



## New Jersey Department of Agriculture Organic Certification Program

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### Buffer Zone Guidance for Growers

The USDA's regulations for organic production and handling (*7 CFR Part 205, the National Organic Program; Final Rule*), section 205.202(c) requires producers to "have distinct, defined boundaries and buffer zones such as run off diversions to prevent the unintended application of prohibited materials." This means that growers must have distance between neighboring areas (or roadways) where prohibited materials are applied, or are likely to be applied, and the organic production areas seeking certification.

#### Examples of where increased buffers are likely to be needed:

- When organic fields are next to conventional (non-organic) fields
- When organic fields are next to residential properties using lawn chemicals
- When organic fields have perimeter fencing that contains wood treated with prohibited materials (see Treated Lumber Guidance for more information concerning treated lumber)
- When organic fields are next to roadways
  - How heavily traveled is the roadway?
  - Does the township or County apply prohibited materials along roadway?

**The size of the buffer** required is site specific to the fields being evaluated for organic certification. There are many factors that influence the size of a buffer zone to include:

- The slope of the land where the buffer is being established (does the land slope towards the intended organic production area or away – at what grade?)
- The prevailing wind direction
- The presence of vegetation in the buffer area (trees, bushes, brush, grasses, etc.)
- The nature of the contamination threat / neighboring activity
  - Exactly what is being applied next door – granular fertilizers or a pesticide spray?
  - How is the material applied – drop spreader or high pressure boom sprayer?

#### Types of Buffers:

- Mowed grass ways / farm lanes
- Diverted Crops
  - Some growers plant crop to the edges of their fields, then harvest the portions of crops along the borders and divert them to conventional markets. Detailed documentation (planting records, harvest records, sales records, bills of lading, etc.) are required to document the crop diversion.
- Established vegetative buffers
  - Trees / Wooded areas
  - Hedges / Bushes
  - Tall Perennial Grasses

Applicants for certification are asked to describe their neighboring activity and buffer zones in detail in the Organic Handling Plan form. Applicants should provide as much detail as possible addressing the points above when describing neighboring activity and the edges of fields and their buffer zones. Hopefully, your neighbors are cooperative and friendly, and will give you specific information concerning their practices when asked. If an organic grower wishes to directly abut neighboring property, an Affirmation of Neighboring Activity can be completed by the neighbors documenting that no prohibited materials are used.

During the initial inspection and yearly update inspections, the organic inspectors evaluate the production areas seeking certification, to include scrutiny of neighboring activities and established buffer zones. Certified clients should notify their certifier immediately if and when neighboring activities change.

Buffer zones should be clearly indicated on the required Farm Map. The map should show the size (in feet) of establishes buffer zones. Certified clients must update their Farm Map if and when buffer zones change.