

Organic Certification 101



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ORGANIC CERTIFICATION 101



Food, feed, and fiber labeled as “organic” must be produced and handled in compliance with the USDA Organic Regulations and certified by a USDA-accredited certifier. Organic Certification is designed to certify every step of the organic supply chain in strict accordance with federal standards.

Eligibility

Crop land must be managed without prohibited inputs for at least a 3-year transition period. Livestock must be managed using organic practices from the last third of gestation, except for poultry (from day 2 of life) and dairy animals (may be eligible for a 1-year transition).

TIPS



Land that has been fallow or managed using organic practices may be immediately eligible for certification.



Operations that sell less than \$5,000/year of organic products are exempt from certification

Choosing a certifier

Every USDA-accredited certifier must use the same USDA Organic Regulations to verify compliance and issue certification. But certifiers differ in their customer service, areas of expertise, geographic service area, fee structure, languages, export programs, and the additional services, programs, and resources they offer to their clients.

TIP



Choose a certifier familiar with your type of operation, provides cost-effective services in your area, and provides great customer service.



VISIT [AMS.USDA.GOV/SERVICES/ORGANIC-CERTIFICATION/CERTIFYING-AGENTS](https://ams.usda.gov/services/organic-certification/certifying-agents) TO VIEW A LIST OF THE USDA-ACCREDITED ORGANIC CERTIFIERS.

Steps to certification



Organic Systems Plan (OSP)

The organic certification application is called an Organic System Plan (OSP). A complete OSP is required by the National Organic Program (NOP). The OSP is a detailed description of the practices and procedures used by your operation to produce organic goods. Operations must update their OSP as changes occur. Your OSP acts as an agreement between you and your certifier. It defines how you remain in compliance with the organic standards, and explains what you do, how you do it, and what you use while doing it.

TIP



During your pre-certification and annual inspections, your inspector will verify that what you do in practice matches what is in your OSP.

Offsetting certification costs

Certification costs vary by certifier and the complexity, size, and type of operation being certified. The **USDA Certification Cost-Share Program** reimburses at least 50% (up to \$500) of your fees (per scope) annually. Contact your local FSA office for information.

TIP



Most certifiers charge separately for your inspection. Keep your certification costs low by organizing and preparing for the inspection to minimize the inspector time on-site.

ORGANIC STANDARDS 101

The USDA National Organic Program establishes uniform federal standards for agricultural production, handling, and labeling of products labeled as 'organic' in the United States. Organic practices must maintain or improve the natural resources of the operation, including soil and water quality. Genetic engineering (GMOs), sewage sludge, and irradiation are expressly prohibited.

Crop production

Must use crop rotation, cover crops, and cultivation practices that maintain or improve soil health, manage nutrients, and prevent erosion

Fertility inputs are limited to manure, compost, and a few other restricted inputs such as liquid fish and micronutrients

Must use preventive methods to control pests, weeds, and diseases. A limited toolbox of least-toxic pest control inputs, such as insecticidal soaps and peracetic acid, is permitted.

Seeds and planting stock must be organic if commercially available

Must maintain buffer zones around organic fields to prevent unintended contamination

GMO seeds and synthetic nitrogen fertilizers are prohibited

Gathering of wild crops must not be destructive to the environment

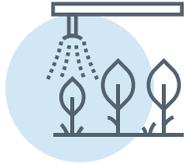
Must prevent contamination of crops, soil, or water



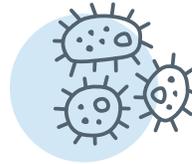
Processing + handling standards



Must maintain **organic integrity of crop and livestock products** throughout further processing, including slaughter and post-harvest handling



Must **prevent commingling** with non-organic or contact with prohibited materials



A limited toolbox of restricted non-organic minor ingredients is available to facilitate minimal processing, such as microorganisms for dairy cultures or yeast for baking.



GMOs or artificial flavors, colors preservatives **are prohibited**

Livestock production

All animals must have **safe, cage-free living conditions** and **year-round outdoor access**

Must provide **100% organic feed**

Cows must **graze on pasture** for at least 120 days a year and obtain at least 30% of diet from **grazing** during the grazing season

Must use **preventive healthcare practice**. A limited toolbox of restricted medical treatments is permitted when preventive methods are not sufficient.



