



Frequently Asked Questions

FAQs

What is organic?

The word 'organic' defines our food; how it is produced, handled and processed. It describes a farming system that simulates natural ecosystems, maintaining and replenishing the fertility and nutrients of the soil through integrating cultural, biological and mechanical practices that promote resource cycling, ecological balance and biodiversity conservation. Organic foods are produced without the use of genetically modified organisms or irradiation. Processed organic foods are handled carefully to maintain the integrity of the organic ingredients going into the products.

What does certification mean?

"Certified" means that the food, feed or fiber has been grown and handled according to strict organic standards which are enforced by independent third-party state or private organizations. **The Certification Process** includes an initial application, documentation review, site(s) inspections of farm fields, storage areas, processing facilities, detailed records, periodic testing of soil, water and produce, a final review and annual updates to ensure that growers, handlers and processors are meeting the standards of the USDA National Organic Program (NOP).

Is there a national organic standard?

Yes. The USDA **National Organic Program (NOP)** establishes standards for organic production, processing, and labeling in the United States. Certification is required by law by anyone who sells product(s) as "organic".

Are organic standards the same in all countries?

No. Organic standards vary from region to region; however, in recent years, the US has entered into equivalency agreements with foreign countries to facilitate global organic trade. Please see **Organic Links and Resources** for links to these agreements.

Eligibility

How does a farmer go about converting land to organic status?

Converting land to become certified organic is a 3-year process. During this conversion time, farm the land as if it were organic; following the **NOP standards** to ensure that your farm will be **NOP** eligible after the 3 years.

What buffers are required?

NOP requires descriptions of physical barriers and management practices that prevent contamination. These include signs, roads, fences, preventative measures, and risk assessments. Include all buffers in your OSP.

I grow in containers. Can I get certified organic?

Yes. Inputs, such as potting soil, pesticides and fertilizers that are used must be allowed under organic standards. Treated wood is not allowed in contact with plants or soil.

How do I know if the organic certificate my supplier sent me is valid?

Certificates may only be issued by certifiers that have been accredited by the USDA. To verify if your supplier is certified by an USDA accredited certifier, see the list of accredited certifiers on the **NOP website**.

Can organic and non-organic be stored in the same area?

Yes, as long as adequate measures are taken to distinguish organic from non-organic and there is no potential for commingling or contamination of organic products.

Application for Certification

When can I apply for organic certification?

Anytime! **What if I have questions about the application?** Call Lindsay Dixon (775-353-3623) at the Nevada Department of Agriculture office in Sparks.

Where do I send the completed application?

Mail completed applications and your fee to: Nevada Department of Agriculture Attn: Organic Certification Program 405 South 21st Street Sparks, NV 89431 or email the application to Lindsay Dixon (ldixon@agri.nv.gov)

What is the Organic System Plan (OSP)?

Your application for certification is your OSP. A complete OSP is required by the National Organic Program (NOP) in order to attain and maintain organic certification. It defines how you remain in compliance with organic standards and details what you do, how you do it, and what you use to do it with.

Does my organic certificate expire?

No. Your organic certificate does not expire; however, it must be updated annually.

What resources are available to help me?

NDA has compiled a list of **Organic Links and Resources** along with this FAQ sheet.

Update/Renewal Information

When is my updated application due (to renew organic certification)?

This application must be received by the Department on or before March 31st of each year to avoid a \$250.00 late fee.

What is the renewal process?

Renewal to the certification program happens in annually. Clients are sent a certification update form and an invoice for annual fees which are due March 31. Information required on updates includes: changes in contact information, pending requests for information or noncompliance issues, updated OSP, and additions or deletions planned for the up coming year.

How do I update my Organic System Plan (OSP)?

Before making any changes to your operation, you must update your OSP. Visit our **Application Forms** to find the forms that you need to update. Submit your completed forms to Lindsay (ldixon@agri.nv.gov). NDA staff will review your updates and let you know if additional information is required.

How do I change or add a new organic product?

You must verify that the product is organic and keep proof of organic status (i.e. labels, organic certificates). If NDA has not verified that the supplier is compliant, ingredients used prior to NDA approval are at your own risk.



Can I use treated seed? Seeds treated with prohibited materials are not allowed. Look at **OMRI** or the **WSDA** lists of allowed materials to find seed treatments that are approved

Do transplants have to be organic? Yes, transplants must be from certified organic sources. Producers must maintain certificates and invoices showing all annual transplants are certified organic.

