



ORGANIC CERTIFICATION

Presented by Margaret Laberge,
President/Chair OCIA Research & Education

United States Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Marketing Service
National Organic Program
Transition to Organic Partnership Program



Organic Agriculture



- ▶ Organic is the only type of agriculture with a set of principles that put nature first.
- ▶ Healthy soil is the foundation of organic farms
- ▶ Pests and weeds are controlled by
 - ▶ Crop rotations
 - ▶ Soil improvements
 - ▶ Birds and predator insects
 - ▶ Row covers
 - ▶ Labor

Organic Certification



No prohibited materials applied to land for 36 months



Provides verification that the operation is following organic standards



Allows the use of organic labeling (more on this later)



Involves annual paperwork, record keeping, and inspection



Exemption - producers whose sales of organic products is less than \$5,000 a year and are in compliance with all organic standards, may use the term organic, but not the logo





Monitoring Organic Standards

- ▶ USDA's National Organic Program (NOP)
- ▶ National Organic Standards Board (NOSB)
- ▶ Organic Certification Agencies
- ▶ Organic Inspectors



What's Prohibited?

persistent pesticides;

synthetic macronutrient fertilizers;

the routine use of drugs, antibiotics or synthetic hormones;

animal cloning;

genetic engineering;

sewage sludge;

Irradiation;

artificial food colours, flavours, sweeteners, preservatives

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding several ripe, dark blue blueberries. The hand is positioned on the left side of the frame, with the fingers slightly curled around the fruit. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting.

OMRI Listed

Always check with your certifier first. We also recommend checking the OMRI website www.omri.org

Products List - brand names

Generic Materials List - generic ingredients

When doing a “Keyword Search” online, you can use specific brand names or general terms, such as ‘weed control’ or ‘pest control.’



Why Go Organic?

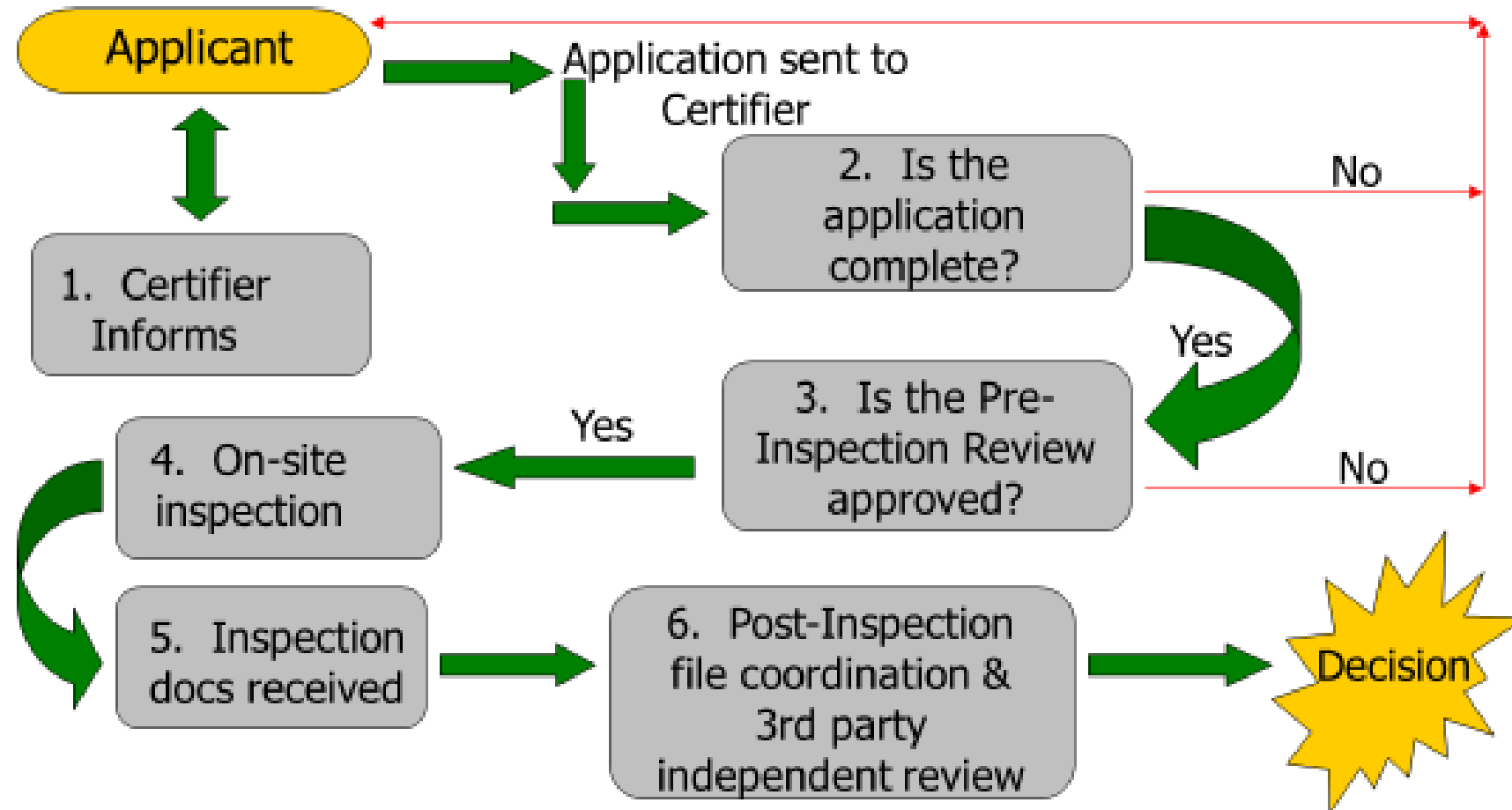
- ▶ Since 2006 the organic market has tripled in value
- ▶ \$61.7 Billion dollars in organic sales in 2022 (Organic Trade Association)
- ▶ Consumers want a healthier and sustainable lifestyle
- ▶ As an organic farmer, you'll rely on energy-efficient and cost-effective fertilizers and pesticides
- ▶ Low-cost inputs plus premium sales provide a higher profit for your lifestyle



