

Materials and Preparation for Module 1

Materials for Trainer

- Computer with Power Point, LCD projector, screen
- "What's the Rule?" (9 Power Point slides as PPT file)
- "The Certification Process in Brief" (19 Power Point slides as PPT file)

Advance Preparation for Trainer

- Read the publication "Organic Farm Certification and the National Organic Program" published by ATTRA (Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas) (<http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/organcert.html>)
- Review page 6 of "NCAT's Organic Crops Workbook" (<http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/PDF/cropsworkbook.pdf>)
- Carefully review each component in this module and prepare yourself to facilitate the learning experience.

Materials for Participants

- *Participant's Guide for Module 1*
- Relevant sections of the NOP (National Organic Program) Standards (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/NOP/standards.html>). If you will be covering several modules during this training program we suggest that you distribute a copy of the entire NOP Standards now or during the initial session of the training program.
- *Transitioning to Organic Production* published by USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Network (<http://www.sare.org/publications/organic/organic.pdf>)
- The ATTRA publication *Organic Farm Certification and the National Organic Program* (<http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/PDF/organcert.pdf>)
- Page 6 of NCAT's *Organic Crops Workbook* (<http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/PDF/cropsworkbook.pdf>)
- We suggest that you print a "handout" version of the slides in "What's the Rule?" (4 per page to be legible) to distribute to the participants **after** Exercise 1 is completed
- You may want to print a "handout" version of the slides in "The Certification Process in Brief" (4 per page to be legible) to distribute to the participants **after** you make the presentation

Module Delivery (95 Minutes Total)

I. Module Objectives and Content (10 minutes)

1. Distribute the *Participant's Guide to Module 1* and all of the other "Materials for Participants" described above to all participants at this time.
2. Review and discuss the ***application objective***.

You will be able to explain the basic steps of certification to farmers.

3. Review and discuss the **learning objectives**.

After completing this module, you will understand:

- The current status of the National Organic Program (NOP) of USDA
- The steps required for organic certification
- Concepts regarding the role of regulatory programs within the USDA

4. Call attention to the **topics** that will be covered in this module.

- USDA definition of the term “organic”
- State organic programs
- Certification agencies and procedures

II. Materials and Resources (5 minutes)

1. Point out that the “Participant Guide” includes a list of the **Relevant Sections of the NOP Standards** that will be covered by this module. Give the participants a moment to review the list.

- 205.100 What has to be certified
- 205.101 Exemptions and exclusions from certification
- 205.102 Use of the term, “organic”
- 205.201 Organic production and handling system plan
- 205.300 Use of the term, “organic”
- 205.310 Agricultural products produced on an exempt or excluded operation
- 205.311 USDA Seal
- 205.400 General requirements for certification
- 205.401 Application for Certification
- 205.402 Review of application
- 205.403 On-site inspections
- 205.404 Granting certification
- 205.405 Denial of certification
- 205.406 Continuation of certification
- 205.620 Requirements of State organic programs

2. Draw attention to the following **Additional Reference Materials**. Electronic versions of these documents are available free of charge. This list is included in the *Participant’s Guide* and we have provided a word document which lists all web-based materials for these training modules so that you can simply click on the appropriate item.

USDA list of accredited certifying agents (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/CertifyingAgents/Accredited.html>)

Organic Marketing Resources (<http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/PDF/markres.pdf>)

An Overview of Organic Crop Production (<http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/PDF/organiccrop.pdf>)

Organic Trade Association (<http://www.ota.com/index.html>)

Economic Research Service (USDA) publication *Recent Growth Patterns in the U.S. Organic Foods Market* by Carolyn Dimitri and Catherine Greene (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aib777>)

3. Draw participants’ attention to the list of **Keywords** on page 2 of the *Participant’s Guide*. Give them 5 minutes to review these terms.

Accreditation. A determination made by the Secretary that authorizes a private, foreign, or State entity to conduct certification activities as a certifying agent under this part.

Certified operation. A crop or livestock production, wild-crop harvesting or handling operation, or portion of such operation that is certified by an accredited certifying agent as utilizing a system of organic production or handling as described by the Act and the regulations in this part.

Certifying agent. Any entity accredited by the Secretary as a certifying agent for the purpose of certifying a production or handling operation as a certified production or handling operation.

Inspector. Any person retained or used by a certifying agent to conduct inspections of certification applicants or certified production or handling operations.

