Soil & Health Association (Est. 1941)
Healthy Soil, Healthy Food, Healthy People

To: Organics Consultation, Ministry for Primary Industries

OrganicsConsultation@mpi.govt.nz

Submission on: **'Consultation document on the proposed National Organic Standard April 2023'**

From: The Soil & Health Association of New Zealand

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About Soil & Health

The Soil and Health Association of New Zealand (Soil & Health) is the largest membership organisation supporting organic food and farming in New Zealand, and one of the oldest organic organisations in the world, established in 1941. Soil & Health is essentially the parent organisation for organics in New Zealand. We own BioGro New Zealand Limited, New Zealand's leading organic certifier, and we were involved in founding Organic Farm New Zealand Incorporated, New Zealand's only domestic certifier offering a low-cost Participatory Guarantee System for small-scale producers and processors.

Soil & Health has held the vision of an organic New Zealand for longer than any organisation (80 years) and we are committed to advocating our maxim "Oranga Nuku – Oranga Kai – Oranga Tāngata: Healthy Soil – Healthy Food – Healthy People". Our bimonthly magazine is entitled Organic NZ. We represent both organic consumers and producers.

Introduction

We appreciate that this is a first draft which will later be officially worded by the Parliamentary Counsel Office (PCO). However, this draft requires some changes before it is ready to be handed over to the PCO. At this stage we see three main categories which still need to be worked through methodically:

1. Issues of clarity, i.e. where the organic sector and MPI agree on what should be allowable under the standard, but where sections need to be rewritten to give them greater clarity and rigour, e.g. section 3.5 on the prohibition of genetically modified organisms.
2. Issues of potential disagreement, i.e. where organic sector stakeholders may not agree on what should be allowable under the standard, e.g. section 4.5.1 the use of treated seeds.
3. Improvements in structure, i.e. the document needs a cohesive structure and consistent language throughout, and needs to be underpinned by a full set of principles and definitions.

The first category of issues will be relatively easy to get right as long as enough expertise is available to complete the review. Time and resources are an issue here.

The second category will require comparative studies. Justifications will need to be made to the different stakeholders and ultimately to our international trading partners under future equivalency negotiations. If not resolved, these could be controversial and may impact on the implementation of the standard.

The third category requires that the document be brought together coherently under clear guiding principles, in a way that leaves no gaps and no room for error or vagueness in interpretation.

In our detailed submission below, we cover only some examples of 1. issues of clarity. We cover several of 2. the issues of disagreement, highlighting clearly what we think is acceptable and what we think is not. We also cover some of the issues of coherence by going into the organic principles and the overall structure of the document.

There has not been enough time during this consultation round to cover all the detailed rewriting that needs to be done. The document currently has a “pieced together” feel to it, which reflects the volunteer effort of many interested parties who took part in the various working groups, which we do appreciate. However, it now needs to be properly peer reviewed, internationally compared, and polished to a consistent whole. We would be happy to do a further detailed review of the draft standard, but would require funding to support further work.

We also note that we have not been consulted on the supplementary notices and we expect to be able to have a reasonable amount of time to assess these at a future date.

Section by section review

Definitions section

At the front end of the document there needs to be a Glossary of Terms or Definitions section so that there is clarity on what the subsequent sections mean. This should be a relatively complete glossary including any terms which may be misunderstood or misinterpreted by users of the standard. This is important for those who are new to organics, such as new operators using the standard for the first time, as well as for recognised entities who will regularly use the standard for detailed interpretation.

A starting list for terms that need to be defined (we have suggestions on some of them below):

- Genetically Engineered (GE)/ Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)
- Irradiation (Ionizing radiation)
- Synthetic substances
- Nanotechnology / Nanomaterials
- Sewage and human waste
- Hydroponics
- Cage
- Landless production systems
- Container growing
- Commercial compost
- Course of treatment
- Quarantine area

Genetic engineering (GE) and genetically modified organism (GMO) definitions

GE and genetically modified organisms (GMO) are specifically prohibited in this draft document, which is appropriate, however there is no definition provided.

The main definition in NZ law for **genetic engineering** is found in the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms (HSNO) Act 1996. This definition is further clarified by the exclusions in regulations (SR 1998/219). These regulations have an exclusion of at least one technique (use of siRNA) that ***is*** currently considered to be GE under the organic standards of several of our trading partners, and would therefore already preclude equivalence of organic standards, if we were to use this definition.

