

Senate agriculture committee moves organic legislation forward

Legislation directing the creation of a national organic food certification program was passed on April 27 by the Senate Agriculture Committee as part of its 1990 Farm Bill package. The document calls for a USDA "organically produced" label for agricultural products that meet federal standards. States could set tougher criteria than the federal standards, but could not restrict sales of USDA-certified products from another state.

A 13-member National Organic Standards Board would advise the USDA on standards. In the proposal, USDA would be able to collect fees from certifying agents to help defray the costs of the program. An administrative appeals process allows citizens to petition USDA regarding provisions of the act. A three-year national committee would advise USDA on establishing a national organic promotion program.

The USDA, which opposes the legislation, has instead proposed forming a national commission to study the most effective means to establish a national organic standards program. While the bill unanimously passed the Senate Committee, the House organic certification bill (H.R. 4156) is not yet included in the House Farm Bill package.

"We have come a long way in building consensus on the development of a national organic certification program," Senate Agriculture Committee staffer Kathleen Merrigan said in reporting the action. "Now the focus shifts to the House Agriculture Committee." Direct comments and information queries to Merrigan at the Senate Agriculture Committee, 328-A Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, DC 20510.

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