



GO Organic



10 step checklist for transitioning to certified organic

✓ Get to know the organic rules and create your organic plan

Your operation is unique, but the rules for organic certification are the same for everyone! The first step is to understand the requirements (see Resource A). Next, determine how to apply them to your operation. When applying for certification, you will create an Organic System Plan (OSP) using the forms supplied by your certifier. Reviewing the OSP forms will help you understand what steps you'll need to follow.

✓ Ensure that your fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides are allowed

Determine if the substances you rely on (or would like to use) for fertility, pest control, or other purposes are allowed in organic farming. Consult with reputable sources with experience in organic production or organic consultants, such as Certified Pest Control Advisors. Lists are available to help you find approved brand name and generic materials for organic (see Resources B, C). Start using allowed substances in place of prohibited substances as soon as possible.

REMEMBER! The word "organic" on farming input labels may not mean a product is allowed for use. Always check with your certifier if you're unsure!

✓ Determine and document when your land will be ready for certification

Land is eligible for organic certification three years from the date of last application of a prohibited substance. You need to document the last date that any prohibited substance was applied and list the substances used. If you did not manage the land for the entire three years, written verification is needed from the previous owner, tenant, or another credible source with knowledge of the land's history.

✓ Develop working organic practices for your farm

Organic certification requires a holistic management approach, which includes: using organic seed whenever possible, maintaining soil and natural resources, using preventative pest management, and ensuring only the use of allowed fertilizers, pesticides, or other substances. Some practices can be put into place quickly, but others require time.

✓ Create a recordkeeping system

Recordkeeping is the backbone of a certified organic operation and will help you stay on track! Keep records of all your farming activities—from seed purchases to production practices (such as fertilizer application, crop rotation, and postharvest handling) to sales. Your records will be reviewed when the inspector visits your farm and must be kept for five years. Records can come in just about any form as long as they clearly match what you are growing.

TIP: Sample forms and recordkeeping tools can be used or adapted for your operation (see Resource D).

✓ Find a market to help grow your business!

In order to ensure your business success, you'll need to find a buyer for your organic crops. Search for sales outlets as soon as you know what you'll be growing. Whether you sell wholesale to restaurants, grocery stores, or a distributor, or make direct sales through a farmers' market, CSA, or farm stand, developing the market early will help ensure your success.

GO Organic Checklist



✓ Ensure organic requirements are met in postharvest handling

After your crop is harvested, packing and further handling must prevent the commingling of organic with non-organic products and protect organic products from contact with substances that are not allowed in organic production.

✓ Label your organic product

There are specific requirements for retail package labels, non-retail labels, and for the use of the USDA “organic” seal. Ask your certifier for an organic labeling guide to learn about labeling requirements.

CAUTION! Printing labels is expensive, so get approval from your certifier before you go to print.

✓ Decide when you want to have your first organic sales

Before you sell crops as organic, you’ll need to get your organic certification. Consider the costs and timeline. Plan to submit your application with enough time for inspection and certification before you’re ready for your first organic harvest. Once certified, you are eligible for reimbursement of certification costs, up to \$750 each year (see Resource E).

TIP: Submit your application early! The certification process can take up to 12 weeks or more.

✓ Complete the certification process

You can apply for certification at beginning or end of your land’s transition. Some like the peace of mind that comes with being part of a certification program early. Certifiers such as CCOF offer a Transitional Certification to help you and may even waive some fees (see Resource F). Certification includes completing your OSP and application, undergoing an inspection, review of your inspection report, and then certification.

RESOURCES

- A. **USDA Organic Standards** (searchable directory) www.ams.usda.gov/nop (PDF manual) www.ccof.org/documents/nop-standards-manual
- B. **Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI)** www.omri.org
- C. **Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA)** agr.wa.gov
- D. **ATTRA – The National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service** www.attra.ncat.org
- E. **Organic Certification Cost Share Programs** www.ams.usda.gov/NOPCostSharing
- F. **CCOF Transitional Certification** www.ccof.org/go-organic
- G. **USDA Organic Literacy Initiative** www.ams.usda.gov/organicinfo
- H. **Organic Trade Association’s How to Go Organic** www.howtogoorganic.com
- I. **eOrganic** www.eorganic.info
- J. **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** www.nrcs.usda.gov
- K. **Resource Conservation Districts (RCD) (California only)** www.carcd.org
- L. **Agricultural Cooperative Extension System** www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension