

USDA Recognizes WSDA and OMRI For Evaluating Materials

by Jeremy O'Brien

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I am often asked by growers if the materials in our organic product line are OMRI (Organic Materials Review Institute) approved for use in organic production. My answer is always the same, “No, our products are not approved by OMRI; we have chosen to use the WSDA (Washington State Department of Agriculture) for approval under the NOP (National Organic Program) guidelines. The NOP guidelines are used by any NOP-accredited certifying agency in determining if materials qualify for certified organic production within the United States.”

As you all are aware, prior to the USDA stepping in and making the guidelines universal under the National Organic Program (NOP) there was much confusion in the marketplace as to what could and could not be used. OMRI was a big player, and many companies used them as a certifying body. OMRI uses the same set of standards that all of the other USDA NOP accredited certifying agencies use in determining if a product is acceptable for organic production. Up until February 2008 there was still a great deal of confusion whether or not OMRI was

recognized by the USDA as a certifying agency.

The following text is taken from the WSDA Organic Quarterly with permission: *“During the January 2008 National Association of State Organic Programs (NASOP) annual meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, USDA National Organic Program (NOP) officials stated that certifiers could not rely on the materials registration programs operated by the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) and the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA). Because of the complexity in determining which materials are approved and prohibited under the National Organic Standards, OMRI and WSDA have developed material registration programs that are based on international quality management systems and the National Organic Standards. OMRI and WSDA evaluate hundreds of materials and publish lists that specify which brand name material are allowed for use on organic production and handling. Certification agencies, organic producers and handlers rely on these lists to make certification decisions. The USDA National Organic Program does not have the resources or the expertise to do this work. The OMRI and WSDA brand name lists have been used as an industry standard for many years*

and are widely recognized for the quality of their work by certifiers, producers, handlers and the industry that produces the materials.

*In late February, NASOP President Miles McEvoy and OMRI Executive Director Dace DeCou met with the NOP Program Manager Barbara Robinson to try to resolve this problem. As a result of the meeting **USDA issued a statement on March 5, 2008 that clarified that accredited certifying agents could utilize OMRI and WSDA brand name lists for evaluating materials used in organic production and handling.** [emphasis added] Organic producers and handlers certified by WSDA may utilize materials approved by either WSDA or OMRI in their organic systems. Over the next year, OMRI and WSDA will be working with USDA to develop an accreditation program for material evaluation programs.”*

Essentially what this says is that the USDA will now accept OMRI approval of materials for organic production as well as any of the NOP-accredited certifying agencies. The Metalosate Amino Acid Soluble Powder products are all registered materials for use in Organic Production anywhere in the United States by the Washington State Department of Agriculture. 