The National Organic Standard must have its own independent definition of GE/GMO and this must be able to be reviewed independently of any other government body that has authority over another NZ law (such as the EPA over the HSNO Act). If the GE/GMO definition under the Organic Products and Production Act and the HSNO Act are linked together under the jurisdiction of the EPA there will be significant risks to organic practice and to international organic trade, because the EPA can and has made decisions that are inconsistent with organic principles and international organic standards. There should be an independent Organic Standards authority which regularly reviews the standards, with a particular focus on areas of science that move quickly, such as genetic engineering.

The Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code 1.5.2 defines **gene technology** very broadly as ‘recombinant DNA techniques that alter the heritable genetic material of living cells or organisms’, but has insufficient detail for this standard.

Along with our partners in the OANZ Standards Technical Group, Soil & Health has been working on an adequate GE/GMO definition for New Zealand which is more detailed than and different from the HSNO Act 1996 definition, plus its exclusions. We support the OANZ submission's definitions of genetic engineering and genetically modified organism.

Nanotechnology definition (Nanomaterials)

The same issues arise with nanotechnology and nanomaterials as with genetic engineering: a prohibition exists in the draft, but there is no definition of what nanotechnology is, or what a nanomaterial is. The default in NZ would be the HSNO Act, with the EPA as the adjudicator. The HSNO definition of nanomaterial, which is contained in the Cosmetic Product Standards that sit under the Act, is much narrower than the IFOAM definition.

HSNO definition of nanomaterials: Nanomaterial means an insoluble or biopersistent and intentionally manufactured material with one or more external dimensions, or an internal structure, on the scale from 1 to 100nm (Cosmetic Products Group Standard 2020 HSR002552).

NZ would again risk international equivalence of organic standards if it relied on the HSNO Act definition. Australian national organic standards use the IFOAM definition, and this is one that Soil & Health would support.

IFOAM definition of nanomaterials: Substances deliberately designed, engineered and produced by human activity to be in the nanoscale range (approximately 1-300 nm) because of very specific properties or compositions (e.g. shape, surface properties, or chemistry) that result only in that nanoscale. Incidental particles in the nanoscale range created during traditional food processing such as homogenization, milling, churning, and freezing and naturally occurring particles in the nanoscale range are not intended to be included in this definition (IFOAM. 2011. The Use of Nanotechnologies and Nanomaterials in Organic Agriculture, https://www.ifoam.bio/use-nanotechnologies-and-nanomaterials-organic-agriculture).

3.1 Scope

This section needs to be written logically in a way that reflects standard biological categories. It needs to include microbes/microbial products, and also fibre products. It has a lot of gaps, based on what flows below it in the different sections.

Suggested alternative:

'This National Organic Standard (this Standard) applies to products from primary production and processing that are foods, beverages or fibres from plant, animal, fungal and/or microbial origins. This includes products, ingredients in products, and inputs to the production of products to be sold for human or animal consumption, where labelling, advertising material or commercial documents claim the product, its production or its ingredients as 'organic'.

This Standard covers:

Processed and unprocessed versions of:

a. plant products (including seeds and propagating material),

b. fungi (including mushrooms and yeasts),

c. live animals

d. animal products (including meat, milk, wool, hair, honey, etc.),

e. aquaculture products and algae (including aquatic animals, seaweeds, etc.),

f. agricultural products for use as feed or food

g. biological inputs to organic production systems

This Standard specifies the minimum requirements for the production, handling, processing and labelling of organic products.'

We think that the scope should include some inputs to organic production, i.e. biologically derived ones like compost. Certain kinds of inputs allowed in organic production will need to be verified under the Act and therefore are themselves organic products. As a result, Section 9 will need changing.

3.3 Principles

This still needs a lot of work. It is important that this section is rewritten within the framework of Te Tiriti o Waitangi using the IFOAM principles of Health, Ecology, Fairness and Care to ensure international coherence.

Here is the guide to the IFOAM principles: https://www.ifoam.bio/why-organic/shaping-agriculture/four-principles-organic

The IFOAM principles are consensus-based and well accepted.

This current set of principles in the draft document omits some important values within the set of four IFOAM principles, e.g. the necessity of both science and traditional and indigenous knowledge to offer valid solutions.

Organic products, whether raw or processed, come from organic agriculture. This was the rationale behind adding in the word 'and Production' to the Organic Products ***and Production*** Act. Therefore, the IFOAM definition of organic agriculture should feature in the principles section.

https://www.ifoam.bio/why-organic/organic-landmarks/definition-organic

Should some of the current wording of this section be retained we wish to draw attention to the two following statements.

