



New Jersey Department of Agriculture Organic Certification Program

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ORGANIC CERTIFICATION FACT SHEET FOR PRODUCERS

What is Organic Agriculture? Organic agriculture is an agricultural system that uses cultural, biological and mechanical methods to promote soil health, provide fertility, suppress disease, and manage insects and weed pests without relying on routine inputs of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. An organic farmer uses management techniques such as crop rotation, cover cropping, and promotion of beneficial insects to control pest populations and disease. When needed, natural materials rather than synthetic materials are used for fertility and pest control. Organic livestock must be fed organic feed, have outdoor access, and be housed in a manner that allows them to engage in their natural behaviors. Livestock health care emphasizes prevention of disease and prohibits the use of antibiotics and hormones. Organic products must not be bio-engineered (genetically modified), subjected to irradiation, or produced with sewage sludge (biosolids).

Certified Organic farms are comprised of production areas (i.e. fields, woodlots, grow houses) that have had no prohibited substances applied for 36 months prior to harvest and are managed in accordance with *7 CFR Part 205, National Organic Program; Final Rule* (often referred to as “the rule”).

Who has to be Certified? §205.101 of the rule explains the exemption and exclusion provisions for organic growers (producers), food processors (handlers), retailers (stores and markets), and food establishments (restaurants). Farmers whose gross agricultural income from organic products is \$5,000 or less per year are exempt from certification, but must still comply with the organic production and handling requirements, as well as the labeling and record keeping requirements found in the rule. Even though they are “exempt” from certain certification requirements, these operations must still be familiar with and follow the regulations for production, handling, labeling, and record keeping. For additional information on exemptions and exclusions, see §205.101 of the rule.

Process: Farmers document the organic management to be used and the prior three-year histories of production areas on the NJDA Organic Certification application forms. By completing the application papers, a grower creates the required “organic farm plan” (note: the rule allows producers to submit a plan prepared to meet the requirements of another governmental regulatory program as the organic farm plan **if** that plan meets all the requirements of §205.201). New applications are reviewed by the Supervisor and evaluated for completeness. Complete applications are referred to a trained, independent organic farm inspector who visits the farm to verify the information. Once completed, the inspection report and application papers are reviewed for compliance with the rule. All production, handling, and storage methods and materials used by the operation are scrutinized for compliance. If an operation is found to be compliant, an organic certification certificate is issued. Operations with multiple minor noncompliance or with a major noncompliance are given time to address the noncompliance to earn certification. The entire process can take between four and six months.

Fees: Certification fees are based on a sliding scale and start at \$285 for first-time applicants and \$235 for renewals. If an additional inspection is required to verify corrective actions, the operation must cover all additional inspection costs.

Certification Regulations: All certified organic operations have to be in compliance with the rule. A copy of the regulatory text is provided to every applicant. For a preliminary look, you can access the rule on the NOP website at www.ams.usda.gov/nop.

To receive more information: Copies of the regulatory text can be obtained by sending a request to the organic certification program. Application packages are available year round and require a \$25 payment that can be deducted from the certification fees.

Call the NJDA Organic Program for details, (609) 984-2225 or e-mail: erich.bremer@ag.state.nj.us