

GROWING A NEW GENERATION OF ILLINOIS FRUIT AND VEGETABLE FARMERS

THE STEPS TO BECOMING A CERTIFIED ORGANIC OPERATION

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Today's Objectives

- Increased knowledge of the principles of organic agriculture
- Increased knowledge of the requirements for organic certification and the certification process
- Increased awareness of resources and organizations that provide organic information and support



What We'll Cover

- Short discussion about what is organic agriculture
- Answering some frequently asked questions
- Detailed information about how to get certified and how to find a certifying agent



What is organic?





"Feeding the soil, not the plant"

 In the simplest terms, organic growing or farming is based on maintaining a living soil with a diverse population of micro and macro soil organisms.



Photo by Lynda Richardson, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Healthy Soil, Healthy Plant, Healthy Food



USDA National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) Definition

 Organic agriculture is defined as "an ecological production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity. It is based on minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain, or enhance ecological harmony. The primary goal of organic agriculture is to optimize the health and productivity of interdependent communities of soil life, plants, animals and people." (NOSB, 1997)





Is this what "organic" means?

 Simply stated, organic produce and other ingredients are grown without the use of pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, genetically modified organisms, or ionizing radiation. Animals that produce meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products do not take antibiotics or growth hormones.





Or is this what organic means?

 It is instead a proactive management system based on ecologicallysound practices in concert with allowed inputs.



Photo by Lynda Richardson, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service





From Transitioning to Organic Crop Production, Organic Fact Sheet, MOSES, FS 604

Deep Organic Versus Shallow Organic

- Deep organic strives to minimize off farm inputs and mimic nature as much as possible.
 Farmers use knowledge to capitalize on ecosystem services and the myriad benefits they provide.
- Shallow organic substitutes organic inputs for conventional inputs.



To certify or not to certify... that is the question



https://www.gomoxie.com/blog/to-be-or-not-to-be-in-the-office-that-is-the-question



What is organic certification?

 Organic certification verifies that your farm complies with the USDA organic regulations and allows you to sell, label, and represent your products as organic.





USDA AMS National Organic Program, What is Organic Certification (Updated June 2012)

Alternatives to Organic Certification

Certified Naturally Grown Certified Humane Raised





http://certifiedhumane.org

www.naturallygrown.org



Who needs to be certified?

- Receives more than \$5,000 in gross annual organic sales
- Receives less than \$5,000 in gross annual organic sales

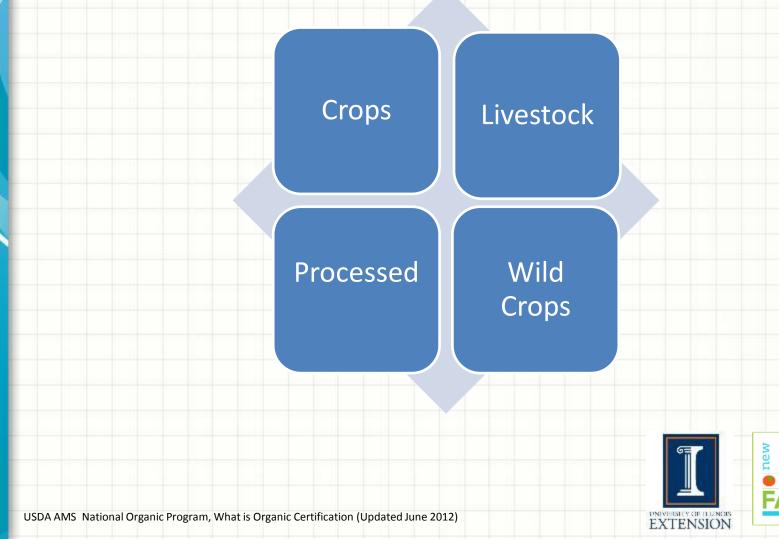






USDA AMS National Organic Program, Do I Need To Be Certified Organic?

What types of crops are eligible for organic certification?



Why is certification required?



Photo by Mercedesfrom the eighties (CC BY-SA 2.0)



Baier, A. H. and Ahramjian, L. (2012) Organic Certification of Farms and Businesses Producing Agricultural Products

EXTENSION

Who Certifies Farms or Businesses?

- Your farm may be certified by a certifying agent
 - Private (domestic)
 - State
 - Foreign







USDA AMS National Organic Program, What is Organic Certification (Updated June 2012)

So how do I choose the right agency to work with me?

- Do you certify other farms or operations of my type?
 - The agency should be familiar with your type of production so your certification goes smoothly.
- Do you certify other farms in my region?
- How do you charge for organic certification services?
- How quickly can you inspect and certify my farm once I have submitted my application?
- Ask other farmers in your region.
- Talk to buyers of organic commodities, especially the projected buyer for your crop.



From How to Choose a Certification Agency & the Organic Certification Process, Organic Fact Sheet, 2012 MOSES

How do I choose a certifying agent?

