



# Organic Certification & Small Operations

## What is Organic Certification?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) accredits state, private and foreign organizations or persons to become "certifying agents". The State of Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA) is one of these "certifying agents". Under the National Organic Program (NOP), all products sold as organic in the United States must be certified by an NOP accredited certification agency. As an independent third party agency, the State of Colorado verifies that the requirements of organic production and handling practices meet the national standards.

## Who needs to be certified?

Operations or portions of operations that produce or handle agricultural products that are intended to be sold, labeled, or represented as "100 percent organic", "organic" or "made with organic ingredients" must be certified.

## Who does NOT need to be certified?

Producers and handling operations that sell less than \$5,000 a year in organic products do not have to be certified. Although exempt from certification, these producers and handlers must abide by the national standards for organic products and may label their products as organic. Other exemptions include:

- Retail food stores
- Processors whose products contain less than 70% organic ingredients
- Processors who limit their organic claims to the information panel.

## Why should I consider certifying my operation?

There are many reasons why you should consider certifying your product. Here are a few:

- The USDA National Organic Standard seal assures consumers that your operation's procedures are genuinely organic and meet the strict standards set forth by the USDA.



- Organically certifying your product increases its market ability to the consumer.
- The measures you take to implement organic agricultural practices should be recognized, especially as the market for organic foods is growing each year.

## How much will it cost to certify my operation?

Each year you will pay an application fee and an inspection fee. The application fee schedule can be found on the Colorado Department of Agriculture's Plant Industries website: <http://www.colorado.gov/ag/dpi>

### Application fee:

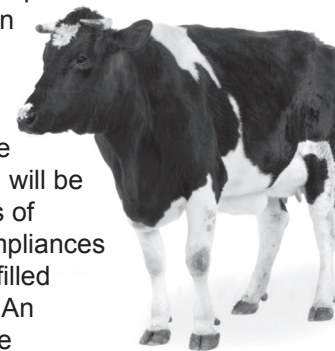
- An application fee is based on your primary category certification.
- If your operation includes more than one category, there is no application fee for the second or third categories.

### Inspection Fee (There is an hourly rate assessed to):

- The time the inspector takes driving to and from your operation.
- Inspection time
- The inspection narrative and write-up.
- Mileage and per diem as necessary.

## The Certification Process

First, you should note that your application for certification doubles as your Organic System Plan (OSP), the foundation of organic certification. The process begins with your OSP being turned in for initial review. Next, an inspector will arrive to examine every aspect of your operation and to verify the OSP. Upon completion of the inspection, inspector narrative and write-up, the application and narrative will be reviewed to evaluate compliance with the organic standards. You will be notified of the certification status of your operation and any non-compliances or conditions that need to be fulfilled before certification can be met. An application and inspection will be conducted annually to keep your certificate current.



## Basic Requirements

Here a few of the requirements listed on the National Organic Program regulations.



### §205.103 Record Keeping

- Records kept must include: receipts for purchased inputs, applications and harvest records, label information, crop posting process records, clean-out logs, facility maps, seed labels, pesticide labels, and organic ingredient certificates. Records must be maintained for no less than 5 years beyond their creation and be sufficient to demonstrate compliance.

### §205.202 Land Requirements

- The organic farm parcel must have had no prohibited substances, as listed in §205.105, applied to it for a period of 3 years immediately preceding harvest of the crop. The field must have defined boundaries and buffer zones to prevent prohibited substances from neighboring fields coming into contact with farm parcels under organic management.

### §205.203 Soil Fertility and crop nutrient management practice standard

- The producer must select and implement tillage practices that maintain or improve the physical, chemical and biological condition of soil and minimize soil erosion. The producer must also manage crop nutrients and soil fertility through rotations, cover crops and the application of plant and animal materials.

### §205.272 Commingling and contact with prohibited substance prevention

- The handler of an organic handling operation must implement measures necessary to prevent the commingling of organic and nonorganic products and protect organic products from contact with prohibited substances.

### §205.601 - §205.606 National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances

- These 6 sections contain lists of synthetic allowable substances and non-synthetic prohibited substances. Each section pertains to a specific category, i.e., crop production, process and handling or livestock production.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### How long will it take to get my operation certified?

- If all of the necessary information is received in a timely manner, the inspection and certification process takes about 120 days.

### Do I submit an application for each category I need certification for (i.e. crops and handling, crops and livestock)?

- Yes, a separate application needs to be submitted for each category every year.

### Can I have both conventional and organic practices in my operation and still be certified?

- Yes, both conventional and organic practices can exist in your operation but the necessary precautions will need to be made to ensure no contamination or commingling will occur.

### How do I add new products to my existing certification or notify CDA if my organic system plan changes during the year?

- CDA certified organic handlers and processors are welcome to submit new products for review to our office at any point throughout the year. Please include a product profile sheet and a label when asking for evaluation. Also, it is understood that environmental, economic and other reasons can cause you to modify your Organic System Plan as the year progresses. The National Organic Standards require that certified operations notify their certifying agent prior to making any changes to your plan.

### How do I get a copy of the NOP rules?

- The National Organic Program rules and regulations are available at the AMS- USDA website: <http://www.ams.usda.gov>.

## Additional Resources

United States Department of Agriculture  
Organic Program: [www.ams.usda.gov/nop](http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop)

CSU Cooperative Extension Agents:  
<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/cedirectory/countylist.cfm>

Colorado State University Organic Agriculture  
Certificate Program: <http://organic.colostate.edu/>

AOSCA Organic Seed Finder:  
[www.organicseedfinder.org](http://www.organicseedfinder.org)

ATTRA - National Sustainable Agriculture  
Information Service: [www.attra.org](http://www.attra.org)



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