

USDA Organic Seal: The Gold Standard, cont'd

Organic Training and Outreach

Over the last few months, the Agricultural Marketing Service has provided training to U.S. accredited certifying agents, the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), and Latin American certifiers and government officials. All of the training slides and handouts are available on the NOP's Training Information web page at <http://1.usa.gov/QbCtuG>.

These trainings cover many aspects of the USDA organic requirements and are also an opportunity for NOP to listen and learn from the organic community. At the U.S. accredited certifier training, we learned about new efforts to share information about materials review and heard of innovative initiatives to make certification more sound and sensible. At the NOSB training, we discussed how the NOSB is governed under the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

At the Latin American training, we heard about the challenges foreign certifiers face in meeting multiple accreditation requirements. Most Latin American certifiers provide certification to both the European and the USDA organic standards, as the US and Europe are the world's largest organic markets. Though the organic standards between the US and Europe are nearly identical, the certification process has distinct differences. Both systems are effective in protecting organic integrity, but certifiers are challenged to reconcile both systems on the same farming operation. Latin American certifiers in Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, and Costa Rica also have to contend with their own country's organic regulatory requirements in addition to complying with US and European requirements. It makes for a challenging and not always sound and sensible system for organic smallholders in foreign countries.

The Latin American organic training in Costa Rica was the first training AMS has provided in Spanish. There were over 50 participants representing certifiers and government agencies from Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Panama, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Mexico. We plan on providing additional foreign organic training in order to protect organic integrity as well as build the capacity of organic systems around the world. We would like to see organic agriculture thrive not only in the U.S., but also in foreign countries so organic farmers can supply their local and regional organic markets as they continue to expand and prosper.

Sincerely,
Miles V. McEvoy, NOP Deputy Administrator

Organic Labeling at Farmer's Markets

Farmer's markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operations are great places for customers who are interested in locally sourced products to find and purchase organic products. Many of these customers appreciate knowing how and where the products that they purchase were grown, and the organic certification status of the farmers.

Farmers and vendors who use the word "organic" to describe their products or practices in the marketplace must comply with the USDA organic regulations. The Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) states that no person may affix a label to, or provide other marketing information concerning, an agricultural product if that label or information implies, directly or indirectly, that such product is produced and handled using organic methods, except in accordance with the OFPA.

Most farms and businesses that grow, handle, or process organic products must be certified, with only a few exceptions. Producers and handlers that sell less than \$5,000 per year of organic products are exempt from certification. These operations may choose to obtain certification but they are not required to be certified.



Organic Labeling at Farmer's Markets, cont'd

Requirements for Exempt Organic Producers

Farms that are exempt from certification and want to sell organic products still must comply with organic requirements, including:

- Not planting any seeds that had synthetic treatments, such as fungicides or insecticides.
- Using organic seeds unless organic seeds were not commercially available.
- Only using seedlings and transplants that have been grown organically using only approved organic potting mixes and inputs.
- Applying only fertilizer, pest, disease and weed management inputs that have either been approved by EPA, the Organic Materials Review Institute, or by a USDA accredited certification agency, and are allowed under the USDA organic regulations.
- Implementing a soil building crop rotation on the farm, where annual crops of the same type are not grown in succession in the same field.
- Not applying manure to fields growing crops for human consumption any sooner than 90 days before harvest for crops that are not in contact with soil (e.g. sweet corn), or 120 days before harvest for crops that are in contact with soil (e.g. root crops, tomatoes, peppers, etc.).
- Ensuring that compost containing manure meets the requirement of having a carbon to nitrogen ratio of between 25 to 1 and 40 to 1, has had a temperature maintained of 130 to 170 °F for 15 days and has been turned 5 times, or, if in a static vessel, had this temperature maintained for 3 days.
- Managing all mammalian livestock organically from the last third of their mother's gestation to the day of slaughter. All poultry has been managed organically from the second day of life. Organic management includes providing certified organic feed.
- Providing all livestock with access to the outdoors, with ruminants receiving 30% of their nutrition from pasture during a minimum 120 day grazing season. All animal health products and feed supplements have either been approved by the Organic Materials Review Institute or by a USDA accredited certification agency and are allowed under the USDA organic regulations.



How much does certification cost?

Fees charged for certification vary among certifying agents due to the size and complexity of the farm operation, the costs of inspection, and other factors. Certifiers provide information on their fee structures upon request. USDA Organic Certification Cost Share Programs reimburse certified organic operations for as much as 75 percent—up to a maximum of \$750 a year—of certification costs. The 2014 Organic Cost Share Programs will launch soon! Contact your State Department of Agriculture for more information on the reimbursement process.

Want to file a complaint?

If you are concerned that an organic product isn't meeting the USDA standards, or that an operation is making an organic claim without certification, submit a complaint to the USDA. We investigate every complaint we receive, and if we find any problems, we take action. If a farm or business violates the USDA organic regulations, penalties may include civil penalties up to \$11,000 per violation and/or suspension or revocation of an operation's organic certificate. Suspected violations of the organic regulations may be reported to the USDA. Send an email to NOPCompliance@ams.usda.gov or call the National Organic Program at 202-720-3252.