



Instruction Organic Certificates

1. Purpose and Scope

This instruction specifies which elements of an organic certificate are necessary to accurately demonstrate an operation's organic status. It also clarifies that only one operation may be listed on the organic certificate. This instruction is directed at certifying agents, who must meet certain terms and conditions as part of their accreditation (see 7 CFR § 205.501(a)(21)), and identifies additional best practices to support organic integrity.

2. Background

A farm or business' organic certificate provides an auditable record of its certified organic status, allowing it to sell products as organic. As recommended by the National Organic Standards Board in 2007, each certificate is to include standardized terminology, a standard organic certificate format, and a clear reference to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) organic regulations.

3. Policy

Producers and handlers that produce, handle, or process organic products must be certified organic. (See 7 CFR § 205.100(a).) Exceptions to this rule are explained in 7 CFR § 205.101 of the regulations.

3.1 Elements of the organic certificate

Organic certificates should be issued in English and include the following (* identifies elements required by 7 CFR § 205.404 of the USDA organic regulations):

1. Certified operation's name (all legal names) and address(es), including a physical address if the mailing or legal address is not the physical location of the operation*;
2. Certifying agent's name, address, Web site, and phone number*;
3. Effective date (when the current or initial certifying agent first certified the operation to the USDA organic regulations)*;
4. Issue date (when the certifying agent issued the organic certificate);
5. Anniversary date (when the certified operation must submit its annual update). Organic certificates cannot include expiration dates;
6. Categories of organic operation (crops, wild crops, livestock, and handling/processing)*;



7. Specific certified organic products covered by the organic certificate, allowing auditors and buyers to verify whether the operation is certified to produce or handle the product for sale (e.g., “hay” or “Uncle Perry’s Berry Organic Granola”);
8. Labeling category for each product certified under the handling/processing certification category (not required for products in the crops, wild crops, or livestock certification categories). Labeling categories: 100% Organic, Organic, Made with Organic (specified ingredients or food groups), and Livestock Feed (Organic or 100% Organic);
9. The statement, “Certified to the USDA organic regulations, 7 CFR Part 205.” This differentiates USDA organic products from those certified to other organic standards; and
10. The statement, “Once certified, a production or handling operation’s organic certification continues in effect until surrendered, suspended or revoked.”

3.2 Only one operation per organic certificate

Certifying agents must identify only one “person” (typically a farm or business as defined in 7 CFR § 205.2) on the organic certificate; this “person” must be certified organic. Each certified organic operation must have its own organic certificate.

3.3 Organic certificates are not transferrable

Certification and certificates issued to certified operations are not transferrable to new owners in cases of mergers, acquisitions, or other transfers of ownership.

3.4 Organic certificate should be updated at least annually

Certifying agents should issue a new organic certificate each year. A new certificate must be issued when any information specified on the certificate has changed. These updated certificates may be issued after reviewing the annual update or after the annual inspection is completed.

3.5 Organic certificates cannot cover operations or land in transition to organic

Certifying agents cannot issue organic certificates to cover operations or land that is under transition to organic production. However, certifying agents can issue separate transitional certificates to cover land in transition to organic production.

3.6 Organic certificates cannot cover operations before they are certified

The USDA organic regulations do not provide for precertification. Certifying agents cannot issue precertification documents to cover operations that are applying for certification. An organic certificate may only be issued once certification is attained, and the operation seeking certification meets all the requirements of the regulations.



4. References

USDA Organic Regulations ([7 CFR Part 205](#))

See specific sections referenced above.

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