May 16, 2022

Jaina Nian
Agricultural Marketing Service
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250-0201

Dear Jaina Nian,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) request to Identify Anti-Competitive Market Structures and Practices in Fertilizer, Seed and Agricultural Inputs, and Retail Markets.

The Water Environment Federation (WEF) is a nonprofit association that provides technical education and training for thousands of water quality professionals who clean water and return it safely to the environment. WEF members have proudly protected public health, served their local communities, and supported clean water worldwide since 1928.

We are writing to share an opportunity to bolster the development, distribution, and use of biosolids and biosolids derived products for agriculture. Biosolids are the treated solids from water resource recovery facilities that must meet Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards. Biosolids offer an independent, innovative, and sustainable American fertilizer that is consistently produced and accessible across the nation. So much so, that you can source our national daily contribution to it.

History
The United States of America Clean Water Act, established 50 years ago, was created to regulate discharges to the waters of the United States and create pollution control programs. These programs became our modern-day water resource recovery facilities, complete with required pretreatment programs, now active in communities across the nation. The Act also made it a requirement to evaluate its own efficacy through annual biosolids reporting and biennial review of biosolids standards. With this express intent to keep waters clean through continuous and transparent program review, biosolids have been researched and regulated more than any fertilizer available on the market. Biosolids, used in accordance with regulations, have become widely accepted by soil scientists and agronomists as one more tool in the soil amendment and fertilizer marketplace.

Economic Value

- **Regenerative.** Biosolids are a natural and renewable resource that offers a reliable and robust alternative to fossil-fuel-derived fertilizers.
- **Secure.** The biosolids supply chain has an established infrastructure to maintain consistent production, quality, and access. Biosolids represent an asset that every community produces 24/7/365 days a year and offers cross-disciplinary jobs across the resource recovery cycle.
- **Cost-efficient.** Biosolids use helps to keep wastewater treatment costs lower for customers.
• **Nutrient value.** The current fertilizer replacement value of biosolids is $38.81/dry ton based on values of N, P, K, and S for the first year after application.¹

**Environmental Benefits**

• **Decarbonization.** Biosolids applied to land builds carbon reserves in the soil, reducing greenhouse gases by keeping carbon out of our air. Soil carbon is a primary measurement of soil health. The production of synthetic fertilizer has a significant carbon footprint.

• **Sustainable.** Recycling the nutrients and organic matter in biosolids back to soils is a core necessity for sustainability. Biosolids return nutrients back to the soil which we harvested them from, reinforcing the foundation for a circular resource economy.

• **Science-based.** Biosolids treatment, use, and innovation are based on scientific research. The USDA established the National Institute of Food and Agriculture Research Committee 4170: Beneficial Use of Residuals to Improve Soil Health and Protect Public and Ecosystem Health which has a 45-year history of biosolids research that supported Title 40 CFR Part 503 – Standards for Use or Disposal of Biosolids.

**Customer Satisfaction**

• **Affordable.** Farmers see direct cost savings using biosolids compared to the rising cost of synthetic fertilizers.

• **Farmer-focused.** Biosolids build healthy soil functions that farmers rely upon for long-term crop production. In addition to renewable nutrients, biosolids deliver organic matter to reduce wind erosion and soil compaction, and increase water-holding capacity, boosting the soils defense to drought conditions. All while offering comparable or improved crop yield and quality compared to synthetic fertilizers.

• **Transparency.** Quality control measures continue to be a central pillar in biosolids use since the origin of the Part 503 biosolids regulation. This sharpened lens welcomes continuous critique and transparency to continuously improve this valuable, locally made, and sustainable resource.

The biosolids community looks forward to exploring options that will promote competition in the American economy and bolster the resource lifeline that our nation depends upon from farms of all sizes. There is an opportunity to match our existing recovered resources with the clear need for sustainable fertilizer alternatives to strengthen our farm economy. Funding directed toward building commerce around biosolids market research and development will spur an innovative and sustainable approach to becoming self-sufficient as a national community.

Please contact me if you’d like to follow up with any questions, (206) 395-8585 or mlono-batura@wef.org.

Sincerely,

Maile Lono-Batura
Director, Sustainable Biosolids Programs
Water Environment Federation

Supporting organizations

- **California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA):** For over 60 years, CASA has served as the leading voice for clean water agencies on regulatory, legislative, and legal issues. We are the leading California association dedicated to advancing wastewater interests, including the recycling of wastewater into usable water, generation of renewable energy, biosolids and other valuable resources. Through our efforts, we help create a clean and sustainable environment for California. CASA represents more than 125 local public agencies engaged in the collection, treatment and recycling of wastewater and biosolids to protect public health and the environment. Our mission is to provide trusted information and advocacy on behalf of California clean water agencies, and to be a leader in sustainability and utilization of renewable resources.

- **Northwest Biosolids:** Northwest Biosolids is a regional non-profit organization dedicated to finding ways to recycle the 200,000 dry tons of treated wastewater biosolids produced in the Pacific Northwest. Since 1987, Northwest Biosolids has offered a unified regional voice for biosolids across Alaska, Alberta, British Columbia, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. The organization leverages resources across biosolids programs to collectively fund biosolids research, participate in regulations development, and create accessible information for all. Northwest Biosolids mission is to advance environmental sustainability through the beneficial use of biosolids.