Annual Steps to Certification

- ▶ Contact a certification agency
- ▶ Apply to the TOPP Program
- ▶ Submit an application and organic system plan (OSP)
- ▶ Have an inspection
- ▶ Respond to agency questions
- ▶ Receive a decision
 - ▶ Average turn around time is 30-60 days after all required paperwork has arrived for review
- ▶ Apply for a cost-share rebate

Certification Process at a Glance



Research Certifiers

- ▶ There are approximately 80 agencies
- ▶ Find a certifier that
 - ▶ holds a very high integrity for the organic industry
 - ▶ can provide support and assistance with paper-work through regional associations
 - ▶ has your interests at heart
 - ▶ can help with marketing
 - ▶ can provide Transaction Certificates for your audit trail
 - ▶ puts back into the organic industry
 - ▶ offer additional programs or assistance to their clients
- ▶ Check out <https://www.ams.usda.gov/resources/organic-certifying-agents> to view the entire list of USDA-accredited certifying agents



OCIA Research & Education

- ▶ Mission Statement
 - ▶ To support organic research; facilitate connections between farmers, researchers, consumers, and decision makers; and educate producers and communities regarding organic farming and foods
- ▶ Micro Grants
- ▶ Scholarships
- ▶ Farmer of the Year Awards
- ▶ Partnerships with Universities
- ▶ Mentorship Program





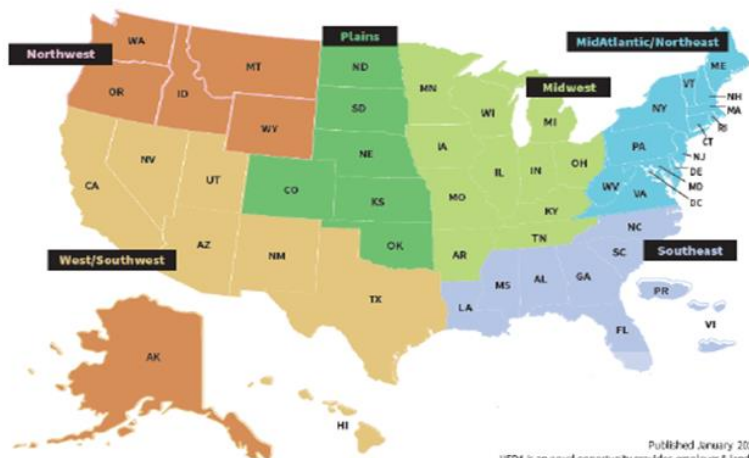
Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP)

TOPP is a network of organizations partnering to support transitioning and existing organic farmers.