What about organic seed, transplants, and commercial availability? For crops other than sprouts, organic seed must be used unless organic seeds are not commercially available. Producers are required to search for organic seed and must document this search in order to demonstrate that organic seed was not commercially available. This documentation may be in the form of a log showing calls made, product/supplier catalogues, letters received, or other demonstration of good faith efforts on your part. Organic seed **MUST** be used to produce organic sprouts. **NO EXCEPTIONS.**

Where do I find organic seed? Check out these websites for help locating organic seed: **Organic Seed Finder, Seed Alliance, Pick A Carrot**

Inputs

How do organic farmers fertilize crops, control pests, disease & weeds?

Under the NOP, growers must use sanitation and cultural practices before resorting to material application for control of weeds, pests or disease. To meet this requirement, organic farmers feed soil organisms, develop soil structure, and build water-holding capacity to help grow healthy crops. Healthy crops outcompete weeds and resist disease and pressure from insects. Methods to raise healthy crops and encourage wholesome soils include: cover crops, compost, biologically based soil amendments, refined crop rotations, hand-weeding, mulches, balanced plant nutrition, diverse populations of soil organisms and beneficial insects.



How do I control pests in my facility?

NOP outlines a specific order of pest control methods for organic processing, handling, and storage areas.

1. Preventative: good sanitation,
2. Mechanical measures (mechanical, sticky, or pheromone traps)
3. If 1. and 2. do not control pests, you may use NOP allowed materials. These are listed on **OMRI** and **WSDA**. All pest control plans and materials must be reviewed and approved by NDA *prior* to use.

Do I need to report all my input materials to CCOF?

Yes, NOP requires all materials you use including, but not limited to, fertilizers, pest control materials, processing aids, etc. to be reported. Be sure to keep your OSP Materials List current and accurate. Use of materials not on your OSP Materials List may affect your compliance and your certification.

What if I want to change a material currently listed in my OSP, cleaner/detergent or sanitizer?

Maintaining a current materials list in your OSP is important. If the list changes by adding new or changing current materials, send us the product brand name, manufacturer name and complete ingredient list (i.e. label, MSDS) for approval *prior* to use. If you are switching cleaner/detergents that do not come in contact with organic products, you do not need to update your OSP.

What potting soil can I use for organic gardening?

Agencies like the **OMRI** or **WSDA** approve materials for use in organic production. Lists are available on their websites and are typically marked by a seal or logo, such as the OMRI seal.

Can I use compost?

Yes! **OMRI** and **WSDA** both maintain lists of approved compost suppliers. Composts wholly composed of plant-based materials, mulch, are generally not subject to restrictions on their use or production. Manure-based composts must be produced according to **NOP regulations** to be considered compost. If the compost does not meet these requirements, it is considered "raw manure."

What are the requirements for manure use?

There are **specific requirements** for the use of raw manure. **Raw animal manure** must be composted unless it is: applied to land used for a crop not intended for human consumption; incorporated into the soil no less than 120 days prior to the harvest of a product whose edible portion has direct contact with the soil surface or soil particles (such as lettuce); or incorporated into the soil no less than 90 days prior to the harvest of a product whose edible portion does not have direct contact with the soil surface or soil particles.

Grazing animals are not subject to the restrictions of raw manure application. Use of grazing animals in crops intended for fresh consumption is not encouraged. **Heat-treated manures** or processed manures may be used without these restrictions as they are treated to prevent the contamination of organic crops.

Can non-organic animals be pastured on organic land?

Yes, non-organic animals can graze on certified organic land without affecting the land's certification. If organic and non-organic animals are pastured in the same field, they must be clearly identified in a manner that will prevent commingling of the final organic product (meat, milk, etc.).

Labels

Can I use the USDA seal on my organic product? Yes you may as long as your product is certified as "100% Organic" or "Organic." The USDA seal may not be used on products labeled as "Made with Organic..."

	100% Organic	Organic	Made With Organic Ingredients	Less than 70% Organic Ingredients
	All ingredients are certified organic	At least 95% organic ingredients	70% - 94% organic ingredients	No certification claims can be made
	USDA seal allowed	Organic ingredients must be denoted on label	May state "made with organic (insert up to three ingredients or ingredient categories)"	USDA seal prohibited
	Must list organic certification agent	USDA Seal allowed	Remaining agricultural products are not required to be organic but must be produced without excluded methods	"Organic" only mentioned in ingredient listing
		Must list organic certification agent	Non-agricultural products must be specifically allowed on the National List	
			USDA Seal prohibited	
			Must list organic certification agent	

What MUST be on my Nevada organic product label? The certifying agent must be identified by name ("Certified Organic by Nevada Department of Agriculture (or "NDA"), or NDA's logo) on the information panel below the name of the handler or distributor. Each organic product must be identified as "Organic" on the ingredient panel of products labeled as "Organic," or "Made with Organic (specified ingredients)." For more information, click [here](#).

