Your First Organic Inspection

You have applied with an organic certification agency and after providing the information requested, it's time for your first inspection.

- What is the purpose of the inspection?
- Who will contact you to schedule the inspection?
- What happens during the inspection?
- What do you need to have prepared?



Purpose of the Organic Inspection

The purpose of the organic inspection is to verify that what you have indicated in your Organic System Plan represents the actions that are taking place at your operation. Also, records related to your operation are verified during the inspection to confirm compliance with the USDA Organic Regulations. The inspection is part of the initial process of applying for certification, and certified operations are inspected annually.

Scheduling

The person who inspects your operation is the organic inspector. The inspector is different from the person who makes the final decision about your organic certification, meaning the inspector does not decide whether you can be certified organic. The role of the inspector is to verify the Organic System Plan, review records, and generally be the "eyes and ears" of the certifier.

Some certifiers have organic inspectors on staff, while other certifiers contract independent contractors to conduct the inspections. Some certifiers have a mixture of both.



The certifier will send you the inspector's name and contact information. It is important to confirm that you have no conflicts of interest with the assigned inspector (for example, it is not someone who you have used as a consultant recently). If there is a conflict, notify your certifier immediately.

The inspector will contact you to set the date and time for the inspection.

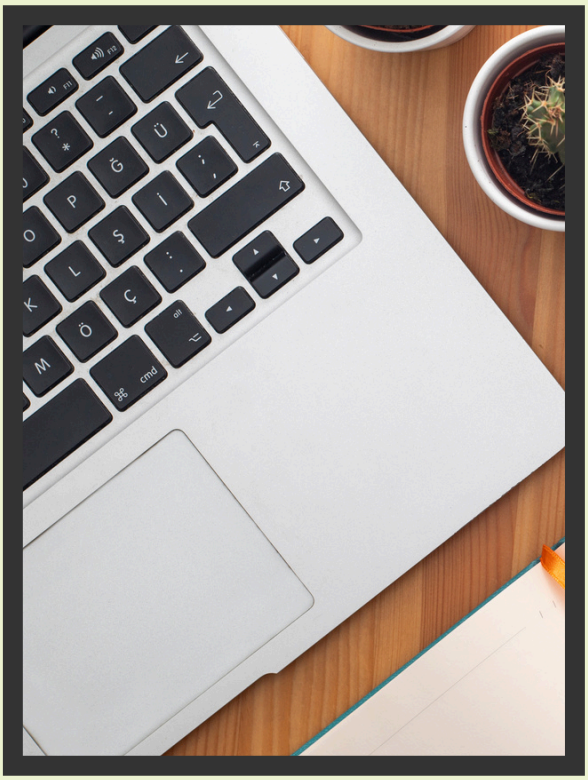
Preparing for the Inspection

The inspector will review the Organic System Plan with you, along with records you have available. If there are records you haven't created yet, you will talk to the inspector about your plans. They will also tour your operation to look at the fields, equipment, and storage.

USDA ORGANIC TRANSITION TO ORGANIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

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

Preparing for Inspection



The documents you will need to have ready will depend on the operation (see **Resources** for more), but here are some key items:

- Review communication from your certifier and have any requested information ready.
- Have your Organic System Plan and related documents (e.g., maps, field histories, receipts and documents for materials (for example, fertilizers, pesticides, seeds), field activity records, and material application records readily available. In future years you will want to make sure you have harvest and sales records available.
- Be ready for the inspector to tour your operation. The inspector will need to visit the fields (checking buffers, field boundaries, and crops), as well as check storage and equipment.
- Last, relax and be flexible. The inspector will choose whether to start with paperwork or go outside first. Each inspector conducts inspections a little differently, so have your documents ready and go with the flow.

At the Inspection

During the inspection, you will spend time in the fields with the inspector to check buffers and boundaries, crops, weeds, pests, and soil health. The inspector will also check your storage for both organic and non-organic crops (as applicable), the integrity of the storage and any pest control, labeling of storage (as applies), and equipment used by the operation.

The inspector will ask you questions about your management of the operation during this time, and they will be verifying if what they see matches with what is written on the Organic System Plan.

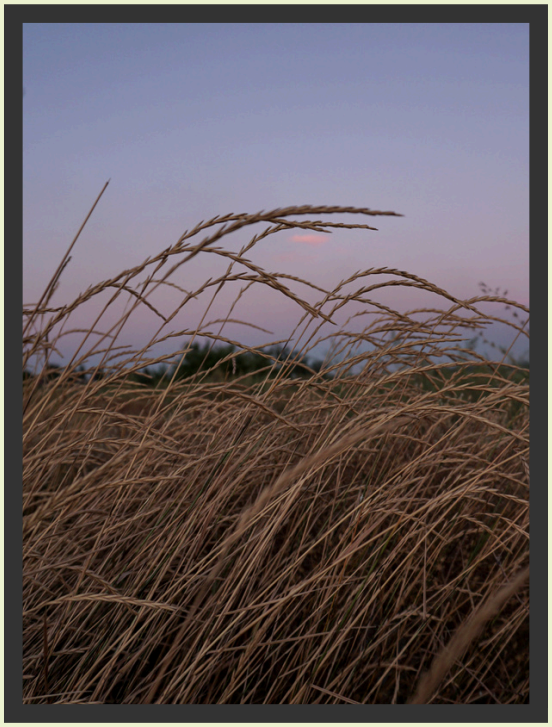
Time will also be spent going over the Organic System Plan in detail and reviewing the paperwork and records you are maintaining. The inspector will verify purchase records for materials (for example, fertilizers, pesticides, seeds), as well as application records of those materials.

The inspector will evaluate how records you maintain (or plan to maintain) will allow for products to be traced from sale back to the purchase of seed and that records maintained (or that you plan to maintain) will allow for an inspector to conduct an in/out balance of sales versus product produced. The inspector may conduct these exercises as far as they can with the records you have available already.

Last the inspector will conduct an exit interview to notify you of any compliance concerns with the organic regulations or where information is needed.

Post Inspection

The inspector will submit their inspection report to the certifier, and the certifier will review the report along with the information you have already provided.



If there are compliance issues (i.e., noncompliances), the certifier will issue you a letter with those items noted. It is important to review the letter and respond by the deadline.

Alternatively, if there are no major concerns but the certifier needs some information or has questions, they may issue you a letter or give you a call. In all cases it is essential to review certifier communication promptly and respond by the deadlines.

If the certifier determines your operation is compliant with the organic regulations and can be certified, they will issue you an organic certificate. There may be additional attachments to the certificate to list the crops and other information. They may also notify you of items that need to be addressed within a certain period or for the future. Review the communication and ensure to follow-up as required.



Resources

- Pre-Organic Inspection Questionnaire contains a list of questions to help you get ready for your inspection.

Videos:

- What to Expect when you are Inspected (vegetable farm and livestock operation)
- Inspection: The Basics
- Post Inspection: Noncompliances