

**§1957. Qualification of associations of producers**

**1. Qualification.** Only those associations of producers that have been qualified in accordance with this section shall be entitled to the benefits provided by this Article.

[PL 1973, c. 621, §1 (NEW).]

**2. Petition.** An association of producers desiring qualification shall file with the board a petition for qualification. The petition shall contain such information and be accompanied by such documents as shall be required by the regulations of the board.

[PL 1973, c. 621, §1 (NEW).]

**3. Hearing.** The board shall provide notice and opportunity for a hearing, provided in a manner consistent with the provisions as to adjudicatory proceedings of the Maine Administrative Procedure Act. The board shall qualify such association, if based upon the evidence at such hearing, the board finds:

A. That under the charter documents or the bylaws of the association, the association is directly or indirectly producer-owned and controlled; [PL 1973, c. 621, §1 (NEW).]

B. The association has membership agreements signed by each of its members which authorize the association to represent the member for the purposes of this article; [PL 1987, c. 155, §7 (AMD).]

C. The association is financially sound and has sufficient resources and management to carry out the purposes for which it was organized; [PL 1973, c. 621, §1 (NEW).]

D. The association represents 10 or more producers of a particular agricultural product for a specific handler involved with those producers and that agricultural product during the previous 12 months; for the purposes of this article, members of agricultural cooperatives are counted as individual members; if the board has reasonable cause to question such representation, the board shall require a secret ballot election to certify the representation; and [PL 2019, c. 248, §4 (AMD).]

E. The association has as one of its functions acting as principal or agent for its producer-members in negotiations with handlers for prices and other terms of contracts with respect to the production, sale and marketing of their product. [PL 1973, c. 621, §1 (NEW).]

[PL 2019, c. 248, §4 (AMD).]

**4. Refiling of petition.** If after the hearing, the board does not deem an association qualified, it shall, in a manner consistent with the Maine Administrative Procedure Act, Title 5, chapter 375, clearly specify the reasons for such failure to qualify in its decision and, upon the refile of the petition, shall reconsider its decision within 30 days after the date on which the petition was filed. An association seeking reconsideration shall refile its petition within 30 days of receipt of the board's initial decision.

[PL 1987, c. 155, §8 (AMD).]

**5. Notice.** After the board qualifies such association, it shall give notice of such qualification to all known handlers that, in the ordinary course of business, purchase the agricultural commodities that such association represents.

[PL 1973, c. 621, §1 (NEW).]

**6. Annual report.** A qualified association shall file an annual report with the board in such form as shall be required by the regulations of the board. The annual report shall contain such information as will enable the board to determine whether the association continues to meet the standards for qualification, except that an association which the board has determined to be qualified shall not be required to have its qualification redetermined until it has negotiated and entered into a contract with a handler, with or without resort to arbitration.

[PL 1985, c. 578, §1 (AMD).]

**7. Revocation.** If a qualified association ceases to maintain the standards for qualifications set forth in subsection 3, the board shall, in a manner consistent with the Maine Administrative Procedure Act, apply to the District Court to revoke the qualification of such association, except that the board shall not seek revocation of an association's qualification during the period set out in subsection 6 in which the association cannot be required to have its qualification redetermined.

[PL 1985, c. 578, §2 (AMD); PL 1999, c. 547, Pt. B, §78 (AMD); PL 1999, c. 547, Pt. B, §80 (AFF).]

**8. Confidentiality.** Information provided to the board by an association regarding the identification of its members and information provided to the board by a handler regarding its volume of purchases of agricultural products and the identification of producers from whom it purchased those products shall be treated by the board as confidential information not to be disclosed to the adverse party or any other person without the consent of the association or the handler, respectively, until the board has rendered its final decision as to the qualification of the association. After a final decision has been rendered, the information is no longer confidential information, but its disclosure shall be governed by Title 1, section 402, subsection 3, paragraph B.

[PL 1987, c. 155, §9 (NEW).]

#### SECTION HISTORY

PL 1973, c. 621, §1 (NEW). PL 1977, c. 694, §§278-280 (AMD). PL 1985, c. 578, §§1,2 (AMD). PL 1987, c. 155, §§7-9 (AMD). PL 1991, c. 116 (AMD). PL 1999, c. 547, §B78 (AMD). PL 1999, c. 547, §B80 (AFF). PL 2019, c. 248, §4 (AMD).

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