



# BAYSTATE ORGANIC CERTIFIERS

Hello from the staff at Baystate Organic Certifiers!

We're glad you have decided to get certified organic with us.

Please take the time to familiarize yourself with the National Organic Standards and Baystate's policies and procedures prior to completing the application forms. The Standards can be downloaded from the National Organic Program's website ([www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic/handbook](http://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic/handbook)). Our Program Manual is located on our website ([www.baystateorganic.org](http://www.baystateorganic.org)) and combines both the Organic Standards and Baystate's Policies and Procedures in one convenient resource.

Many questions you are sure to have may be found by becoming familiar with the Organic Standards and Baystate's policies and procedures. However, if you do have any questions or want further clarification on any particular certification subject or your personal operation and how it can reach compliance to the Standards, do not hesitate to contact Lauren Sandstrom 917-957-0979.

Thank you for your interest in organic certification through Baystate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Don Franczyk".

Don Franczyk  
Executive Director

## **Introduction to the Certification Process - Grower**

Organic certification can be complex, but it doesn't have to be confusing. Baystate Organic Certifiers (BOC) is here to help you through the process.

To become certified, fill out an application called an Organic System Plan (OSP) that describes your operation and explains how it works. Electronic versions of these forms are available for download at [www.baystateorganic.org](http://www.baystateorganic.org) or can be emailed directly to you. You will only need to submit the entire completed plan once. After that submission, your organic submission will be entered by Baystate, and you will be sent a copy for editing. Because you will start with a completed plan, renewing your certification is a much easier process than first year certification.

So, how is it done? Organic certification involves an application, initial review of the application to see if it qualifies, inspection, final review of the inspection report, and finally, certification for those who meet the standards. BOC provides assistance for any questions you may have along the way, so please contact any one of our staff.

### **Steps to Certification**

#### **1. Submit application - your Organic System Plan (OSP)**

You may apply for certification at any time. However, we encourage you to apply for any one of the three spring application deadlines. There are three different deadlines for application: February 15th, March 15th, and May 1st. These dates refer to the postmark date of your application. These deadlines correspond to dates you will be notified for certification decisions. Applications received before February 15<sup>th</sup> will receive their certification decision by May 1<sup>st</sup>. Applications received before March 15<sup>th</sup> will receive their certification decision by June 1<sup>st</sup>. Applications received before May 1st will receive their certification decision by July 15<sup>th</sup>. Applications received outside of these deadlines will receive a certification decision after their organic certification inspection has been completed. This process can be expedited to a matter of 4-6 weeks for operations with complete applications that are prepared for inspection and certification. If you require expedited certification, call the Baystate office as soon as possible in the application process, so we can arrange to have an inspector ready to inspect your operation.

Part of your application packet contains a checklist to assist in finishing your application packet. Following this checklist will help ensure that your submitted application packet is complete. All business-related information on the application forms will be kept strictly confidential. If you have any questions about the forms, or whether specific questions or additional forms apply to your operation, please contact any one of the Baystate staff, and we will do our best to answer your questions.

#### **2. BOC reviews application and OSP**

Once we receive your application, we will notify you of its receipt and whether it is complete. If the application is incomplete, BOC will provide you with a list of any missing paperwork needed to make it complete or if you need to provide more clarification. A member of BOC staff will review your application to determine whether your OSP is compliant to the Organic Standards and is ready to move forward with inspection.

#### **3. Inspection**

When the initial review is complete, an inspector will schedule your inspection visit to inspect all aspects of your operation. The purpose of the inspection is to verify that what is detailed in your

OSP is happening in practice. Expect to spend two to four hours with the inspector. Inspections need to be scheduled during a time and season when we can inspect what is being certified. That means that crop inspections do not begin until field work begins in the spring. The inspector then files an inspection report detailing your visit to the BOC office for final review.

#### **4. BOC reviews inspection report and makes a certification decision**

Our staff will review the inspection report and determine if your operation meets the Organic Standards. They will let you know of any issues or requests for further information. If there are any issues or noncompliances found, you will be given a chance to correct them.

#### **5. Final Notification**

Once the final review is complete, you will receive a letter from BOC informing you of your certification status and any requirements for ongoing certification, and if there are no open noncompliances, a copy of your certification certificate. Should you disagree with Baystate Organic Certifier's decision concerning your operation, you may appeal that decision according to the process detailed in the Standards.

#### **6. Cost Share Reimbursement**

Once you have received your certification, you are eligible for the cost share reimbursement as a part of the farm bill. Organic operations can receive 75% of certification fees back to them, up to \$750 total per scope of certification each year. Operations that are certified for more than one scope may apply for reimbursement for each scope but need a receipt for the payment of each scope. Fees must be paid in full in order to get the reimbursement.

#### **7. Annual renewal and inspection**

Organic certification must be renewed annually. Each year, your certification will be renewed, and each year, annual certification fees are due. To remain certified in good standing, every operation must be inspected annually and update BOC of any OSP changes, new labels, or other changes to your operation. Your annual renewal date is set at the time you submit your initial application for certification. That means if you submitted for our February 15<sup>th</sup> deadline, for example, your renewal application will be due on February 15<sup>th</sup> every year going forward. Renewal dates are listed on your certification certificate.