



ORGANIC FACT SHEET

# STEPS TO ORGANIC CERTIFICATION

## 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.
- Land and animals may need to be transitioned, and there are distinct steps required to complete certification.

## DO YOU NEED CERTIFICATION?

Before you take your first step towards organic certification, it is important to determine if certification 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 compliance with the USDA National Organic Standards. Certification allows products to be sold as "Certified Organic" and to be labeled with the USDA Organic Seal.

## 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 claim 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, some small operations still choose certification for its many marketing benefits.

## OPERATIONS THAT REQUIRE CERTIFICATION

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

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

## STEPS TO CERTIFICATION

**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 simultaneously, 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. (See "The Transition to Organic Production" Fact Sheet for more info)



MOSA Certified Organic  
122 W. Jefferson St.,  
Viroqua, WI 54665  
phone: 844-637-2526  
fax: 608-492-0470

**CONTACT** [mosa@mosaorganic.org](mailto:mosa@mosaorganic.org)  
**VISIT** [mosaorganic.org](http://mosaorganic.org)

continued on OTHER SIDE

**1. 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 three to six months. It may take less time, but this is dependent upon the complexity of your operation, your ability to provide information, and inspector location and availability.

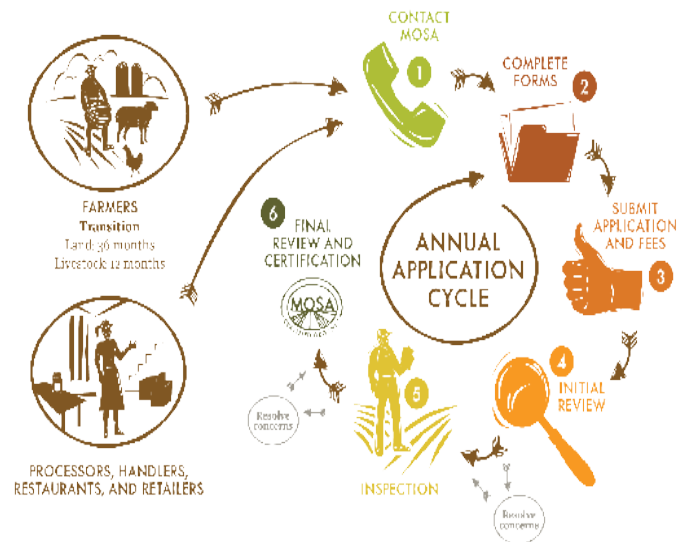
If you have a new certification request that is time sensitive, or if you have a question about whether we provide service in your area, contact the MOSA office so we can discuss our ability to meet your needs. Late season farm (Producer) applications might not be accepted, as inspector availability becomes increasingly limited late in the year, and we are required to see the crops growing in the fields. Please contact MOSA prior to submitting an application after August 1. Expedited service is available for an additional fee.

**2. Fill out your Organic System Plan and all the necessary forms** 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.

**3. 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 and inspection fees online with a credit card or by mailing a check (MOSA does not accept applications or update information through fax or email.) Call the MOSA office for an application packet if you plan to apply on paper.

The current MOSA fee schedules can be found here: [mosaorganic.org](http://mosaorganic.org).

**4. 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. Missing forms and incomplete information at this step is the most common reason for delayed certification.



**5. 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 payment submitted with your application. You may provide feedback on the inspection report.

**6. 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 April 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.

## ABOUT MOSA

MOSA is a non-profit organic certification agency that was created by farmers in 1999 to offer practical, reliable, friendly, and affordable certification services. We are now one of the largest and most successful agencies in the US, with over 2100 clients in 23 states. We have the experience you need to access the growing organic marketplace. Call us toll-free at (844) 637-2526 or email us at [mosa@mosaorganic.org](mailto:mosa@mosaorganic.org).

## RESOURCES:

**MOSES Guidebook for Certification:** <https://mosesorganic.org/publications/guidebook-forcertification/>

**USDA "Is Organic an Option for Me?":** <https://www.ams.usda.gov/publications/content/organic-option-me>

