

For Immediate Release:
August 31, 2010

Proposed Canadian Organic Aquaculture Standard Opposed by Over 40 North American Organizations

“Organic” Label for Farmed Fish Fails to Meet Consumer Expectations and Environmental Principles

VANCOUVER, BC – Over 40 organizations from across Canada and the U.S. submitted a joint letter opposing the Canada General Standards Board (CGSB) proposed organic standards that allow antibiotic and chemical treatments of farmed fish. The signatories reflect a broad cross section of the scientific, conservation, consumer, and organic communities, and represent a collective membership of over one million people. The CGSB period for public comment closed yesterday and a revised draft of the standard will soon be released.

The joint letter outlines concerns that the draft standard is contrary to the basic principles of organics as it would allow certification of net pen farmed salmon – a practice that has been shown through published scientific research to negatively impact wild salmon and marine ecosystems. The proposed standards cover seaweed, shellfish, closed containment and net pens. However, the weakest sections of the standards relate to the production of fish, which grant organic certification to net pens with minimal changes to current, conventional practices. The use of antibiotics and chemical sea lice treatments are allowed in the standards and key environmental impacts of net pens are unaddressed.

“The use of antibiotics and chemicals, and the acceptance of conventional practices that we know are harming wild salmon and the marine ecosystem is completely contrary to organic principles and what consumers have come to expect when choosing organic,” said Shauna MacKinnon of Living Oceans Society.

The proposed organic aquaculture standards would allow:

- A product treated with antibiotics and pesticides to be sold as "organic";
- The spread of disease and parasites lethal to wild fish;
- Uncontrolled disposal of fish feces into the ocean;
- A weak definition of what constitutes a sustainable fishery with corresponding unlimited use of "sustainable" wild fish in feed. Since operations use substantially more wild fish in feed than farmed salmon produced, this allows farmed fish to be certified “organic” despite contributing to a net loss of marine protein and drain on already strained global fish stocks;
- Up to 30 percent of feed from non-organic, unsustainable sources if organic sources are unavailable, as opposed to 100 percent organic feed currently required for other livestock;
- Escapes of farmed fish that compete or interbreed with wild fish; and
- Lethal interactions with marine mammals.

“Consumers deserve clear assurance that their choice of organic products supports a safer and more sustainable environment. Fish labeled as “organic” that are not fed 100 percent organic feed, come from polluting open net pen systems, or that are contaminated with mercury or PCBs fall significantly short of expectations for organic products,” said Dr. Urvashi Rangan, Director of Technical Policy at Consumers Union, one of the groups which have signed on to the letter.

Weak standards threaten the integrity of the organic label and negate efforts to produce legitimately organic products. In order to protect consumers from weak foreign certifications, California has prohibited the labeling of seafood as organic until the U.S. has its own standards for seafood products. However, this is not the case for the rest of the U.S. and Canada. In addition, the proposed Canadian standard sets a significantly lower bar for environmental and consumer standards than the recommendations for organic aquaculture standards passed by the U.S. National Organic Standards Board in 2008, which do not allow net pens where they could impact the reproduction or migratory routes of wild fish or other marine life and do not allow any antibiotics or pesticides to be used.

Canada and the U.S. currently have an equivalency agreement for organic standards and there is concern that Canadian aquaculture standards that set a low bar will put downward pressure on U.S. standards as they go through the final approval process with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Read the joint letter and view the signatories at:

<http://www.farmedanddangerous.org/uploads/File/news-releases/CGSB-organics-joint-letter.pdf>

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