Inspection. The act of examining and evaluating the production or handling operation of an applicant for certification or certified operation to determine compliance with the Act and the regulations in this part.

Private entity. Any domestic or foreign nongovernmental for-profit or not-for-profit organization providing certification services.

State certifying agent. A certifying agent accredited by the Secretary under the National Organic Program and operated by the State for the purposes of certifying organic production and handling operations in the State.

III. Exercise 1: What's the Rule? (30 minutes)

The objective of this exercise is for the participants to understand that the National Organic Program is not unique in USDA. They should understand two points **after** they complete the exercise. First, the National Organic Program is a **regulatory** program, much like others that the USDA has implemented over the years. USDA's regulatory programs, in general, are designed to protect consumers and make sure that food products sold in the United States meet specific standards. The NOP ensures that consumers get an organically produced product when they buy something labeled with any of the USDA organic seals, 100% organic, organic, or made with organic, on it. Second, USDA has a long history of establishing rules and regulations to cover the use of specific terms (like "salt free") on food product labels. Again, the use of the term "organic" is now legally restricted, just as some other terms are, by USDA. Do **NOT** explain these concepts now. Wait until you finish the exercise and allow the participants to discover these concepts for themselves. This is a **large group activity**.

1. Prepare the Power Point presentation called "What's the Rule?" for show.
2. Designate two participants as scorekeepers. Let the scorekeepers know that they should record the number of votes for each of the four multiple-choice answers for each term.
3. Show the slide that offers four definitions of the term "low fat."
4. Have the participants who agree with the first definition of this term, "Contains limited amounts of fat," hold up their hands.
5. Have the two scorekeepers record the number of participants who voted for definition A.
6. Repeat this process for the other three definitions (B, C and D).

7. Repeat this process for the terms “Low Sodium,” “Free Range,” and “Organic.”
8. Show the slide that has the correct definition of the term “Low Fat” in bold (the correct answer is D, no legal definition). Ask the scorekeepers to report how many participants responded with the correct answer. Encourage discussion of how this term is used on food product labels and why, in this case, the term may be misleading to consumers. You may want to bring an example of a misleading use of this term. Many ground turkey products, for example, contain fairly high amounts of fat because they include the skin and the fatty subcutaneous layer. If you compare the actual fat content in one of these products with, for example, 97% fat free beef, you can show participants how terms without legal definitions can be misleading.
9. Show the slide that has the correct definition of the term “Low Sodium” in bold (the correct answer is A, product contains 140 mg or less of salt per serving). Again, ask the scorekeepers to report how many participants responded with the correct answer. You may want to bring two versions of the same product, one low sodium and the other not, and compare the sodium content. Encourage discussion about differences in how the terms “Low Fat” and “Low Sodium” can be used on food products.
10. Show the slide that has the correct definition of the term “Free Range” in bold (the correct answer is D, no legal definition). Again, ask the scorekeepers to report how many participants responded with the correct answer. Many “free range” eggs are actually produced by hens that are kept in cages that are moved from one area in a pasture to another. It is true that these hens have access to “range,” but they are certainly not free roaming. Again, you can point out that terms that are not legally defined can mislead consumers about the products they buy.
11. Show the slide that has the correct definition of the term “Organic” in bold (the correct answer is B, product must consist of at least 95% organically produced ingredients, excluding salt and water). Again, ask the scorekeepers to report how many participants responded with the correct answer. Point out that the NOP does establish a **legally binding** definition of the term “Organic,” and that misuse of the term constitutes a violation of federal law, punishable by fine.

IV. Closure for Exercise 1 (10 minutes)

Ask participants to name some other **regulatory** programs established by USDA over the years. One recent example is the rule about BSE (“mad cow disease”). You can find a brief summary of this rule at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/pubs/fsheet_fa_notice/fs_ahbse_minrisk.html. Other examples include the Animal Welfare Act (unofficial version available at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ac/awa.html>), recent HACCP rules (<http://www.fs.is.usda.gov/oa/haccp/issue04.htm>), and rules covering grain inspection (<http://www.usda.gov/gipsa/programsfgis/services.htm>).

