



CHELLIE PINGREE
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
1ST DISTRICT, MAINE

May 8, 2019

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

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HOUSE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE

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BIOTECHNOLOGY, HORTICULTURE, AND
RESEARCH

CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

I am writing to inquire about the prohibited use of synthetic chemicals, such as glyphosate, in certified organic operations. I have received concerns from organic farmers about the use of glyphosate in certified organic container operations and urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to address this issue immediately.

As an organic farmer, I know that there is no ambiguity about the prohibition on synthetic chemicals in certified organic operations. Under the Organic Foods Production Act, an organic product "shall have been produced and handled without the use of synthetic chemicals" and shall "not be produced on land to which any prohibited substances, including synthetic chemicals, have been applied during the 3 years immediately preceding the harvest of the agricultural products."¹ Because glyphosate is a synthetic chemical and is not on the National List, it cannot be used in certified organic operations.

I am very concerned by recent accusations that land is sprayed with glyphosate, plastic is put down, and then containers or pots with plants are placed on top of the plastic right before organic inspection. Plastic is not an impenetrable barrier and could easily tear. Furthermore, land use history is an eligibility requirement for organic certification, and the statutory language is clear that synthetic chemicals cannot be used during the three-year organic transition period.

As you know, integrity is the cornerstone of the organic label. If consumers lose confidence in the organic label, farmers will lose this market opportunity. USDA must address this issue immediately to ensure that there is no consumer confusion about the prohibition on glyphosate in certified organic operations. Please provide answers to the following questions by May 15, 2019:

1. Has USDA reviewed any of the recent accusations regarding the prohibited use of glyphosate in certified organic operations? If so, what did USDA find?
2. Has USDA taken enforcement actions against any of those certified organic operations?

¹ 7 U.S.C. § 6504.

3. Has USDA provided guidance to certifiers reaffirming that synthetic chemicals, including glyphosate, cannot be used in any certified organic operation and that synthetic chemicals cannot be used on farms during the three-year transition period?
4. If not, when will USDA provide such guidance to certifiers?

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chellie R." followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line.

Chellie Pingree