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## USDA Takes A Step in the Right Direction in Rescinding Organic Directives

### A statement from GRACE

New York (NY) May 28, 2004 – GRACE applauds Secretary Ann Veneman and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in their decision to rescind the recent changes made to the National Organic Program (NOP).

Consumers pay a premium for the USDA Organic Seal, and in return have come to expect high-quality products that are free of certain chemicals and pesticides. The following changes were made to the National Organic Program (NOP) without consultation from the National Organic Standards Board or the public:

- The USDA prohibited the use of the USDA Organic Seal for personal care products, dietary supplements, fertilizers, soil amendments, pet foods, clothing and all fish. Under this new scope policy, manufacturers were given the green light to put phony “organic” labels on these products, which effectively became unregulated with regards to organic standards.
- Pesticides could be used on organic crops even if farmers and certifiers did not know the specific ingredients contained in them – which may have included ingredients prohibited by the NOP. In effect, farmers could have used any pesticide formulation before determining whether it contained prohibited ingredients.
- Organic dairy cows could be treated with antibiotics or any drug, including synthetic growth hormones, at any time as long as the milk from these cows was sold 12 months after the treatment.
- Dairy cows could be fed non-organic fish meal, which can contain mercury, PCB’s antibiotics and other synthetic preservatives. This could have been fed as protein supplement to cattle whose beef was labeled as organic.

These directives could have drastically discredited the meaning of the organic label for farmers, producers and consumers alike.

The public outcry stemming from the recent directives mirrors the year 2002, when proposed changes to organic standards prompted a groundswell of over 275,000 public comments, the largest ever on any ruling by the USDA. As a result, the proposed changes were rescinded. These actions should stand as a signal to the USDA that consumers do care about where their food comes from. We urge the department to now fully meet its duty to the National Organic Standards Board, as well as the public, by allowing them to have access and input to any significant policy changes made to the National Organic Program.

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