Visit USDA's TOPP Webpage to:

- ☐ Sign up to **serve as a mentor**
- ☐ Tell us you want to **transition to organic**
- ☐ Express interest in **providing technical assistance**
- ☐ **Find partners** in your local TOPP region



Published January 2023.
USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

www.ams.usda.gov/services/organic-certification/topp

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender

Apply to the USDA TOPP Program

- ▶ Fall 2022, USDA announced investment of up to \$300 million to launch the Organic Transition Initiative (OTI)
- ▶ Suite of programs to support transitioning farmers to organic production
- ▶ Agricultural Marketing Service just launched the Organic Market Development Program

TOPP Program



Farmer to farmer mentoring

- ▶ Education and technical assistance on agronomy
- ▶ Certification
- ▶ Extension
- ▶ Conservational planning
- ▶ Business development
- ▶ Regulations
- ▶ Marketing



TOPP Program

- ▶ Mentors receive stipend of \$3,000 yearly
- ▶ Can mentor more than one farmer
- ▶ Group - more than 1 (\$4,000 yearly per group)
- ▶ Multiple - one-on-one sessions (\$3,000 + \$2,500 per each additional mentee)
- ▶ Apply or get more information at www.ams.usda.gov/services/organic-certification/topp

Expectations:

- ▶ Commit to 45 hours per yearly program cycle (12 months)
 - ▶ Includes 2 on-farm visits per year
 - ▶ Includes at least 3 touch points during growing season with mentee
 - ▶ Includes mentor training and end-of-year meetings
 - ▶ Suggest attending with mentee at 1 community farm event
 - ▶ Suggest speaking at and/or host an educational event (virtual or in person)
- ▶ Create Mentor/Mentee agreement to support the structure of their experience
 - ▶ Includes Communication Plan Learning objectives
- ▶ Communicate timely and consistently with mentees and program staff.





Certification Paperwork

- ▶ Certification Application
- ▶ Operator's Licensing Agreement
- ▶ Crop, Livestock, or Handling OSP (modules)
- ▶ Record Keeping Documents
 - ▶ Field History
 - ▶ Prior Land Use Affidavit
 - ▶ Field Map
 - ▶ Farm Equipment Cleanout Records
 - ▶ Yearly Field Activity Log
 - ▶ Storage Records



Organic Crops

- ▶ **Seeds**
 - ▶ All seeds must be organic
 - ▶ Records of a documented seed search must be kept if an untreated, non-GMO seed is used instead of an organic seed
 - ▶ During your 36 months of transition, you may plant non-GMO seed
- ▶ **Soil Building Crop Rotations are Key**
 - ▶ Provides organic carbon and nitrogen
 - ▶ Variety of root depths help to distribute nutrients
 - ▶ Breaks the cycles of weeds, pests, and disease
- ▶ **Manure**
 - ▶ Raw animal manure may be applied to crops not used for human consumption. Check with certifier regarding processed manures.



