

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

March 26, 2007

### **CONTACTS:**

Dave Bard, Pure Salmon Campaign, (202) 486-4426

Dom Repta, Coastal Alliance for Aquaculture Reform, Cell (202) 251-3997

Joseph Mendelson, Center for Food Safety, (202) 547-9359, Cell (703) 244-1724

## **GROUPS PRAISE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION TO EXCLUDE FARMED SALMON FROM ORGANIC STANDARDS**

### **USDA urged to permanently prohibit open net-cage systems and carnivorous fish from forthcoming U.S. organic aquaculture standards**

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) Livestock Committee is recommending that fish raised in open net-cages and those using wild caught fish in their diet be excluded from forthcoming United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) organic aquaculture standards. Three major groups are commending the Committee for upholding the principles of organic production and are urging the NOSB to follow the Committee's lead when they meet in Washington, D.C. tomorrow through Thursday, March 29 to discuss the Committee's organic aquaculture recommendations.

"We're extremely pleased with the Committee's recommendations because no matter how stringent and well intentioned organic standards for aquaculture are, open net-cages just don't fit under the organic umbrella," said Dom Repta, from the Coastal Alliance for Aquaculture Reform. "The evidence in British Columbia shows that open net-cage technology does not prevent the discharge of untreated waste or the escape of farmed fish and allows continued impacts on marine predators such as seals and sea lions, the transfer of sea lice to wild salmon and the contamination of aboriginal food sources."

In prepared comments, the groups have offered support for organic certification of non-carnivorous fish farmed in closed systems, but stress that farming carnivorous fish in open net-cage systems violates core organic principles. The groups cite scientific evidence from around the world that shows open net-cage fish farms cannot meet the standards for ecological protection to which current organic practitioners must adhere. In addition, carnivorous species that use more wild fish for feed than farmed fish produced increase the pressure on already diminishing global wild fish populations.

"The USDA must now take a strong stance on organic aquaculture certification to ensure that the entire 'organic' label is not diluted," said Andrea Kavanagh, director of the Pure Salmon Campaign. "To make sure consumers are getting what they pay for when they buy 'organic' seafood, we're asking the U.S. to permanently close the door on organic certification for open net-cage fish farming and the farming of carnivorous fish like salmon."

While the NOSB has been developing organic aquaculture regulations, consumers are increasingly seeing seafood products labeled as "organic" in U.S. supermarkets. These products are being imported from countries that allow certain practices, such as the use of open net-cages and the administration of chemicals to control parasites and diseases, to be considered organic.

"Under U.S. law there is no such thing as organic seafood right now," stated Joseph Mendelson, Legal Director for the Center for Food Safety. "Any products labeled as such mislead consumers."

The USDA has the authority to stop this threat to the integrity of the organic label and should act to enforce the law."

Rick Moonen, chef and co-owner of RM Seafood at Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada, is part of the chorus of support commending the Committee's recommendation to exclude open net-cages from organic aquaculture standards. Tomorrow, Moonen will present a letter to the NOSB on behalf of 19 U.S. chefs that reads:

"As professionals that depend on quality, healthy and sustainable ingredients, we are avid supporters of 'organic' systems. If the U.S. chooses to water down its organic standards to accommodate carnivorous farmed fish species from open net cage systems, however, it seriously risks losing our confidence in the USDA organic brand as a whole."

Rather than modifying organic standards to fit the needs of salmon farming, the Pure Salmon Campaign and the Coastal Alliance for Aquaculture Reform are working to improve the sustainability of the industry as a whole by fostering a transition from open net-cages to closed containment systems. Closed containment technology would eliminate many of the environmental problems associated with open net-cage fish farms such as escapes, spread of sea lice and interactions with marine predators that organic aquaculture standards for open net-cages cannot adequately address.