



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
P.O. Box 42560 • Olympia, Washington 98504-2560 • (360) 902-1800

August 30, 2010

RE: Use of Compost on Organic Farms

The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) Organic Program is accredited to certify organic producers and handlers in accordance with the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Organic Program (NOP) Rule, 7 CFR Part 205.

WSDA Organic Program has not received reports or residue sampling results that suggest crops grown on currently certified organic farms have been contaminated by the use of approved composts. However, the recent detection of herbicides in dairy manure compost in Whatcom County, Washington has spurred questions regarding the organic standards and the use of compost by certified organic operations.

Can compost made from non-organic animal manure be used on a certified organic site?

Yes. The NOP regulations support the use of composted plant and animal materials to maintain or improve soil organic matter. The regulations specify that the use of nonsynthetic (natural) materials in compost is allowed. These natural inputs *are not* required to be from certified organic sources.

Compost used on certified organic land must be made from approved feed stocks. Approved feed stocks for compost include:

- Plant and animal materials, such as crop residues, animal manure, food waste, yard waste;
- Newspaper or other recycled paper that does not contain glossy or colored ink.

Compost produced with prohibited feed stocks such as urea, recycled wallboard, or sewage sludge is prohibited.

Does the use of compost that has been found to have residues of prohibited substances jeopardize the organic status of the farm that used the compost?

No. A certified organic farm will not lose their organic certification for the use of compost that is produced from approved feed stocks. WSDA Organic Program has not suspended or revoked the organic certification for any farm for the use of composts made from approved feed stocks.

The NOP regulations were established with recognition that background levels of synthetic pesticides may be present in the environment and, therefore, may be present in organic

production systems. This is referred to as unavoidable residual environmental contamination (UREC) in the regulations.

Furthermore, the NOP regulations are process-based and do not mandate zero tolerance for synthetic pesticide residues in agricultural inputs such as compost. If residue testing of a crop from a certified site detects unavoidable residual environmental contamination at levels greater than 5 percent of the Environmental Protection Agency's tolerance for the specific substance, the crop itself may not be sold, labeled, or represented as organic. An investigation regarding the cause of the contamination is also required.

How can I find out more information about the requirements for organic certification and the labeling of products as “organic”?

If you have any questions about organic certification, or the requirements for producing organic products, please contact the Organic Program Staff at:

Phone: 360-902-1805

E-mail: organic@agr.wa.gov

Website: <http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/Organic/>

Additional Resources:

Washington State Department of Agriculture Pesticide Management Division

<http://agr.wa.gov/PestFert/>, Phone: (360) 902-2038, E-mail: RSchoen-Nessa@agr.wa.gov

Washington State Department of Agriculture Food Safety Program

<http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/FSP/>, Phone: (360) 902-1876, E-mail: foodsafety@agr.wa.gov

USDA National Organic Program (USDA NOP)

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/nop>, Phone: 202-720-3252

The NOP website includes organic regulations, a current list of USDA-NOP accredited certifying agents, consumer information, and guidance on the interpretation of the National Organic Standards.

“The Allowance of Green Waste in Organic Production Systems” (NOP 5016)

http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/Organic/docs/nop_5016_green_waste_compost_4.10.9df.pdf

This USDA National Organic Program document clarifies the requirements around the use of green waste compost that may contain contaminants.

Bioassay Test for Herbicide Residues in Compost: Protocol for Gardeners and Researchers in Washington State

<http://www.puyallup.wsu.edu/soilmgmt/Pubs/CloBioassay.pdf>

Washington State University and Washington State Department of Ecology Publication, 2002.