## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### What is organic?

Organic agriculture practices are designed to protect the health of soils, plants, animals, people and environment. Organic farmers use deep-rooted native crops and essentially avoid the use of pesticides, sewage sludge, genetically engineered organisms, and synthetic fertilizers and growth regulators. Instead, they rely on good crop rotations, animal manures, composts, cover crops, crop diversity, and biological and mechanical means of pest control. They also maintain the biological, physical and chemical fertility of the soil by integrating cropping and livestock management systems.

### Is there a national organic standard?

Yes. The National Organic Program (NOP) is a set of standards for the production, processing, handling, and certification of organic foods produced in the United States. These standards are enforced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Organic Program (USDA NOP).

### When can I apply for organic certification?

You can apply for organic certification any time during the year, but you cannot apply for certification more than 30 days before the harvest date. This is because the certification process must be completed by the end of the growing season to ensure that the organic status of the product is verified before it is harvested.

### What is the application process for organic certification?

The application process for organic certification involves several steps:
- **Developing a management plan:** This includes a detailed description of your farming practices, such as the types of crops you grow and how you manage them.
- **Organic System Plan (OSP) development:** This is a document that outlines the key aspects of your farm’s organic system, including how you manage your land, embrace biodiversity, and use non-mechanized equipment.
- **Annual inspection:** This is conducted by an accredited third-party certifier, who will review your management plan, OSP, and conduct a farm audit to ensure compliance with the USDA NOP standards.

### Can I export my organic products?

Yes! Organic products can be exported to any country that allows organic products. However, the importing country may have specific requirements for organic products. For example, Japan requires the Organic Inspections Program (OIP) for all organic products imported from the United States. You must contact the USDA NOP before exporting your organic products.

### What do I need to do after I receive organic certification?

After you receive your organic certification, you will need to:
- **Maintain records:** Keep detailed records of your farming practices, such as crop rotations, livestock management, and pesticide use.
- **Inspect your farm:** An accredited certifier will conduct annual farm inspections to ensure compliance with the USDA NOP standards.
- **Label your products:** Organic products must be labeled to indicate their organic status.

### What if I want to change a material currently listed in my OSP?

If you want to change a material currently listed in your OSP, you must contact the USDA NOP. The USDA NOP will review your request and determine if the change is allowed. If the change is approved, your OSP will be updated to reflect the new material.

### What are the requirements for manure use?

Manures must come from sources that are not prohibited by the USDA NOP. This includes manures from non-organic farms, composted manures, and manures from livestock raised on organic farms. Manures must be properly handled and stored to prevent contamination with prohibited substances. Manures must also meet the requirements for nutrient content and be used in accordance with the USDA NOP standards.

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**Note:** The information provided here is a summary of the USDA NOP standards and requirements. For more detailed information, please refer to the USDA NOP guidelines and standards.