

# **Compost and the new National Organic Program**

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Lehigh County(PA)

Office of Solid Waste and Recycling

# History

- 1990 Congress passes Organic Foods Production Act
- 1997 First proposed rule  
286,000 comments later...
- 2000 Revised proposed rule
- 2001 Rule becomes final

## **Subpart C. Organic production and handling requirements**

### **§205.203 Soil fertility and crop nutrient management practice standard**

- Manage plant and animal materials to improve soil organic matter and prevent contamination
  - raw manure
  - composted plant and animal materials
  - uncomposted plant materials

## **Compost definition (§205.2)**

**“The product of a managed process through which microorganisms break down plant and animal materials into more available forms suitable for application to the soil. Compost must be produced through a process that combines plant and animal materials with an initial C:N ratio of between 25:1 and 40:1. Producers using an in-vessel or static aerated pile system must maintain the composting materials at a temperature between 131°F and 170°F for three days. Producers using a windrow system must maintain the composting materials at a temperature between 131°F and 170°F for 15 days, during which time, the materials must be turned a minimum of five times.”**

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# Compost cannot contain:

- Any synthetic substance not included on the National List
- Sewage sludge (biosolids)

# Problems:

- Overly simplistic--too narrow
- ineffective
  - good composts not allowed
  - bad composts meet definition
- vagaries allows for inconsistent application
- discourages small scale and/or on-farm production

# What happens now?

3 components of a certification process:

- standards--in place (final rule)
- producers--farmers
- certifying agent

**NOP hopes to publish list by April 2002**

**Farmers must meet Federal standards at  
next annual inspection (for 2003)**

# What's next?

- NOP is aware of issue
  - comments received from diverse groups:  
USCC, NCSA, NOFA-NY
- NOSB Crops Committee Composting Task Force
  - Recommendations due at May NOSB meeting
  - Short term and long term solutions

# NOSB Composting Task Force

- Short term:
  - Reinterpretation to allow flexibility
  - Issue guidance document
- Long term:
  - Revise regulations
  - Address compost teas, vermicompost

# Summary

- Compost is a cornerstone of organic production
- Use caution when accepting feedstocks
- Test your compost
  - Simple bioassay
- Work with your local certifier

# Contacts

- Local
  - David Engel, Midwest Organic Services Association, Inc. (608) 734 -3349  
mosa@mwt.net
  - Ann Roth, WI Dept of Ag., 608-224-5043  
rothab@wheel.datcp.state.wi.us
- Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI)
  - (541) 343-7600, info@omri.org
  - extensive testing and documentation required