What if I want to update my label?

NDA approves labels as part of your OSP. If new labels are created or current labels are changed, send label to NDA for review *prior* to printing your new label.

How do water and salt affect my product labeling?

Water and salt are excluded when calculating the organic percentage of a product.

Food Safety

How can I practice food safety as an organic farmer?

Safe food is a priority for all producers. All farming and food processing must comply with local, state, and federal safety standards, but organic food must also meet the stringent standards of the NOP.

Qualities of Organic Food that make it Safe

- Organic System Plans:** Every certified organic producer and handler must have a descriptive plan of the operation, including measures taken to prevent pathogenic contamination.
- Sanitation:** Important element of every OSP.
- Traceability:** Certified organic producers and processors keep extensive records so they can trace their products from the field to point of sale.
- Microbial Balance:** Beneficial soil microbes provide balanced nutrition to crops while protecting against pathogens.
- Biodiversity:** Biodiversity is promoted.
- Manure and Compost:** Manure use is strictly regulated.
- No GMOs:** Prohibited in organic food.
- No Sewage Sludge:** Prohibited in organic farming.

Is NDA approved to do food safety certification?

Yes! NDA can certify to USDA GAP standards.

What cleaners or sanitizers can I use?

NDA cannot recommend any specific cleaners or sanitizers. Processors/handlers are permitted to use any sanitizer allowed for cleaning food contact surfaces as long as the sanitizer does not leave a residue and does not come in contact with organic products. Sanitizers that contact organic products must be on the National List (205.605). The National List (205.600-205.606) is available by visiting the **NOP website**. Any sanitizer or cleaners that may come into contact with organic product must be reviewed by NDA *prior* to use.

Inspection

What is an organic inspection?

Organic inspections confirm that the policies and procedures within your operation meet NOP standards. Inspections occur both before initial certification and annually after certification as long as it remains certified. During the inspection, inspectors verify that your OSP and what you are doing in practice match. "Preparing for Organic Inspection", found on **ATTRA's website**, is a great resource that includes checklists and other resources.

Preparing for the inspection...

When your inspection is scheduled, you will be mailed a copy of the Inspection Appointment Confirmation along with a breakdown of how to prepare for an organic inspection and definition of the organic inspector role.

During the inspection...

Explain how your operation is in compliance with organic standards, how potential noncompliances are prevented, how your audit trail works, etc.

After the inspection...

The inspector will discuss the inspection with you, including any points of concern and/or noncompliances. If additional information is requested, send it quickly so as not to delay the final review and decision of your organic certification.

What records will I need for the inspection? Record audits can be timely. Clear, complete, organized, and accessible records will facilitate inspections. Records for organic certification fall into two categories: 1) audit trail and 2) organic integrity. 1) "Audit trail" includes all records of purchases, internal movement, and sales. Documentation of inputs, ingredients, intermediates, and final products are all vital to maintain. The inspector will likely focus on records from the past year, but NOP requires all records to be kept for 5 years, so these should also be accessible. Split or parallel operations (organic and non-organic) should separate organic records so they are more accessible and easy to understand. Processors and handlers must be prepared to track final products back through processing stages to starting ingredients. Use lot numbers. Lot numbers are a tracking system that links the final organic product back to the farm or incoming ingredient. It is identified on all documentation from start to finish to allow quick traceback in the event of a recall. The inspector must understand the audit trail before s/he can test it. Be prepared to explain and teach the inspector how your records work; this will make their job easier and faster.

2) Organic integrity records document prevention of potential noncompliances, such as commingling or prohibited materials contamination. These can include cleaning logs for each organic use (e.g. harvest bins, transport trailers, packing lines, processing equipment, holding tanks, etc.), disposal records, and organic seed searches. Make sure key people are available to meet with the inspector. Arrange access to all materials storage areas, organic food handling rooms, farming parcels, and off-farm handling facilities certified under your operation.

Misc. What if I disagree with a NDA certification decision or action?

You are encouraged to contact the NDA with your issue in writing. Any adverse action decision, such as proposed suspensions or revocations, made by NDA may be appealed to the National Organic Program.

What if I don't want to be certified anymore?

Call Lindsay at 775-353-3623 or email her at ldixon@agri.nv.gov. She will ask you for a reason then send you the appropriate form.

Can I export my organic products?

Yes! The **EU, Canada, Japan** and **Korea** have equivalency agreements and **Taiwan** has a trade agreement with the US to simplify trade of organic products. If your product meets the relevant critical variances for each market; you will be able to export to them.