Ask the participants to explain **why** these programs were created. The main point that you want to make is that USDA bears a very large responsibility for ensuring that consumers get what they pay for when they buy food products in the U.S. Animal carcass grading, for example, came about to ensure that people who pay the premium price for “USDA Prime Beef” get what they wanted, that they are protected from paying a premium price for an inferior product. The National Organic Standards follow in this tradition. These standards ensure that consumers who pay for organic products actually get an organic product and that they can know, in detail, how the product was produced. Make the following three key points:

1. The National Organic Program is **not** a program to promote organic agriculture.
2. It **is** a regulatory program designed to ensure consumers that they get what they pay for when they buy a product labeled “organic.”
3. This program follows a long tradition in USDA of establishing programs that protect the safety of food products sold in the U.S. and that establish strict legal rules governing how products are produced, handled, and processed.

V. Exercise 2: Questions for the Service Provider (20 Minutes)

This is a **large group activity**.

1. Explain to participants that they will explore how much they already know about organic certification.
2. Begin the activity by reading aloud the scenario below.
3. Then pose the questions that are listed, one at a time. After each question, ask participants to tell you what they think the answer is. Any participant may respond. You may want to solicit several responses and discuss the responses that are provided. We have provided answers for your information.

Scenario

A client comes in to the Extension Office with a list of questions. The client had been certified in Massachusetts by the Northeast Organic Farmers' Association prior to 2002. He has moved to Florida and now wants grow certified organic produce on 10 acres that he just bought. He has a letter from the previous landowner in Florida stating that no substances prohibited under the National Organic Standards were used on the land for five years prior to the purchase.

1. When he looked at the NOP Website, he found that Florida does not have a state organic program. Can he be certified in Florida?

Answer: Yes, certification is done by agencies that are accredited by the USDA. Both private entities and states can be accredited. Some states, but not all, have state (governmental) organic programs that are accredited to certify organic operations. He can be certified by any accredited agency, and does not necessarily have to use one that is actually located in Florida.

Additional Information to Provide: The list of accredited agencies is available at the National Organic Program website under “Certifying Agents”. A state organic program differs from an accredited agency because the state program can be **more** restrictive than the NOP Standards and Guidelines. Accredited agencies cannot be more restrictive than the NOP Standards. State programs may be more restrictive because of the need to take specific environmental conditions into account or to comply with specific production or handling practices particular to the state or region. State organic programs must assume the enforcement obligations of the regulation.

2. He knows about being certified but now he has read about being accredited. Does he have to be accredited, too?

Answer: No, certifying agencies are accredited and farms/operations are certified.

3. Who can he be certified by in Florida? The list of certifying agencies is long and daunting and he is now confused. What can you tell him about how to choose a certifying agency?

Answer: He can be certified by any accredited certification agency. Any grower should take at least three factors into consideration. Certifiers' websites are an excellent source of information and the NOP list of accredited agencies provide links to many websites.

- a. Talk to other organic producers in your area to get some background information about the certifiers that they use and see if they are pleased with the agencies they have selected.
 - b. Check costs. Different agencies charge different fees for certification. The grower should remember that the inspector's fees include travel. It may reduce costs to choose an agency with (relatively) local inspectors. Growers may be able to recuperate some of the cost of certification through the state Cost Share Program (see question 5)
 - c. Make sure that the agencies can meet the grower's needs. For example, not all agencies can provide all of the certifications that are required for exporting organic produce.
4. Why is it all so different from what he did before? Can't he just follow the production rules and label his product as organic at the local farmers' market?

Answer: No, things have changed because new federal regulations were fully implemented on October 21, 2002, and the old rules he followed may not be the same as the National Organic Standards (NOS). The term "fully implemented" means that any producer who uses the term "organic" to describe a product must meet all requirements under the NOS, and that USDA is enforcing the regulations. Prior to full implementation of the NOS, there was no national consistency in the rules that governed the use of the term "organic" on agricultural products. Today, the National Organic Program regulates the standards as found in 7 CFR Part 205 of the Final Rule governing organic production, handling, accreditation and labeling in the US. Any product labeled organic, regardless of where it is sold, must meet the requirements of the National Organic Standards and Guidelines.

5. He realizes that the first year he may only operate his farm part-time while he learns about the growing conditions in Florida. He thinks he will only gross about \$4800. He does follow all of the NOS requirements. Does he need to be certified? Can he advertise his products as organic if he sells them at the farmer's market? Can he use the USDA logo on his signs?