This statement is problematic: 'Organic production systems encourage self-sufficiency rather than reliance on external measures or inputs and non-renewable resources, that is, working as far as practicable within a closed system by conserving, recycling and efficient use of nutrients, water, and other material.' This statement implies a preference for farms to work in isolation, for disconnection and a lack of cooperation across the productive landscape, and for a lack of openness to positive external influences. It is also not realistic. Farms are not ever completely closed systems. In many cases organic input suppliers will collect and process inputs for organic growers and farmers that do not have the total resources on their land to achieve desired and beneficial outcomes (e.g. seaweed

for inland pastures). The principle of not wasting or losing resources to soil or water is touched on here, but it should not be tied to the ideal of being insular and closed.

This statement requires clarification: 'Organic management practices use cultural, biological and mechanical methods where possible for pest, weed and disease management. These practices encourage a balance and growth of beneficial microbial and insect populations.'

What about small invertebrates that aren't insects? Spiders, mites, ticks, snails, slugs, centipedes, millipedes, to name a few massive groups. If this statement is to be used, it would be more accurate to write: 'Organic management practices use cultural, biological and mechanical methods where possible for pest, weed and disease management. These practices avoid toxicity and encourage an ecological balance in favour of beneficial organisms suited to soil and crop health.'

However, it is important that this section is written within the framework of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in partnership using the IFOAM principles of Health, Ecology, Fairness and Care to ensure international coherence.

3.5 Prohibitions

Every term in this section needs to be defined, otherwise there is no clarity.

For example, this section does not expressly say that GMOs themselves (i.e. live organisms and their propagules) are prohibited. It mentions materials and products made from GMOs. It must refer back to a clear definition of genetic engineering (in the Definitions section at the start of the document), which should cover all trans- and cisgenic GMOs and all the new gene editing techniques currently available.

3.6.1 Biodiversity

Notes from the guidance section state: 'Pest control in organic production depends on building an environment based on a natural balance through establishing floral and faunal diversity.'

Suggested alternative: 'Effective pest management in organic production is supported by encouraging or establishing biodiverse vegetation, which in turn provides habitat for pest predators.'

3.6.2 Soil health

The guidance section here fails to highlight soil biological function.

'Soil organic matter and soil structure are of paramount importance, and must be maintained or enhanced by using any or all of the following:'

Suggested alternative:

'Soil organic matter, soil structure and soil biological function are of paramount importance, and must be maintained or enhanced by using any or all of the following:'

There is a listing here of 'd. animal manure (preferably composted) / effluent' as a suitable soil enhancement. This introduces inconsistency with current rules and within the standard that needs more explanation. Raw manure or effluent is currently not allowed under the BioGro organic

standard in crop production (Module 9, 3.1.3g) unless hot composted to specific parameters, but there is an exception allowing its application to pasture for livestock production (but not directly to soil) (Module 5 4.2.3g). The cases in which uncomposted manures are allowed to be used need to be clearly laid out in this standard, and should include guidance on cold composted versions such as biodynamic Cow Pat Pit (CPP). Raw manure applied to vegetable gardens should not be allowed.

While the guidance section in the draft document contains some important concepts, the subject is so complex that there should be a best practice organic management manual for soil health to go with the standard. We hope to be involved in the development of that document.

For example, suggested measures for tracking soil health in the manual could include:

Lab tests:

Wet Aggregate Stability: How well the soil holds its structure when it is exposed to simulated rainfall.

Predicted Available Water Capacity: How much water the soil can hold and give to crops in droughts.

Soil Respiration: This shows the amount of microbial activity in the soil.

Active Carbon: This is a measure of organic matter in the soil that is easy for microbes to eat.

Autoclave-Citrate Extractable (ACE) Protein Test: This is the fraction of the soil organic matter pool that is present as proteins or protein-like substances.

Electrical Conductivity: This can tell us about the soil's salinity levels.

Soil Texture: The proportions of sand, silt, and clay in the soil.

Field tests:

Field Infiltrability: This measures how quickly water enters the soil when exposed to simulated rain.

Surface and sub-surface hardness: This is measured by pressing a device called a penetrometer into the soil and recording the amount of force required.

3.12 Packaging and labelling

'Packaging of organic products must be fit for purpose and comprised of suitable packaging that is reusable, recycled, recyclable, compostable or biodegradable where possible.'

Suggested alternative: 'Packaging of organic products must be fit for purpose and comprise suitable material that is reusable, recycled, recyclable, compostable or biodegradable where possible.'

