-organic plant material must be grown for a minimum of 12 months in compliance with this Standard for conversion*’.

This statement is confusing as to what a *non-organic plant* is and if the statement is referring to a plant that is not certified as organic.

2.3.1 Section 4.2.1 Refers to ‘*notifying a Recognised Entity’*. It is unclear what a ‘Recognised Entity’ is in the document, but there is a reference defined in the Organic Production and Products Act. However, the act is not sited in the document as a reference and there is no definitions appendix.

2.3.2 Section 4.2.1 does not recognise plants that are certified as organic that are planted in an area not zoned organic and seeking to gain organic certification status.

2.4 Section 5.6 Health Management Treatment

Section 5.6 notes that “*non-synthetic treatments should be used in preference, provided that their therapeutic effect is effective for the species of animal, and the condition for which the treatment is intended*.”

2.4.1 We believe that this statement and approach is not strict enough to ensure that the initial non-synthetic treatment is likely to be effective. We submit that non-synthetic treatments should also have "scientific evidence backing their efficacy". Otherwise, there is concern that there could be use of treatments that are not scientifically tested and not likely to be effective, which could delay the use of effective products and so increases the risk of treatment failure and lengthens animal suffering.

2.5 Use of the term *Batch*

A batch of poultry or small animals seems odd terminology. We suggest using *flock* for poultry and *group* for small animals.

About Animal and Plant Health NZ

Our objectives are to:

- Strive for effective and sustainable animal health and crop protection technology through industry leadership and advocacy.
- Achieve a balanced and science-based regulatory environment that gives members freedom to operate and grow in New Zealand.
- Enable farmers and growers to supply high quality food and fibre into domestic and global markets.
- Create an environment that encourages competition through innovation.
- Promote stewardship and responsible use of products.
- Support the health and wellbeing of pets, livestock, and people.

References

1. Australian National Standard for Organic and Bio-Dynamic Produce, Edition 3.8, November 2022.

2. Organic Production and Products Act , April 2023