Adjoining Land Use and Prevention of Contamination

Organic regulations require that organic production areas have distinct boundaries and buffer zones to prevent the unintended application of a prohibited substance or contact with a prohibited substance that is applied to adjoining land not under organic management.

Adjoining land includes crop land, pastures, residential property, fallow land, road ditches, and more. Buffer areas may change annually, depending on contamination potential from adjoining land uses.

There is not a one-size-fits-all solution for buffer zones. Evaluation of local conditions are key when developing buffer zones.



Consider multiples factors when making decisions about adequate buffer zones, such as:

- Prevailing winds
- Land slope
- Upstream use of creeks and water ways
- Whether conventional or genetically modified crops are grown nearby
- Pest management application at nearby farms
- How pest and weeds are managed in adjoining roads

Also, how will adjoining land be monitored (and how often) to verify if buffer zones are adequate? Some options include:

- Visual observation
- Residue Analysis
- GMO Testing
- Photographs
- Wind direction/speed data



Crops within the required buffer zone must be left unharvested or harvested, stored, and disposed of as non-certified crop, with records kept of crop disposition (e.g., sold as “non-organic,” fed to on-farm non-organic livestock, etc) . If equipment shared with organic fields is used to harvest buffers, records must be maintained to show equipment was cleaned before use on organic fields.

All buffer areas should be identified on field maps you submit to an organic certifier.

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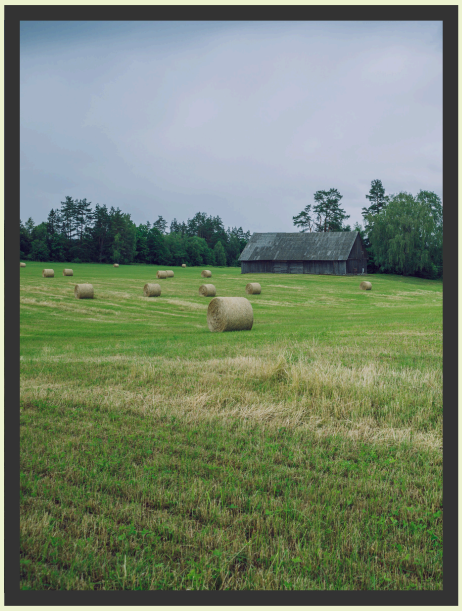
For more resources:
https://www.organictransition.org/

Additionally, an operation may choose to put other safeguards in place to prevent unintended contamination, such as:



- Written notification to local authorities:
  - Highway departments
  - Electric companies
  - Drainage Commissions
  - Farm Service office
  - Aerial spray companies/airports
- Documented agreements with neighbors regarding land use
  - E.g., Signed agreement that neighbor will not use prohibited substances within 25+ feet of the organic field
- Posting "No Spray" signs around boundaries of fields



Resources

- **Adjoining Land Use Affidavit**
- **Buffer Strip Record**
- **Farm Equipment Clean-out Record**
- **Organic Recordkeeping Resources from the NOP**

NOP Handbook:

- NOP-5034: Materials for Organic Crop Production

USDA Organic Regulations

National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances

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