Also, a definition of biodegradable should be provided, because it needs to exclude any synthetics or microplastics as break-down products of the biodegradation.

3.12.1.1 Organic:

In this section clarification is required.

'The remaining product ingredients must be less than 5% of allowed non-agricultural ingredients or non-organic agricultural products.'

This must expressly state that the 5% may not contain GMOs or GE-derived ingredients. While ingredients may be 'non-organic' they must still be GE free. This speaks to the first purpose of the Act, which is consumer confidence.

3.12.1.2 Made with Organic ingredients:

This claim allows for a minimum of 70% organic ingredients, but it should still exclude GE ingredients from the remaining 30%, otherwise the claim is misleading and can only be checked in the fine print. Consumers would not expect something "made with organic ingredients" to contain GE ingredients.

3.13 Pest, weed and disease management

'Pests, diseases and weeds must be managed in a way that minimise negative impacts to the overall ecology of the system.'

To say "the overall ecology" is colloquial (ecology is the study of ecosystems, not the thing itself). It would be more scientifically rigorous to say, 'Pests, diseases and weeds must be managed in a way that minimises negative impacts to the ecological balance of the system'.

Typo: anyone -> any one

4.1 Plants Introduction and Scope

It is not clear what the following statement means.

'Organic production should aim to benefit the ecosystem through holistic management of land in a way that recognises and supports the crops and soil.'

Alternative suggestion: 'Organic production should aim to benefit ecosystem function through holistic management of land, soil, water, production crops and other non-production vegetation.'

This one also requires clarification: 'Crops and, where applicable crop rotation should seek to maintain and enhance soil health.'

Alternative suggestion: 'Crops should be grown in a way that maintains and enhances soil health, and, where necessary, crop rotation should be used.'

4.2 Conversion of land

Query conversion times – these are shorter than the usual 3 years which have been used since the beginning of organic certification in Aotearoa NZ.

'The conversion period of land for annual horticulture crops is two years, and three years for perennials and any other land use (subject to variables such as the nature and prior use of the organic operation).

The conversion period for pasture, open air runs and exercise areas used only for nonherbivores is 12 months.'

Our recommendation is that a standard conversion period of three years should apply to all land uses.

There is also clarification required (perhaps by Supplementary Notice) of the specific contamination testing that is required for organic land, and what the limits of each contaminant are.

4.3 Environment

'Organic plant production should ensure crop rotation is varied and balanced to maintain and enhance long-term soil fertility and plant health.'

Crop rotation is not always necessary, and crop diversity can be a substitute (with less soil disturbance) for crop rotation. Therefore, we think crop diversity should be referred to in this guidance.

Suggested alternative: 'Organic plant production should ensure crop rotation or crop diversity is balanced to maintain and enhance long-term soil fertility and plant health.'

4.5.1 Seeds & Propagation Material – Source

The draft states:

'c. Treated, non-organic material, provided they are treated with a product acceptable under this Standard

d. Treated, non-organic material that is treated to meet New Zealand import requirements.'

Seed treatments should not be allowed unless they are permitted by international organic regimes and for clarity, these should be listed in a supplementary notice (this should be referred to in point c.).

For example, neonicotinoids should be entirely prohibited, but there are other treatments that are currently allowed (with conditions) by the organic standards of our trading partners (BioGro has a list of these).

Unless the treatments used for import requirements are also compliant with point c., they will be unacceptable in organic production. As it stands now point d. is not compliant with organic practice and should be removed.

There is the potential for an open provision like this to undermine organic in NZ and this should be tightly controlled through Recognised Entity approval and appropriate control measures.

This topic was discussed in workshops with organic sector experts, but there has clearly been a divergence from standard organic practice adopted in this draft. It is generally seen as unacceptable to use treated seed in organics, because of harmful effects on soil, microbes and insects feeding on the plants. Ideally the seed treatment should be removed from any seeds being introduced into an organic growing area.

The draft states: 'Seeds used to produce sprouts and microgreens must be organic', however these are not always available, and in such cases current organic standards in NZ allow untreated, non-organic seeds to be used for microgreens and sprouts.

4.6 Compost

'Commercial compost for use in organic production must meet the requirements as set out in NZS 4454:2005 in addition to the requirements set out in this Standard.'

The above statement is not clear as to what 'commercial compost' means – does it include all compost used in organic businesses, or only compost that is purchased from off-site as ready-made for use?

'On-farm composting must be done in accordance with organic production principles as set out in this Standard.'

