

OBTAINING YOUR ORGANIC CERTIFICATION IN COLORADO

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What is Organic Certification?

- ▶ Organic certification means that an independent, third party has verified that the requirements of organic production and handling have been met.
- ▶ All organic certification for products to be sold in the U.S. is done under the National Organic Program (NOP).

What is the NOP?

- ▶ The NOP is part of the USDA's Agriculture Marketing Service.
- ▶ Established to manage the standards to which all products intended to be sold in the U. S. as "organic" must be produced and handled.

What is the NOP?

- ▶ Two primary components of the NOP:
 - USDA Staff in Washington D.C.
 - National Organic Program Rules

What are the National Organic Program Rules?

- ▶ Almost everything you need to know to obtain certified organic.
- ▶ The National Organic Program Rules became effective in October of 2002
 - Organic Food Production Act of 1990
 - Code of Federal Regulations Part 205
- ▶ Get a copy and **read them**, and **read them** again, and **read them** again!

Do You Need to be Certified?

- ▶ Most likely yes, but the NOP Rules provide both exemptions and exclusions
- ▶ Except for businesses indicated as exempt or excluded from certification under National Organic Standards (205.101), **ALL** producers and handlers of organic products must be certified.

Exemptions in 205.201

- ▶ Businesses that sell less than \$5,000 of organic products annually.*
- ▶ Retail food stores as long as they do not process any food.
- ▶ Processors whose products contain less than 70% organic ingredients.*
- ▶ Processors who limit their organic claims to the information panel.*

* Don't need to be certified but must follow some components of the rules.

Exclusions in 205.201

- ▶ Handlers that handle only packaged products.
- ▶ Retailers with in-store bakeries, delis, salad bars or ready to eat foods.
- ▶ Exempt or excluded producers and handlers may choose to obtain certification due to market demands, or to increase consumer confidence in their products.

Seven Steps to Organic Certification

- 1. Contact Accredited Certifying Agency.**
They will send you an application packet
- 2. Read the National Organic Program Rules**
- again
- 3. Complete and submit the application forms (Organic Systems Plan) with the appropriate fee.**

Seven Step to Organic Certification

- 4. Application review and approval.** ACA will review your application to ensure it complies with National Organic Rules.
- 5. On-site inspection.** An inspection of your operation will occur.
- 6. Certification review.** ACA will review the inspection report to ensure that your business complies with National Organic Standards.
- 7. Certification status notification.** You will be notified of the organic status of your operation.

Step 1. Contact an accredited certifying agent (ACA)

- ▶ ACA is the independent third party.
- ▶ Find accredited certifiers on the NOP website under “certifiers.”
- ▶ Colorado Dept. of Agriculture is the only CO based accredited certifier.
- ▶ Private entities and other state’s Dept. of Ag can certify in Colorado as well.

Step 2. Read the Rules

- ▶ **Read the NOP Rules**

Step 3. Complete the Application – Organic Systems Plan (OSP)

- ▶ This is Huge! This is your business plan to organic certification. The OSP is the cornerstone to certification. 205.201
- ▶ Complete the application and any supporting paperwork and submit to the ACA.
- ▶ Include the fee.

Step 4. ACA initial review

- ▶ The ACA will conduct an initial review of the application.
 - Is it complete?
 - Determine if the operation appears to comply or could comply with the NOP rules?

Step 5. On-Site Inspection

- ▶ ACA will send an inspector out for an on-site inspection.
- Verify the OSP is reflective of the actual operation.
- Verify compliance with the NOP rules.
- Verify that no prohibited substances have not been and are not being applied to the operation.

Step 6. Certification Review

- ▶ ACA will review the OSP, the inspection report and any supporting documentation to make a certification decision.

Step 7. Provide Certification Decision

- ▶ ACA provides certification decision to the operation.
 - Denial; or
 - Certification
- ▶ If certified – you will receive a certificate to document certification.

How long does the Seven Step process take?

- ▶ 90 – 120 days from the time we receive the application is the goal
- Incomplete applications will delay the certification process.
- Due to the large volume of inspections needing to be conducted, it may take an organic inspector several weeks to fit an inspection into their schedule.

OSP Submission Timing

▶ Crops Certification

- Submit the OSP 120 days prior to harvest
This provides time for the whole process to be completed prior to harvest.
- Inspection must take place when crops are growing and operation can demonstrate compliance.
- The OSP is a plan, it should be submitted at the beginning of the process. If changes are made, the OSP can and should be modified.

