

NATIONAL ORGANIC PROGRAM RESPONSE TO 2020 PEER REVIEW

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FROM: Jennifer Tucker, Ph.D.
Deputy Administrator
National Organic Program (NOP)

SUBJECT: National Organic Program Response to 2020 Peer Review

Background

The peer review process is a vital component of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service National Organic Program's (NOP) commitment to continuous improvement. The peer review process is described in [NOP 1031 "Peer Review of National Organic Program \(NOP\) Accreditation."](#) For its 2020 peer review, the NOP contracted with the ANSI National Accreditation Board (ANAB). The 2020 ANAB Peer Review Panel evaluated NOP's compliance with NOP accreditation procedures and decisions, and with ISO/IEC 17011, a quality standard.

Overall, the ANAB auditors found that NOP and its staff are in compliance with NOP's own policies and procedures, and ISO/IEC 17011.

Opportunities for Improvement

Below is NOP's summary of ANAB's recommended two areas for improvement.

1. **Documented Assessment Procedure.** The NOP does not have a documented policy or procedure for the timely completion of accreditation assessments.
2. **Satellite Office Process.** The NOP does not have a defined process for completing certifier satellite office assessments as part of the accreditation cycle.

NOP Response

Since the 2019 Peer Review was completed, NOP has focused significant resources on addressing personnel needs, quality management improvements, and developing training. In response to the two opportunities for improvement, the NOP is implementing the following changes:

1. **Documented Assessment Procedure.** The NOP has successfully expanded the Accreditation Division by hiring additional Accreditation Managers and Auditors. The increase in personnel resources has already supported the division in meeting timely assessment completion goals. In 2020, the NOP successfully conducted 54 audits and assessments of certifiers. To support this ongoing progress, the NOP will develop and

document an official timeline with goals for the assessment process.

2. **Satellite Office Process.** The NOP continues to audit certifier satellite offices on a regular basis. In response to the observation that the NOP doesn't have a defined process for satellite office audits, the NOP will document an official satellite office audit policy to help clarify the process already in use. The official satellite office audit policy will reflect the ongoing risk-based oversight approaches currently in development. The NOP's expansion of the Accreditation Division included the new position of an Audit Supervisor. Having a position dedicated to overseeing the certifier audit schedule supports the division in implementing a risk-based satellite office audit policy.

Next Steps

The NOP values the constructive feedback from ANAB. We take continuous improvement seriously and will continue to evolve our process controls and planning. By focusing on quality and risk-aware accreditation processes, the NOP continues to support the organic community and maintain organic integrity for all.