Weed Hierarchy

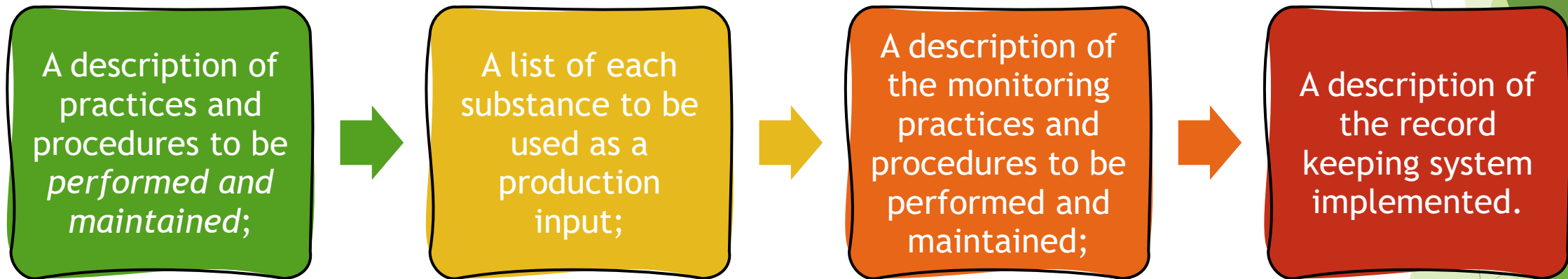
- ▶ First Method: Naturally
 - ▶ Mulching with fully biodegradable materials
 - ▶ Livestock grazing
 - ▶ Hand weeding or mechanical cultivation
- ▶ Second: Mechanical and Physical Management Practices
 - ▶ Mowing
 - ▶ Cultivations
 - ▶ Flame, heat, or electrical means
- ▶ Third Method: Nonsynthetic Biological, Botanical, or Mineral Inputs
 - ▶ Plastic or synthetic mulches if removed from the field at the end of the growing/harvest season
- ▶ Check the DriftWatch Map and filter by 'Certified Organic'
- ▶ <https://driftwatch.org/map>

Organic Crops

► Buffer Zones

- Distinct, defined boundaries and buffer zones must be in place to prevent the unintended application of a prohibited substance
- Determination of buffer adequacy is left to the organic producer, inspector, and certifying agent on a case-by-case basis
- You may harvest crops from the buffer zone, but cannot sell them as organic
- Buffer zones must be shown on farm map

The OSP Must Include





Livestock

- ▶ Organic management and input rules (including feed and supplements) are required to consider the following livestock organic:
 - ▶ Ruminants: last third of gestation
 - ▶ Swine: last third of gestation
 - ▶ Poultry: day 2 of life
 - ▶ Dairy: 1 year prior to sale of organic milk
- ▶ Pastures (like cropland) have a 36-month transition period

Livestock Records & Management

- ▶ Must track each animal
- ▶ Must give ruminant animals
- ▶ Must have free access to the outdoors year-round
- ▶ 30% DMI from certified organic pasture
- ▶ Vaccination and other preventative measures are common; antibiotics and growth hormones are prohibited





Processing

- ▶ Each facility where organic products are processed or handled, from butchering to processing, must be certified for organic production
- ▶ Ensures the integrity of the organic product
- ▶ **“Processing”** is defined as: cooking, baking, curing, heating, drying, mixing, grinding, churning, separating, distilling, extracting, slaughtering, cutting, fermenting, eviscerating, preserving, dehydrating, freezing, chilling, packaging, canning, jarring or enclosing food in a container
- ▶ Processors have a specific list of allowed and non-allowed products found in section 205.605 and 205.606 of the NOP Regulation.



Processing Records Must Include:

- ▶ Certificates for organic ingredients
- ▶ Recipes detailing the percentage of every ingredient
- ▶ Product flow chart
- ▶ Tracking system of product
 - ▶ Storage
 - ▶ Sales
 - ▶ Cleaning and pest control
 - ▶ Transportation

Processing Pest Management

- ▶ Pest management plans should focus on preventing pest access into the facility
- ▶ Mechanical or physical methods may be used: traps, light or sound, and lures
- ▶ Only if these management practices are ineffective can pest control products on the National List be used



Labelling

- ▶ Organic labels are very closely regulated and must be approved by your certification agency. Three types:
- ▶ 100% Organic
- ▶ Organic
- ▶ Made with Organic Ingredients





Purpose of an Inspection

To verify what is written in the OSP is actually occurring



To be the eyes and ears of the certification agency



To watch for areas where risk to organic integrity occurs



To observe, verify, and report

A photograph of a person wearing a red long-sleeved shirt and a white cap, working in a field of dense green plants. The person is seen from the back, reaching into the foliage. The field is filled with tall, leafy plants, possibly tomatoes or similar vegetables. The background shows more of the field under a bright sky.