OSP Submission Timing

▶ Livestock Certification

- Submit the OSP at least 120 days prior to needing certification
- Since ruminant livestock certification requires pasture access, this OSP is closely tied to a crops OSP.

OSP Submission Timing

- ▶ Process/Handler
 - Submit the OSP 120 days prior to needing certification.
 - Usually timing is easier than with crops since it is not seasonally based.

Renewal Applicants

- ▶ Organic certification is an annual procedure.
- ▶ CDA's renewal application process is changing to accommodate the volume of applications and to allow on-site inspections to occur at the appropriate time.

Organic Recordkeeping

- ▶ This is a certification program that is based strongly on recordkeeping.
- ▶ If you don't want to keep records, don't get into the organic program.
- ▶ If you don't want to share your records, don't get into this program.

Types of Certification

- ▶ Crops Producer
- ▶ Livestock Producer
- ▶ Process/Handling
- ▶ Wild Crops Harvesting

What is organic crop production?

- ▶ Organic crop production is a farming system that is managed in accordance with National Organic Program rules in response to site-specific conditions.

An organic farm integrates cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that foster the cycling of resources, promote ecological balance and conserve biodiversity.

Organic crop production standards require:

Organic Crop Production

- ▶ Verification that no prohibited materials or practices were applied to a site for at least 36-months prior to certification.
- ▶ The use of organic seeds, seedlings, and annual transplants.
- ▶ Practices that enhance or maintain soil fertility.
- ▶ A crop rotation or the use of cover crops.
- ▶ Practices that enhance or maintain a farm's natural resources.
- ▶ Practices that prevent pest and disease pressure.
- ▶ Harvest and packing practices that prevent commingling with or contamination by prohibited materials.
- ▶ The use of approved materials for organic production.
- ▶ A recordkeeping system that clearly describes all practices being implemented on the farm.

Common Questions for Crops

- ▶ Can I grow both organic and conventional crops?
 - Yes. You must maintain adequate buffer zones to prevent spray drift of a prohibited material onto your organic crops. Records must be maintained that clearly differentiate organic and conventional production.

Common Questions for Crops

What are the land requirements for crops?

- ▶ Must have had no prohibited substances applied for 36 months.
- ▶ Must have distinct, defined boundaries.

Common Questions for Crops

What are the general requirements regarding resource protection?

- ▶ The producer must select and implement tillage and cultivation practices that maintain or improve the physical, chemical, and biological condition of soil and minimize soil erosion.
- ▶ The producer must manage plant and animal materials to maintain or improve soil organic matter content in a manner that does not contribute to contamination of crops, soil, or water by plant nutrients, pathogenic organisms, heavy metals, or residues of prohibited substances.

Common Questions for Crops

Are there restrictions on Manure use?

- ▶ Preharvest intervals are required for crops that are for human consumption.
 - 120 days for crops whose edible parts touch the soil
 - 90 days for crops whose edible parts don't touch the soil

NOTE: The preharvest interval starts on the day of incorporation not application of the manure.

Common Questions for Crops

What is considered compost under the NOP rules?

- ▶ Composted plant and animal materials produced through a process that:
 - Established an initial C:N ratio of between 25:1 and 40:1;
AND
 - Maintained a temperature of between 131 °F and 170 °F for 3 days using an in-vessel or static aerated pile system; **or**
 - Maintained a temperature of between 131 °F and 170 °F for 15 days using a windrow composting system, during which period, the materials must be turned a minimum of five times.

Common Questions for Crops

▶ Do I have to use organic seeds?

- Yes – except . . . The National Organic Program rules require that organic seeds, annual transplants and seedlings be used unless they are not commercially available. Commercial availability is defined by appropriate form, quality or quantity. Commercial unavailability must be documented.

What is process/handling under the NOP rules.

- ▶ You change an organic food into another form or product (can, freeze, dry, dehydrate, cook, press, etc.)
- This can be product you produced or product produced by someone else.

Process/Handling Requirements

- ▶ Processors and handlers must submit an application packet that includes an Organic System Plan.
- ▶ Procedures must be in place to ensure that no commingling or misidentification occurs between organic and nonorganic food products.
- ▶ Prohibited substances used within the processing or handling facility must not come in contact or contaminate the organic food products.

Process/Handling Requirements

Product Composition and Labeling

- ▶ A list of all ingredients used in a product must be provided. All organic ingredients must be certified organic by a NOP accredited certification agency.
- ▶ Labels for all organic food products must be submitted and approved prior to obtaining organic certification.
- ▶ All organic food products must be processed with only approved minor ingredients and processing aids.

