

Application Objective

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

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
- The role of regulatory programs within the USDA

Topics

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

Relevant Sections of the NOP Standards

- 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

Materials and Resources

- Relevant sections of the NOP (National Organic Program) Standards (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/NOP/standards.html>)
- Transitioning to Organic Production* published by USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Network (available free of charge at <http://www.sare.org/publications/organic/organic.pdf>)
- The ATTRA publication *Organic Farm Certification and the National Organic Program* at (<http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/PDF/organcert.pdf>)

Additional Reference Materials. Electronic versions of these documents are available free of charge at the URL listed.

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>)

Keywords

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.

Exercise 1: What's the Rule?

You will see several terms on slides. We have provided four definitions for each term. Decide which one you believe is the correct definition.

Closure for Exercise I

Name some other regulatory programs established by USDA over the years. Explain why these programs were created. How is the National Organic Program similar to these programs?

Exercise 2: Questions for the Service Provider

You will explore how much you already know about organic certification. A scenario is given below. Read it and be prepared to answer the questions that follow the scenario.

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?

Your Answer:

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

Your Answer:

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?

Your Answer:

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?

Your Answer:

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?

Your Answer:

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

Your Answer:

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?

Your Answer:

Module Closure Exercise: The Certification Process in Brief

Please refer to the flow chart “The Certification Process in Brief.” First, we will discuss the seven key steps in the organic certification process. Then we will ask you to give some examples of how Extension agents and other local service providers can assist farmers at each step.

**The Certification Process in Brief
Concurrent**