Referring to the above, there are no specific guidelines or rules in this draft about compost-making on-farm. Basic requirements should be set out in a supplementary notice (e.g. minimum temperature reached, types of ingredients, aeration etc.) and further guidance could be provided in a best practice organic composting manual.

Many organic farms and gardens currently make their own compost for use on site and do not test or monitor the compost to NZS 4454:2005. There should be a distinction made between compost for sale, which should comply with NZS 4454:2005, and compost produced on site for use within an on-farm system, which should only have to meet the organic guidelines (that are not currently in this document). This section seems to say that, but without clear definitions.

Furthermore, we have advocated all along for the NZ National Organic Standard to be a public good that is free of charge, and we have been led to believe so far that it will be. By including a blanket requirement for all organic compost to meet NZS 4454:2005, all operators making and using their own compost would need to purchase this standard, which is behind a significant paywall with Standards NZ.

4.7 Landless Production Systems

This section lacks clarity, in particular because there are no definitions for 'landless production systems' and 'container growing' in the draft standard. Hydroponic systems are specifically prohibited, and yet, container systems that are similar to hydroponic systems could slip through without clear distinctions being made between container growing and hydroponics.

The draft states: 'Perennial plants may be established in pots only until they are sufficiently robust enough to be planted out.' This does not explicitly state the intended use of container growing which should be for short-term use, e.g. seedlings, microgreens, not full life-cycle production.

Alternative wording suggested: 'Container growing is allowed only for short-duration crops (e.g. microgreens) or an early stage in production (e.g. seedlings, saplings). Perennial plants may be established in pots only until they are sufficiently robust to be planted out.'

We do <u>not</u> accept the validity of this section:

'In cases where perennial plants are required to be planted in a pot for the entire lifecycle, the operator must notify the Recognised Entity and provide the following:

i. Appropriate justification;

ii. Evidence to demonstrate that growing method is sustainable and aligns with organic principles as set in this Standard.'

In Europe, Regulation (EU) 2018/848 sets out rules for plant production in Part I of Annex II.

https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32018R0848

The first of the rules is this:

1.1. Organic crops, except those which are naturally grown in water, shall be produced in living soil, or in living soil mixed or fertilised with materials and products allowed in organic production, in connection with the subsoil and bedrock.

There is a derogation for plants grown in pots and containers set out in point 1.4 of Part I of Annex II.

1.4. By way of derogation from point 1.1, the following practices shall be allowed:

(a) growing plants for the production of ornamentals and herbs in pots to be sold together with the pot to the final consumer;
(b) growing seedlings or transplants in containers for further transplanting.

There is further guidance put out by EU on how to interpret this derogation:

https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-09/organic-rules-faqs_en.pdf (see point 16).

Nowhere in the EU organic regulations do the rules or derogation from the rules allow for the entire lifecycle of plants to be grown in pots or containers. Pots and containers are only intended as a means to produce transplants for planting into soil, as per section 1.1 above.

4.8 Wild Harvest

'Wild harvest products include plants, plant products, aquatic plants, and fungi.'

This section does not adequately capture the harvest of fish (from the sea or beaches), nor wild harvest of soil.

Regarding point c., what is 'an appropriate distance' from non-organic activities, and when will such figures be presented for consultation with the NZ public?

4.9.1 Fungi – General Principles

The draft states: 'To maintain a healthy growing environment in the production of fungi an operator should consider, proper airflow, sanitation and removal of used material.' This does not specify the desirability of returning the used material into a natural cycle.

Suggested alternative wording: 'To maintain a healthy growing environment in the production of fungi an operator should consider proper airflow, sanitation and the return of used growing media and fungal matter to a composting system or to natural ecosystem where such used materials can be incorporated into biological cycles without harmful environmental effects.'

4.9.3 Source of substrate

The draft reads:

'c. peat (not chemically treated);

d. wood and wood products (not chemically treated);'

Sections 4.9.3c and 4.9.3d should not state 'not chemically treated', rather they should state 'without prohibited inputs' or 'uncontaminated by prohibited inputs'. Chemically treated is a vague term, whereas prohibited inputs will appear on a list in a supplementary notice.

5.2 Livestock - prohibitions

What is the definition of a 'cage'? This needs to be included in the definitions section at the start.

Transport and slaughter

'The use of any tranquilliser before, and during transport, is prohibited, unless withholding tranquiliser compromises the animal's welfare.' This statement is very vague and malleable. Obviously animal welfare is paramount, and an argument could be made either for or against using a tranquilliser, so why state this?

