



September 3, 2019

TO: the Honorable Phyllis Fong, USDA Office of Inspector General
RE: Request for Investigation of the National Organic Program

Dear Ms. Fong,

OrganicEye is requesting that your office investigate officials at the USDA's National Organic Program (NOP) for willfully ignoring a bona fide tip of a fraudulent grain shipment before it arrived and was subsequently unloaded or uninspected, at a US port.

Specifically, on May 3, 2019, the Organic Farmers Association was informed that a ship loaded in Turkey was in transit to a North Carolina port and that the USDA's National Organic Program had been alerted, through the filing of a formal legal complaint, of its likely fraudulent cargo. Apparently, doing nothing more than communicating with the certifiers involved, and possibly reviewing paperwork, the NOP deemed the cargo was legitimate.

The NOP had the opportunity to request that Customs and Border Protection, and the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, both intervene to do inspection/testing but failed to avail themselves of the opportunity.

To illustrate the risk to the integrity of the American organic market that this shipment presented, the apparent certifier involved, Control Union, lost its accreditation just days later on May 9.

Investigations by NGOs and the Washington Post have documented widespread fraud in grains imported from a number of countries, principally Turkey, and the NOP publicly responded that it would be implementing aggressive oversight to prevent repeat occurrences. The North Carolina incident makes that commitment appear to have been hyperbole.

We respectfully request your office review of this incident and the capability and willingness of the USDA's National Organic Program to carry out its congressional mandate to protect ethical organic industry participants, and American consumers, from fraud.

Please keep us apprised of your findings.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark A. Kastel", with a horizontal line drawn through it.

Mark A. Kastel
Director

OrganicEye
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