Common Issues with Processing Certification

Product Composition of Organic products
Using non-organic products without sufficient justification and documentation

Labeling errors:

No including the certifying agency information.

Livestock Production

- ▶ Livestock production under the NOP rules is any cattle, sheep, goat, swine, poultry, or equine animals used for food or in the production of food, fiber, feed, or other agricultural-based consumer products.

Livestock Production Requirements

- ▶ 205.236- 205.239 outline organic livestock requirements.
- ▶ The NOP rules include criteria for:
 - Origin of livestock
 - Feed
 - Health care
 - Living conditions.
 - Materials approved for use in organic livestock production are provided in NOP sections 205.603 and 205.604.

Livestock Records Needed

- ▶ The following records must be maintained:
 - Medications administered (dates, doses, and sources).
 - Feed bought or raised and fed (receipts, sources, organic certificates, labels).
 - Feed supplements (receipts, labels, sources, dates and quantity administered).
 - Purchase and sales records for livestock and livestock products (dates, weights, quantities, description).
 - All materials used in the on-site production of crops for feed (receipts, source, dates and quantity applied).
 - Records of finished product sales.

Livestock Feed Requirements

- ▶ Livestock must be feed with a total feed ration composed of agricultural products, including pasture and forage, that are organically produced. *Except, That,* nonsynthetic substances and synthetic substances allowed under §205.603 may be used as feed additives and supplements.

Transitioning Animals

- ▶ Read the NOP rules
- ▶ Talk to your certifier

Wild Crop Harvesting

- ▶ A wild crop that is intended to be sold, labeled, or represented as organic must be harvested from a designated area that has had no prohibited substance applied to it for a period of 3 years immediately preceding the harvest of the wild crop.
- ▶ A wild crop must be harvested in a manner that ensures that such harvesting or gathering will not be destructive to the environment and will sustain the growth and production of the wild crop.

Additional Information

Certified organic producers

NOP Website

AQSS – questions answered by NOP
program staff

Other websites

ATTRA and others

Recent Issues

Plastic mulch:

Plastic mulches may be used in the field for weed control provided the plastic is not made with or of polyvinyl chloride.

Plastic mulch must be removed from the field at the end of each annual growing or harvest season. Failure to remove the plastic from the field at the end of each annual growing or harvest season would be a violation of the NOP and could result in loss of certification of the applicable field and/or operation in total. Once the plastic begin disintegrating and breaking up into parts or fragments, this would be considered an application of a prohibited substance and would require a 3 year transition.

More discussion needed

Liquid Fertilizer with > 3% N

This notice is to inform you that the National Organic Program (NOP) is no longer confident that the following liquid fertilizer products can be shown to be compliant with the NOP regulations: Marizyme™ and Agrolizer™. Both of these products were manufactured by Port Organic, Ltd., which is not operating at the present time.

Liquid Fertilizer with > 3% N

Huge concerns recently about > 3% N
being legitimately organic

CA dealer investigated

NOP Statement

- the NOP cautions vigilance in the approval of all liquid fertilizer products and other inputs. We are taking the following steps to support certifying agents, with whom final responsibility for approval of all organic inputs remains. These steps are effective for all ACAs—not just domestically-operating agents—as well as all NOP-certified operations globally.

NOP Statement

Effective with this notice, continued use of the products Marizyme™ and Agrolizer™ without the ability to prove they are in full compliance (see approval criteria below) with the NOP standards could jeopardize the organic status of operations, including land and products, once the outcome of the OIG investigation is concluded.

NOP Statement

By October 1, 2009, approval of all high nitrogen liquid fertilizers (nitrogen analysis greater than 3 percent) must be accompanied by documentation that demonstrates their compliance with the NOP regulations, based upon a 3rd party inspection that meets the criteria below. If such documentation is not provided, ACAs must immediately rescind approval for the use of these materials by certified organic operations.

NOP Statement

By October 1, 2009, NOP will require all 3rd party reviewers to implement a system of audit and inspection for branded products they deem compliant with the NOP regulations as a condition of recognition as a 3rd party reviewer by the NOP. Inspections must include but not be limited to high risk inputs such as liquid fertilizers and other inputs where synthetic substitutes are readily available and have the potential to be concealed.

NOP Statement

NOP will also require all 3rd party reviewers to undergo audits by NOP as a condition of ongoing recognition as a 3rd party reviewer for materials by the NOP.

NOP will focus increased scrutiny on how inputs are approved for use by certified organic operations during accreditation audits of ACAs conducted beginning in 2009, beginning with an emphasis on liquid nitrogen fertilizers.