

Center for Food Safety sues USDA to block organic certification of soil-free hydroponic crops

Federal Magistrate Judge Laurel Beeler will be reviewing USDA's decision to permit the ["indoor agricultural evolution"](#) known as hydroponics to use the "organic" marketing slogan. Food safety is a driving force behind the hydroponics evolution, where plants are grown in water with specific mineral nutrient solutions, not soil.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture was sued March 2 by organic interests that use soil to grow their crops. They claim the USDA decision allowing hydroponics to be sold under the organic label puts dirt growers at a disadvantage.

Led by the Center for Food Safety, the plaintiffs argument is that the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA), which set up the National Organic Program, imposes standards that require organic growers to "foster soil health."

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The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), the expert body assigned by Congress to advise USDA on organic matters, has repeatedly called on USDA to prohibit organic certification of hydroponics, but USDA has ignored that recommendation.

As a result of USDA's inaction, CFS filed [a legal petition](#) in January 2019 formally asking [USDA to prohibit hydroponic operations from the Certified Organic label](#) but USDA denied the petition's requests later that year.

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