What to Expect at Inspection

- ▶ Conduct opening meeting
- ▶ Ask questions about the operation
- ▶ Go through paperwork
 - ▶ Audit Trail
- ▶ Visit fields / equipment / processing facility / storage
- ▶ Traceability audit
- ▶ Inventory Balance
- ▶ Conduct exit interview
- ▶ Forward report to certification agency

Organics

Organic Certification Cost Share Program



Introduction

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP), administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA), provides organic producers and handlers with financial assistance to reduce the cost of organic certification. The program reimburses producers and handlers for a portion of their paid certification costs. Once certified, organic producers and handlers are eligible to receive reimbursement for 50 percent of certification costs each year, up to a maximum of \$500 per certification scope—crops, livestock, wild crops, handling, and State Organic Program fees.

Who is Eligible?

Certified organic producers and handlers who have paid certification fees during the 2021 and subsequent program year may apply for reimbursement of the incurred costs.

Program Year	Covers expenses paid from . . .	The application deadline is . . .
2021	Oct. 1, 2020, through Sept. 30, 2021	Nov. 1, 2021
2022	Oct. 1, 2021, through Sept. 30, 2022	Oct. 31, 2022
2023	Oct. 1, 2022, through Sept. 30, 2023	Oct. 31, 2023

OCCSP funds are limited and applications are paid on a first-come, first-served basis. Applications received after all funds are obligated will not be paid.

Is Certification Required to Participate?

Yes. Organic certification cost share funds are only available to certified organic producers and handlers. Certification must be provided by a **USDA-accredited certifying agent**. If your operation is not currently certified organic and you would like to learn more about the certification process, please visit www.fsa.usda.gov/organic.

What Costs are Reimbursable?

Eligible costs include application fees, inspection costs, fees related to equivalency agreement/arrangement requirements, travel/per diem for inspectors, user fees, sales assessments and postage.

What Costs are Not Reimbursable?

Ineligible costs include equipment, materials, supplies, transitional certification fees, late fees and inspections necessary to address National Organic Program regulatory violations.

What is the Maximum Reimbursement Amount?

The maximum per certification scope (crops, livestock, wild crops, handling or State Organic Program fees) is \$500.

How Do I Apply for a Reimbursement?

You may apply to a participating state agency according to their deadlines, or you may apply directly to one of over 2,100 FSA offices. Applicants must typically submit a one-page application form, W-9 tax form (to participating state agencies), proof of certification and an itemized invoice of certification expenses.

More Information

This fact sheet is for informational purposes only; other eligibility requirements may apply. For more information, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/organic or contact your local FSA office. To find your local FSA office, visit farmers.gov/service-center-locator.

National Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP)

- ▶ Reimburse 75% (up to \$750 per category of certification)
- ▶ Costs eligible for reimbursement
 - ▶ Application fees
 - ▶ Inspection costs
 - ▶ Equivalency agreement fees
 - ▶ Travel for inspectors
 - ▶ User fees
 - ▶ Sales assessments & postage



Steps for Reimbursement

- ▶ Go the website below, or contact your FSA office for an application

www.fsa.usda.gov/organic

- ▶ Submit Cost Share Applications to FSA County Offices or Participating State Agencies
- ▶ Submit application, W-9 tax form, copy of organic certification document, and itemized invoice showing amount paid for certification
- ▶ Submit by October 31st 2023
- ▶ Funds are limited and applications are paid on a first-come, first-served basis

Join Us to Become Certified Organic

- ▶ You can convert your land in stages or all at once
- ▶ Certification takes 36 months from the last application date of prohibited substances to certifying an organic crop
- ▶ You have the potential to improve your farm's soil health, protect the environment, enjoy better health, and support your family through higher profitability
- ▶ **Going Organic is much easier than you think!**





Thank you for allowing me to share this information with you. I would be pleased to answer any questions.

Organic Certification

Marg Laberge, President/Chair OCIA Research & Education

Phone: 402-477-2323

Email: ocia04.re@gmail.com Website: www.ocia.org

United States Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Marketing Service
National Organic Program
Transition to Organic Partnership Program

