



Organic Certification

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. Exemptions:

- Producers and handling operations that sell less than \$5,000 a year in organic products. Although exempt from certification, these producers and handlers must abide by the national standards for organic products and may label their products as organic.
- 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 marketability 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.

What is an Organic System Plan?

Your application doubles as your Organic System Plan (OSP), the foundation of organic certification. The OSP is a detailed description of the practices and procedures used by your operation to produce organic goods. The document acts as an agreement between you and CDA that explains how you remain in compliance with organic standards.

7 Steps to Organic Certification

1. **CONTACT THE COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (CDA) ORGANIC PROGRAM.** We will send you an application packet. Or you can download the required documents from our website: www.colorado.gov/ag/dpi and select Organic.
2. **COMPLETE AND SUBMIT YOUR ORGANIC SYSTEM PLAN WITH THE APPROPRIATE FEE.**
3. **PLAN REVIEW AND APPROVAL.** CDA will review your plan to ensure it complies with National Organic Standards.
4. **ORGANIC INSPECTION.** A trained organic inspector will perform an on-site inspection and verify your operation functions as stated in your OSP.
5. **INSPECTION REPORT REVIEW.** CDA will review your Plan and inspection report to determine compliance with the organic standards.
6. **CERTIFICATION STATUS AND NOTIFICATION.** You will be notified of the status of your operation.
7. **ANNUAL RENEWAL.** An application and fee needs to be submitted to CDA every year.

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 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

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

ATTRA - National Sustainable Agriculture
Information Service: www.attra.org



Division of Plant Industry
Organic Program
700 Kipling Street, Suite 4000
Lakewood, CO 80215 - 8000
Tel: (303) 239-4140
Fax: (303) 239-4177
Email: organic@state.co.us
Web: www.colorado.gov/ag/dpi

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