

PROCEDURE FOR COMPLAINT LODGING, HANDLING AND APPEALS PERTAINING TO USDA-NOP ACCREDITATION

COMPLAINT LODGING PROCEDURE

APEDA has an established and well defined complaint (grievance) lodging procedures for all activities undertaken by it. Complaints can be lodged by any interested party related to APEDA's activities pertaining to National Program for Organic Production (NPOP) and USDA-NOP accreditation. APEDA is Secretariat of National Program for Organic Production and implementing conformity verification procedures for certified organic products under India-USA recognition agreement. Accordingly, complaints pertaining to NPOP and USDA-NOP can be lodged in writing to APEDA through letter and email. Complaint can also be lodged in APEDA's website mentioning the issue related to APEDA's activities pertaining to NPOP and USDA-NOP. The website link to lodge the complaint by the interested party is given as follows:

<https://itrack.apeda.gov.in/GrievancePortal/GrievanceSignUp.aspx?RequestID=92958477>

In addition, the complaint/grievance can also be lodged under the Central Government's complaint/grievance portal related to NPOP and USDA-NOP which is referred by the Government to APEDA for response and redressal.

COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCEDURE

APEDA has established procedure for handling the complaints received from any interested party such as certified operators, Certification Bodies, importers, Competent Authorities of importing countries, Certification Bodies of importing countries, general public, etc.

APEDA being secretariat for NPOP, the procedure for complaint handling as described in NPOP will be followed on same lines for other accreditation programs handled by APEDA such as USDA-NOP.

APEDA on receipt of complaints against the operator/Certification Body in respect of violation of NPOP and USDA-NOP will initiate the investigation by obtaining relevant documents from all the concerned stakeholders. This includes the exporter, handlers and producer in the supply chain. The TraceNet database is used to identify the operator involved in the supply chain. Official notification will be sent to the stakeholders regarding the complaint received by APEDA both for NPOP and USDA-NOP.

The procedure followed for inspection and certification of the operators by the concerned Certification Body is verified as part of investigation under the applicable standard.

The traceability records will be verified to assess the production estimate, crop season, sold quantity, purchased quantity, storage capacity, transport capacity, processing ratio, product recipe, recovery per cent, stock verification etc. The use of approved label will also be verified. The use of certification mark as appropriate will also be verified.

During the course of the investigation, if major irregularities/non conformities/procedural lapses are observed, APEDA will issue a show cause notice to the operator/Certification Body as to why sanction should not be imposed under relevant clause of NPOP which are also applicable to USDA-NOP in case of non-compliances.

The operator/Certification Body will have to respond within 15 days from the date of receipt of such Show Cause Notice.

The response received on the show cause notice is reviewed at APEDA. Thereafter, the investigation report along with comments of APEDA will be placed before the NAB for its decision.

If the non conformities are confirmed against the operator/Certification Body, NAB will impose appropriate sanction as per the sanction catalogue given at NPOP Chapter 4.

APPEAL HANDLING PROCEDURE

Appeal by an accredited Certification Body or interested party for consideration of any decision made by the NAB related to its accreditation status will be recorded by APEDA.

The appeals of the applicant/Certification Body or interested party will be dealt with as per the provisions given in relevant clauses and chapter of the NPOP document including in case of USDA-NOP.

In case of appeal from any other interested party such as general public related to USDA-NOP, the same procedure as per the provisions given in relevant clauses and chapter of the NPOP document shall apply.

Applet Authority shall take follow up action where required and shall keep records of all appeals of final decision and of follow up actions taken.