Compost

'The use of ruminant protein as an ingredient for compost is prohibited.' It could be argued that wool is ruminant protein. This section should expressly state that wool is not prohibited as a compost ingredient. The Biosecurity (Ruminant Protein) Regulations 1999 are not clear on this. The definition in those regulations is 'ruminant protein means protein derived from the tissue (including blood) of a ruminant; but does not include milk, cream, butter, or cheese, or any other product of milk or cream: tallow: any derivative of tallow: rennet: dicalcium phosphate: peptides less than 10,000 daltons: amino acids,' (paraphrased).

5.3.1 Livestock – conversion, general

Consumers are concerned that the timeframes for converting conventional livestock into organic livestock under these proposed rules are too short and are much looser than what is currently allowed under the BioGro Standard. For example, due to the six-month conversion period for small ruminants such as sheep, it would almost be possible under this standard to be a seasonal producer of organic lamb, whereby young conventional animals are brought in on an annual basis from a conventional farm and six months later are sold as organic lamb. Year-round organic management would not be required, but this is what the consumer would be expecting.

Research is required to ascertain that any timeframes accord with the organic standards of our trading partners.

5.6.2 Use of veterinary medicines

Consumers are also concerned that this draft standard is too permissive when it comes to exception allowing the use of veterinary medicines.

The draft currently states:

'Animals that receive more than the following number of courses of treatment with restricted veterinary medicines are not compliant with this Standard:

a. for animals with a productive lifecycle greater than one year: three courses of treatment per year; or

b. for animals with a productive lifecycle less than one year: one course of treatment.'

The use of the terminology 'course of treatment' is far too open to interpretation and could allow for continuous use of veterinary medicines on organic animals. A 'course of treatment' could last for multiple months, therefore three courses per year could cover the whole year.

We also have concerns about the following:

'Artificial synchronisation and induction of oestrus may be granted for individual animals under veterinary direction in conjunction with prior written notification to the Recognised Entity.'

There is no guidance on when or why this would be justified. Would it be for animal health reasons, or production synchronisation? This needs to be made clear.

5.6.5 Quarantine

We are unsure about the validity of a quarantine area within an organic production unit that gets returned to organic production frequently.

'When not in use for quarantine purposes, the quarantine area may be returned to organic production following a two week stand down period.'

It could be that there is contamination in the quarantine area from treatments or medicines, so this may not be wise to do.

It is also possibly true that other organic standards world-wide do not require quarantine.

We recommend that quarantine areas not be brought into organic production and that they remain permanently separate from production areas.

5.7.2 Supplementary feed

'Non-organic feed should be sourced from, in order of preference:

a. in conversion to organic operations;

b. documented low-chemical-input, non-organic operations;

c. wild harvested in situ products (e.g., high country grazing);

d. non-organic GE/GMO free products.'

Section 5.7.2b is not clear. It should refer to non-organic operations which use no prohibited inputs.

9.2 Inputs

The draft states: 'An input is not:

- An organic product'

However, organic compost for sale is both an organic product and an input.

This is why the scope section should include at least some inputs to organic production systems as organic products. Some classes of inputs will not require verification because they are generic substances which can be listed in a supplementary notice. However, some inputs, such as compost or other biologically derived products will clearly require verification under the Act.

In this draft there are two categories of input: 'Acceptable input' and 'Unacceptable input'.

The USDA uses the terminology 'Allowed' and 'Prohibited'.

Until now, BioGro licensees (the majority of NZ organic certified businesses) have had three categories of input: 'Permitted', 'Restricted' and 'Prohibited'.

By lumping all permitted and restricted inputs into the category of 'acceptable inputs' we may run into problems of overuse or irresponsible use. For example, over-application of soil amendments, where there has usually been a restriction placed on their use, such as a soil test or leaf test demonstrating a deficiency. How will limits be placed on the amounts of inputs to be used? We recommend that there are published restrictions placed on specific inputs that carry a risk of misuse or overuse, such as in a supplementary notice.

Section 9.4.1.1d refers to restrictions that may be placed on inputs for fertilisation and soil conditioning. So, it seems there are likely to be sub-categories of inputs within the 'acceptable inputs', i.e. permitted and restricted. This needs to be clarified.

Section 9.5 also hints at sub-categories: 'Acceptable inputs in organic production must be used in accordance with any conditions that are specified in supplementary notice.'

It is certainly preferable, for some inputs, that restrictions are placed on their use. For example, minerals, both major and trace, which are overused can adversely affect soil health, sometimes for a considerable length of time.