



What is Organic Certification?



Organic certification verifies that your farm or handling facility located anywhere in the world complies with the USDA organic regulations and allows you to sell, label, and represent your products as organic. These regulations describe the specific standards required for you to use the word “organic” or the USDA organic seal on food, feed, or fiber products. The USDA National Organic Program administers these regulations, with substantial input from its citizen advisory board and the public.

Who Certifies Farms or Businesses?

Your farm or handling facility may be certified by a private, foreign, or State entity that has been accredited by the USDA. These entities are called certifying agents and are located throughout the United States and around the world. Certifying agents are responsible for ensuring that USDA organic products meet all organic standards. Certification provides the consumer, whether end-user or intermediate processor, assurance of the organic product’s integrity.

What Can I Be Certified to Produce?

The USDA organic regulations recognize four categories of organic products:

- **Crops:** A plant that is grown to be harvested as food, livestock feed, fiber, or used to add nutrients to the field.
- **Livestock:** Animals that can be used for food or in the production of food, fiber, or feed.
- **Processed products:** Items that have been handled and packaged (i.e. chopped carrots) or combined, processed, and packaged (i.e. soup).
- **Wild crops:** Plants from a growing site that is not cultivated.

Is There a Transition Period?

Yes. Any land used to produce raw organic commodities must not have had prohibited substances applied to it for the past three years. Until the full 36-month transition period is met, you may not:

- Sell, label, or represent the product as “organic”
- Use the USDA organic or certifying agent’s seal

USDA provides technical and financial assistance during the transition period through its Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Learn more at <http://1.usa.gov/nrcs-eqip-apply>.

How Much Does Organic Certification Cost?

Actual certification costs or fees vary widely depending on the certifying agent and the size, type, and complexity of your operation. Certification costs may range from a few hundred to several thousand dollars. Before you apply, it is important to understand your certifier’s fee structure and billing cycle. Typically, there is an application fee, annual renewal fee, assessment on annual production or sales, and inspection fees.

Once you are certified, the USDA Organic Certification Cost-Share Programs can reimburse you up to 75 percent of your certification costs. To learn more about this and other financial assistance programs, visit www.ams.usda.gov/NOPFinancialAssistance.

Can I Use the USDA Organic Seal?

All raw certified organic products may be labeled with the USDA organic seal. To learn more about organic labeling, including which processed or multi-ingredient products may use the USDA organic seal, visit www.ams.usda.gov/NOPOrganicLabeling.



How Do I Get Certified Organic?

To become certified, you must apply to a USDA-accredited certifying agent. They will ask you for information, including:

- A detailed description of the operation to be certified.
- A history of substances applied to land during the previous three years.
- The organic products grown, raised, or processed.
- A written Organic System Plan describing the practices and substances to be used.

The certification and annual recertification processes are described to the right and below respectively.

To learn more about the becoming certified to the USDA organic standards and to find a certifying agent, visit <http://1.usa.gov/organic-certification>.

Organic Certification Process

Producer or handler adopts organic practices; submits application and fees to certifying agent

Certifying agent reviews applications to verify that practices comply with USDA organic regulations

Inspector conducts an on-site inspection of the applicant's operation

Certifying agent reviews the application and the inspector's report to determine if the applicant complies with the USDA organic regulations

Certifying agent issues organic certificate

Annual Recertification Process

Certifying agent reviews the application and the inspector's report to determine if the applicant still complies with the USDA organic regulations

Inspector conducts an on-site inspection of the applicant's operation

Producer or handler provides annual update to certifying agent