

# MARKETING LABELS & VOLUNTARY CERTIFICATIONS **CERTIFIED ORGANIC**

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Perhaps one of the most well recognized and highly sought after eco-labels of today is “Organic.” This is a labeling term indicating the growth conditions of agricultural products. Certified Organic products must be grown or raised with biological, mechanical, and cultural practices that “cycle resources, promote soil health and ecological balance, and conserve and enhance biodiversity” and without certain prohibited substances and processes, including synthetic fertilizers or pesticides and genetic engineering. The use of this term and label is protected by federal regulation and overseen by the National Organic Program (NOP).



regulations and are subject to verification. Products produced by non-certified operations cannot be used as organic ingredients in processed products manufactured by another operation, cannot be used as feed for certified organic animals, and may not display the USDA organic seal.

## *Transitioning to Organic Crop Production*

When transitioning to organic production, you must keep records documenting land use and material applications during the 3-year transition period. You must adhere to organic standards during the transition, including not using prohibited inputs such as certain fertilizers and pesticides. For example, if a field was sprayed with synthetic pesticides on August 1st, 2020, then a crop harvested from that field may not be certified as organic until September 1st, 2023.

## **CERTIFICATION BASICS**

Becoming certified organic can help you receive premium prices, access new markets, protect natural resources, and stand out in the marketplace. Farms, ranches, or other agricultural operations wishing to be certified must develop an Organic System Plan (OSP), document their processes to prove they are in accordance with the USDA’s National Organic Program (NOP)’s Organic Regulations, permit annual inspection by a USDA-accredited certifying agency, and pay dues. Applicable records must be kept for at least 5 years. To be eligible for certification, your operation must have been free of prohibited materials for at least 36 months.

### *Exemptions*

Crop and livestock producers who sell less than \$5,000 of organic products annually are not required to apply for organic certification and can promote their products as being produced organically. Producers utilizing this exemption must comply with the organic production and handling and recordkeeping requirements of the USDA organic

## **CERTIFICATION AGENCIES**

Once you’ve met all of the National Organic Program’s Organic Regulations, you can seek certification by an accredited certifying agent. You can choose to work with any of the agents listed on the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service’s website, including the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA). Certified organic producers may use the USDA organic seal and the seal of their registered certifying agent to identify their products as organic. The ISDA seal is shown here. These logos can help you stand out in the marketplace on websites, promotional materials, product packaging, social media, and communications. The ISDA website also includes many helpful resources for crop, livestock, and handlers/processors.



## SPECIFIC PRODUCT REGULATIONS

Organic certification regulations vary depending on the products. All specifics, and the mentioned publications, can be found on USDA's website.

### *Crops*

Crop producers must provide plans for soil fertility management, pest prevention, weed management, seed sourcing, sale, and more. USDA's publication, "Guide for Organic Crop Producers" provides additional details.

### *Livestock*

Livestock must be under continuous organic management practices from the last third of the animal's gestation or from hatching to be labeled, sold, or represented as organic. There are some exceptions for poultry and dairy animals—visit the USDA's website, or their "Guide for Organic Livestock Production" for more information.

### *Handlers & Processors*

Handlers and processors can also be certified organic if they use certified organic ingredients and adhere to regulations on processing. These regulations include limitations on commingling organic and non-organic products and cleaning or sanitization products used. There are four distinct labeling categories for certified organic food products: 100% Organic, Organic, Made with Organic [ingredient name], or denoting specific organic ingredients. For more details, visit USDA's website.

## COST & FUNDING ASSISTANCE

Cost of certification varies widely depending on the size, type, and complexity of your operation but may vary from a few hundred to several thousand dollars. However, there are several grant programs available to organic producers. The USDA Farm Service Agency administers an Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP) to reimburse farmers and handlers for a percentage of their certification fees. Additionally, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides

technical and financial assistance to organic farmers and ranchers to implement conservation practices through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Organic Initiative.