- When selecting a certifying agent, you may wish to consider the following criteria:
 - Distance to your farm or business
 - Fee structure
 - Accreditation to other standards
 - Additional services, such as educational resources or member services

www.ams.usda.gov/NOPACAs

http://bit.ly/certifierselection





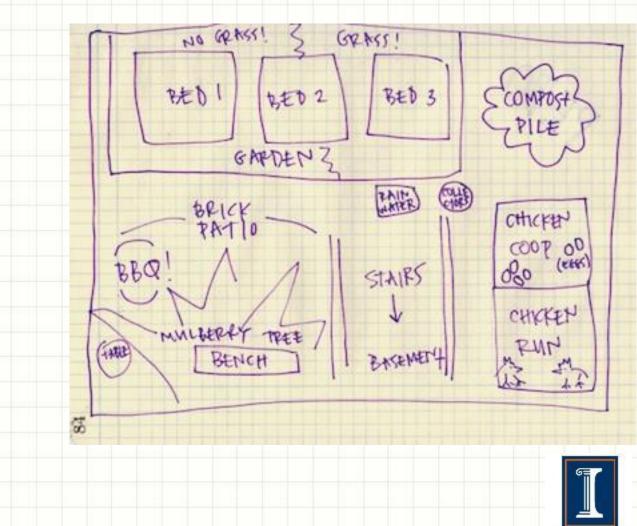
How Do I Get Certified Organic?



organic



1. A detailed description of the operation to be certified



Baier, A. H. and Ahramjian, L. (2012) Organic Certification of Farms and Businesses Producing Agricultural Products

EXTENSION



2. History of substances applied to land during the previous 3 years

Generic Materials





Products List

www.omri.org

National Organic Program

National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances



3. Names of the organic products grown, raised, or processed



USDA photo courtesy of Sam Jones-Ellard. (CC BY 2.0)





4. Must have a written Organic System Plan

- A complete Organic System Plan consists of one or more of the following elements, as appropriate to the individual operation
 - Organic Farm Plan
 - Organic Livestock Plan
 - Organic Handling Plan

Organic System Plan Template for Crop and/or Livestock Production

https://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/summaries/summary.php?pub=359



What are the steps in the organic certification process?

Producer or handler adopts organic practices; submits application and fees to certifying agent

Certifying agent reviews applications to verify that practices comply with USDA organic regulations

Inspector conducts an on-site inspection of the applicant's operation

Certifying agent reviews the application and the inspector's report to determine if the applicant complies with the USDA organic regulations

Certifying agent issue organic certificate





USDA AMS National Organic Program, What is Organic Certification (Updated June 2012)

Do I have to recertify each year?

Certifying agent reviews the application and the inspector's report to determine if the applicant still complies with the USDA organic regulations

Inspector conducts an on-site inspection of the applicant's operation

Certifying agent issues organic certificate

Producer or handler provides annual update to certifying agent





USDA AMS National Organic Program, What is Organic Certification (Updated June 2012)

Is There a Transition Period?



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Transitioning to Organic Production



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PATTI Introduction to Organic Farming

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How Much Does Organic Certification Cost?

- Application fee
- Inspection fees
- Certification Fees
- Fees assessed on
 - sales
 - Differs for agency

www.ams.usda.gov/NOPFinancialAssistance

USDA AMS National Organic Program, What is Organic Certification (Updated June 2012)



Image © Elnur - Fotolia.com



Ecocert ICO 2013 Fee Schedule

Application Fee \$350*



- Initial application and then annually
- Inspection Fee \$410 plus*
 - Fees based on the amount agreed upon between ICO and the inspector
- Certification Fee \$215-\$1,350*

Based on the number of acres

Ecocert ICO does not charge fees based on sales





the web community for

http://eorganic.info organic agriculture

funded by CSREES Integrated Organic Program and eXtension

www.extension.org



Small organic farms

- Less than \$5,000 (in gross annual organic sales) you are exempt
 - Certification
 - Don't need to be certified to sell, label, or represent your products as organic.
 - Organic System Plan
 - You are not required to document the specific practices and substances used to produce and/or handle organic products.

MUST FOLLOW ALL OTHER REQUIREMENTS IN THE USDA ORGANIC REGULATIONS



Small organic farms

- You must follow these requirements:
 - Maintain records for 3 years
 - Not use the USDA organic seal or refer to them as certified organic
 - Not sell your products as ingredients for use in someone else's certified organic product



Cavanaugh-Grant, Deborah A. High Tunnel. [Photograph].



Resources

- Good Growing Why Organic Farming Works, Leslie Duram
 - http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/product/Good-Growing,672895.aspx
- USDA National Organic Program (NOP)

http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/nop

 University of Illinois Extension, Local Food Systems and Small Farms website – Organics <u>http://web.extension.illinois.edu/smallfarm/organic.html</u>



ATTRA: The National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service

- Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas is provided by the National Center for Appropriate Technology
- <u>http://attra.ncat.org/</u>
- Highlights:
 - Comprehensive list of 200+ publications on organic topics
 - Submit questions to staff professionals
 - Organic Farming



MOSES (Midwest Organic Sustainable Education Service)

- MOSES promotes organic and sustainable agriculture by providing the education, resources and expertise farmers need to succeed.
- <u>http://mosesorganic.org</u>
- Highlights:
 - Organic Broadcaster
 - Guidebook for Certification
 - Organic Fact Sheets
 - Organic Link E-News
 - Organic Resource Directory



The Rodale Institute

- The Rodale Institute provides a venue for information, action, and interaction
- <u>http://rodaleinstitute.org</u>
- Highlights:
 - Results from Rodale's own research
 - <u>Grassroots OPX</u>: a volunteer organic price index
 - Organic Transitions Course
 - Organic System Plan



Summary

- There are many benefits of organic production and certification
- You may use organic practices without being certified, but are restricted in the use of the word "organic."



To reach us

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