

Steps to Organic Certification



ORGANIC FACT SHEET

mosaorganic.org

Do you Need Certification?

Before you take your first step towards organic certification, it is important to determine if it is right for you. The rapidly growing organic market offers premium prices, strong consumer support, and the opportunity to grow and process food and fiber in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way. It does require new management techniques, transparency, and research to ensure market access in your area.

The \$5000 Exemption

It is possible to label and sell small amounts of unprocessed products as “organic” without organic certification. This may be enough for your customers if you sell direct, but by law, you cannot label your products as “organic” unless you are following the USDA National Organic Standards. The limit in annual sales for this exemption is \$5000. Even though they may be exempt, many small operations still choose certification for its many benefits.

Operations that Require Certification

- Operations selling more than \$5000 in organic products per year.
- Processors (Handlers). Most operations that package and process (modify from its raw form).
- Anyone selling raw or processed products to other certified organic operations.

Quick Facts

- Not every operation may require organic certification.
- Certification is required for operations that sell more than \$5000 in organic products per year and for all processors.
- There are distinct steps that must be followed to complete certification.

Certification allows products to be labeled as “Certified Organic”. (See “Retail Label Requirements” Fact Sheet for details)

When you are ready to get certified, follow these important steps:

Steps to Certification

1. Complete the “Transition” to Organic.

By law, all land that is used to produce organic foods or fiber must be free of prohibited materials for 36 months prior to the first harvest. It is possible for a farm to have conventional, transitional and organic fields on the same farm, or in multiple locations. Farms cannot be certified until at least one part of the operation qualifies for organic production.

You can begin the application process ahead of the transition date to ensure that your certification is complete by the time you are ready to sell organic product. Processors that use certified organic inputs may begin the application process at any time, but must complete certification before they are allowed to sell certified organic products.

2. Contact MOSA to determine if we can offer service in your geographic area and on your timeline. For new applicants, the certification process can take 3-6 months. Often it can occur more quickly, but this is dependent upon the complexity of your operation and inspector location and availability. If you have a new certification request that is time sensitive, or if you have a question about whether we provide service in your area, contact the MOSA office so we can discuss our ability to meet your needs.

Late season applications might not be accepted, as inspector availability becomes increasingly limited late in the year. Please contact MOSA prior to submitting an application after August 1.

3. Fill out your Organic System Plan and all the necessary paperwork. You can register and do this online at our secure system, [MyMOSA](#). If you would prefer that we mail you a paper application packet, contact MOSA by phone or email.

4. Submit your Organic System Plan(s), supporting information and fees. You can submit your information either online through [MyMOSA](#), or by sending paper copies by postal mail. You can pay your base certification fees and inspection deposit online with a credit card or by mailing a check (MOSA does not accept applications or update information through fax or email.) You can find the MOSA fee schedules here:

<http://mosaorganic.org/>

5. Initial review. A certification specialist reviews your application. If everything is complete and there is apparent compliance,

we send you a confirmation that your file is moving on to the next step. Occasionally, we may require additional information before scheduling an inspection.

6. Inspection. When the initial review is complete, the next step is an on-site inspection. On the scheduled day, the inspector will inspect your operation and review your paperwork. Inspections vary in length depending upon the complexity of the operation- usually 2-4 hours for farms and 4-8 hours for a processor. The inspector submits a report to MOSA. You receive a copy of the report and a bill for any inspection costs beyond the deposit submitted with your application. You may provide feedback on the inspection report.

7. Final review. Our certification staff reviews your file, the inspection report, and any comments you made concerning the inspection findings. We may request additional information before we can make a certification decision. A certification decision may include requirements for changes needed. Once certification is granted, you receive your certificate and you may sell your listed products as certified organic.

Certification is an annual process. MOSA clients update paperwork by May 1 of each year. We'll contact you with update information in the beginning of the calendar year.

MOSA is committed to making certification as clear, open and transparent as possible. We welcome your questions at every step along the way. Please contact our friendly staff to get started.

Resources:

MOSES Guidebook for Certification:

<https://mosesorganic.org/publications/guidebook-for-certification/>

USDA "Is Organic an Option for Me"

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/IsOrganicAnOptionforMe.pdf>

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