



# Organic Certification in Nevada

Factsheet 2015-12

## What is the current status of organic certification in Nevada?

According to the 2014 report issued by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Organic Program (NOP), there are currently 78 operations certified organic in Nevada. Nine certifiers currently certify these operations, and the Nevada Department of Agriculture (NDA) is one of them, certifying 45 of the 78 operations. All USDA-accredited organic certifiers certify to the same standards set forth by the USDA NOP.

## What is the current status of the NDA's Organic Certification Program?

The NDA's Organic Certification Program was first implemented in the 1997 Legislative Session with the intent that it would be self-sustaining within a few years. With the current fee structure, a state-operated organic certification program has left the department with a significant budget shortfall, resulting in budgetary hardships for other NDA programs.

## Who will decide if and when the NDA's program will close?

The NDA's Board of Agriculture's June 3, 2015 meeting will have an action item regarding the program on their agenda. The Board may or may not take action on the item.

This public meeting will be held at the NDA Headquarters: 405 South 21st Street in Sparks and via video conference at 2300 McLeod Street in Las Vegas and at Great Basin College, Room 121 in Elko. The agenda will be available online at [agri.nv.gov](http://agri.nv.gov) on Thursday, May 29, 2015.

## What does that mean for organics in Nevada?

Regardless of the next steps, organic operations will still be able to certify organic in Nevada to the same standards, whether through the NDA or an independent certifier. Local, certified organic produce will still be available in Nevada groceries, co-ops and farmers markets.

## What are the options for the future of the NDA's Organic Certification Program?

At the March 19, 2015 meeting of the NDA's Organic Advisory Council (OAC) the NDA's Director Jim Barbee presented several options for the future of the NDA's certification program, while welcoming new ideas. The goal was to have a recommendation from the OAC to present to the Board of Agriculture on June 3, 2015. Those options include:

- 1. Increase fees to make the program sustainable.** To make the NDA's program sustainable on fees alone, the NDA would have to significantly increase fees, bringing our fees more in line with private certifiers.
- 2. Increase certified organic producers and handlers.** The OAC and program stakeholders can promote the program in order to increase NDA certified organic operations to a level that is sustainable and manageable for NDA organic staff.
- 3. Pursue General Fund.** The OAC and program stakeholders can express program needs to legislators in order to pursue monies from the General Fund to subsidize the program.
- 4. Transition to third party certifiers.** The NDA can surrender the certification program, assisting growers with transitioning to private certifiers. The NDA's current fee structure is outcompeting private certifiers, which is not a government agency's role. The NDA exists to support the agriculture industry in Nevada, which includes private organic certifiers.

It has been concluded by NDA staff that options 1 and 2 are only feasible if implemented in tandem with one another. Even with increased fees, the NDA's Organic Certification Program, along with the OAC, would also need to significantly increase participation in order to make it self-sustaining. Conversely, doubling the number of clients certified through the NDA would increase staffing needs, therefore increasing budget projections. It's also difficult to predict if an increase in fees will mean some producers leave the NDA's program, again reducing revenue.



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## What are other State Departments of Agriculture doing?

There are 16 states that currently operate organic programs through a state agency. Not all state organic programs offer certification, for example California, the state with the most certified organic growers.

The NDA staff has reached out to other states to inquire as to the status of those organic programs, which are run by combinations of general funds, grants and fees and at varied levels of implementation and involvement (some of which include certification).

## How will the NDA continue to support organic producers in Nevada?

The NDA supports farms and operations of all sizes, and will continue to pursue funding through the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program (NOCCSP) in order to offset costs for certified organic operations in Nevada. Any entity that successfully receives certification through any certifier would be eligible to receive funding as it is received by NOCCSP.

The NDA continues to provide marketing, grants such as the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant, and education to the public to support organic operations.

## If there is no certification program through the NDA, how will growers become certified?

Several independent certifiers already certify operations in Nevada. A list of NOP accredited certifiers can be found on the USDA National Organic Program website at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/NOP>.

## Will I still be able to buy locally grown, certified organic food in Nevada?

Yes! Organic farming is one of the fastest growing segments of the agriculture industry in the United States. The NDA is proud to be partners with our organic operations and excited to be part of the growth of this industry in Nevada.

### Board of Agriculture Meeting

► **Wednesday, June 3, 2015 at 9 a.m.**

405 South 21st Street • Sparks, NV 89431

or via video conference at

2300 McLeod Steet • Las Vegas, NV 89104

and Great Basin College, Room 121

1500 College Parkway • Elko, NV 89801

📎 **Meeting agenda at [agri.nv.gov](http://agri.nv.gov)**

*If you are unable to attend, but wish to comment, please submit to [jwilliams-conrad@agri.nv.gov](mailto:jwilliams-conrad@agri.nv.gov) no later than 5 p.m. on Monday, June 1, 2015.*

### Contact

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