Antibiotics, growth hormones, GMOs, and slaughter by-products **are prohibited**



Animals may only be temporarily confined indoors during certain situations, such as health or safety risks, inclement weather, or animal's stage of life



Manure must be managed to optimize nutrient cycling and prevent contamination

THE ORGANIC MARKETPLACE

THE U.S. ORGANIC MARKETPLACE IS...

A **\$63.3 billion** industry.

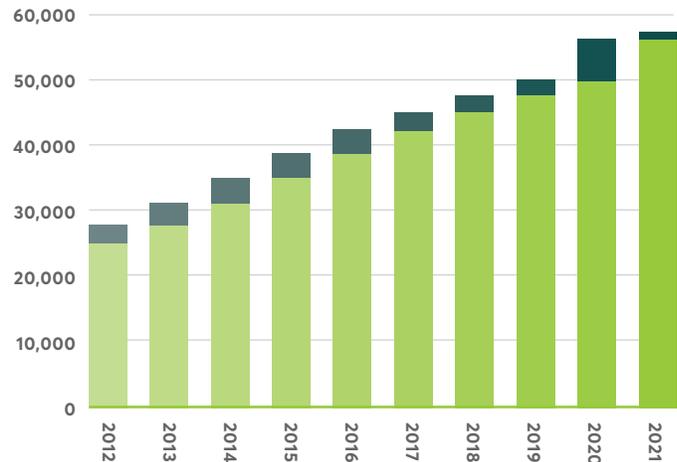
The **fastest growing sector** of the U.S. food industry.

Supported by **over 80% of U.S. households** purchasing organic on a regular basis.



MORE THAN
80%
OF U.S. HOUSEHOLDS

U.S. Organic Food Sales and Growth, 2012–2021



Source: Organic Trade Association's 2022 Organic Industry Survey conducted 2/4/2022–4/11/2022 (\$mil., consumer sales).

■ Sales ■ Incremental Growth

Export readiness training

The Organic Trade Association provides Export Readiness Training for companies seeking to expand their business to international markets.

Provides the **knowledge and logistical expertise** to conduct business abroad with confidence

Includes an overview of a suite of tools designed to give U.S. organic producers visibility into key export markets

Consists of a series of three four-hour-long **online learning sessions** spread over several weeks

Costs around **\$550**, with full scholarships available



Market Access Program (MAP) opportunities

The Organic Trade Association promotes U.S. organic products and fosters global trade at the world's most promising, high-value international trade shows. For a small fee, USDA organic producers can connect with buyers worldwide with USDA MAP funding covering flights, hotel, and trade show registration and booth costs.



Producers seeking to promote products at these international events must be marketing products that are:

1
USDA
certified organic,

2
Produced in
the USA, and

3
Made of 51% or more
U.S. based ingredients.



PLEASE REACH OUT TO OTA'S INTERNATIONAL TRADE MANAGER, SARAH GORMAN,
AT SGORMAN@OTA.COM FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ALL OUR INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTION TO THE ORGANIC TRADE ASSOCIATION

The Organic Trade Association (OTA)

Has **promoted and protected the organic business community** for thirty years

Ensures that all parts along the organic value chain have a **strong voice** with the government and the public

Represents its members to government on sector needs, market development and promotion, and strong organic standards and regulations

GET INVOLVED

Contact our Government Affairs staff to get involved in organic advocacy. OTA offers several opportunities for folks to advocate for organic each year:

Spring: Organic Week Advocacy Day

Summer: Farmer Advisory Council Fly-in

Ongoing: Support Organic PAC to elevate elected leaders who prioritize organic

THE FARMERS ADVISORY COUNCIL (FAC)

Open to small- and medium-sized organic farmers, ranchers, and growers

Gives organic farmers a voice to directly influence OTA's policy and advocacy

Represents **nearly 8,000** organic livestock, poultry, grain, and specialty crop producers



OTA MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

Timely and vital information and **guidance on organic standards**

Opportunities to **advocate for organic priorities** on Capitol Hill

Access to the **latest OTA market research**

Exclusive marketing tools and directory listings, including *Find.Organic*

Access to **key media relationships, outreach strategies, and effective crisis communications**

Involvement in our **member communities**, including the Farmers Advisory Council

MEMBERSHIP DUES

Calculated based on a **company's total annual organic sales** for trade members

Allows flexibility to adjust your dues level with an increase or decrease in your revenues

\$50 per year for organic farms with less than \$250,000 in yearly sales who are a member of a FAC Partner Organization through Farmstead level membership