Answer: Operations grossing less than \$5000 do not need to go through the certification process to market and advertise their products as organic, **providing that the farm operator follows all of the NOS requirements.** However, they cannot represent their products as **certified** organic, use the USDA organic seal, or use the seal of any certifying agency on the product. Non-certified farms cannot sell their products for use in certified organic products (e.g., non-certified sugar cannot be used to make a 100% organic product using sugar) or in other certified organic production systems.

6. He is thinking about exporting some of his products. Does he have to inform the certifying agent before exporting products overseas?

Answer: Yes. The key issue is that the producer must now meet the requirements not just of the National Organic Program, but **also of the importing nation.** Different rules about organic production may apply in other nations. The importing nation may require documentation showing that its standards have been met. Most of these documents can only be issued or approved by

a USDA accredited organic agency. In some cases an inspection will be required to verify that all agricultural practices comply with the rules covering organic production in the importing nation. Some USDA accredited certifiers are also able to certify under the organic programs of other nations. A producer who wants to export may want to select a certifying agency that can certify under multiple organic programs. These considerations need to come into play early in the certification process to save the producer time and money.

7. Finally, he is confused about the role of ATTRA (Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas) and OMRI (Organic Materials Research Institute). What are the roles of these organizations?

Answer: ATTRA provides several publications about organic agriculture, most produced with USDA funding. These publications can be a good source of information for farmers. OMRI is a non-profit organization that reviews and makes its own decisions about whether different substances should be used in organic production, processing, or handling. OMRI's decisions are based on their independent interpretation of the NOS. The substances reviewed by OMRI are voluntarily submitted for review by the individual or company that produces the substance. The OMRI list of approved materials can be a good place to look for information about products and help decide whether they meet the requirements of the National Organic Standards.

However, neither of these organizations is an official part of USDA and neither plays an official role in the National Organic Program. The National List of products that can be used in organic production systems in the United States, determined and published by USDA, is the only official source of information about what substances are allowed in an organic operation in this country.

VI. Module Closure Exercise: The Certification Process in Brief (20 Minutes)

Advance Preparation: Three specific documents are mentioned during this closure exercise, the Organic Farm Plan, the Field History Sheet, and the Organic Farm Plan Update. All three documents are available from ATTRA and you should have at least one copy of each that you can pass around among the participants prior to making this presentation. Alternatively, if you have already printed and distributed a set of all the required documents for these modules, you can refer the participants to the copies in their packets of documents.

1. Prepare to show the Power Point presentation "The Certification Process in Brief." You may decide to distribute a copy of the slides **after** this discussion or not. It is your choice.
2. Before starting the slide show, draw participants' attention to the flow chart of the seven key steps, also called "The Certification Process in Brief," included in the *Participant's Guide*. The slides provide more detail about each of the seven steps listed in the flow chart.
3. Part I of the slide show provides information about the seven major steps in the certification process. Review each of the seven steps, using the information on the slides as a basis for your **brief** comments.
4. After your comments, draw participants' attention to the three specific documents that are mentioned in the slides -- the Field History Sheets, the Organic Farm Plan, and the Organic Farm Plan Update. Make sure that participants understand that you will cover each of these documents in detail in upcoming modules in this series. At this point, just give them a moment to look at each of these documents.
5. Part II of the slide show gives some examples of how Extension agents and other local service

providers can assist farmers at each of the seven key steps in the certification process. The first slide summarizes the steps to help participants think about the ways that they can assist farmers. Show the first slide in Part II. ***Prior to showing any of the remaining slides ask participants to give examples of how they could help farmers with each of the seven key steps.***

6. On the remaining slides we provide some examples of key ways that local service providers can help farmers acquire and maintain certification. Review these ***briefly***. Stress that the point of this training is to provide the participants with the knowledge they need in order to be able to provide the information and services that are described on these slides. Reassure participants that by the end of the training we will have gone over every step in this process and that they will know how to help any grower complete the process and where to find more information when needed, especially information about the parts of the NOP Standards that are more difficult to interpret.
7. If you have not already done so, distribute copies of the publication “Organic Farm Certification and the National Organic Program” published by ATTRA. Point out that the basic steps involved in organic certification and how the National Organic Program functions are described in this publication. This is a very useful publication to provide to growers who are interested in converting to organic production. It is short and provides a good overview of what is involved in becoming a certified organic producer.

**The Certification Process in Brief
Concurrent**

