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Organic Grower Tip Sheet

New to organics? Use this tip sheet as a quick guide to some of the relevant regulations for handlers and processors. This sheet is **not** intended as a full overview of organic regulations, only as a helpful guide as you orient yourself to the regulatory framework.

You can find the full text of the National Organic Program regulations online here: [eCFR 7 Part 205](#).

For further information, please see the below resources:

- [NOP Certification Manual](#)
- [National Organic Program Handbook](#)

Important National Organic Program (NOP) Regulations

Regulation	Key Takeaways - Click the Regulation for Full Text
National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances §205.600-606	Also called The National List, this section covers the actual substances, not branded products, that are allowed or prohibited in organic production.
Organic System Plans §205.201	In order to be certified to the USDA Organic standard, you must create and maintain an Organic System Plan (OSP). An OSP is a complete record of your operation that outlines all your practices.
Land Use Requirements § 205.202	Land must be free of prohibited substances for 36 continuous months before being eligible for certification. Buffer zones must be maintained between organic crops and non-organic crops and/or prohibited substances.
Organic Integrity §205.272	The organic operation must prevent the commingling of organic and nonorganic products and protect organic products from contact with prohibited substances. These measures must be described in the Organic System Plan (OSP).

<p><u>Soil Fertility and Crop Nutrient Practices</u> <u>§205.203</u></p>	<p>It is important to have management practices that maintain and improve soil health, nutrient levels in soil, and appropriate use of micronutrients.</p>
<p><u>Organic Seeds, Seedlings, and Planting Stock</u> <u>§205.204</u></p>	<p>All seeds and planting stock must come from a USDA certified organic source. If no certified seeds and/or planting stock is "commercially available", this section covers specific provisions for sourcing non-organic seeds/planting stock.</p>
<p><u>Crop Rotation Practice Standard</u> <u>§205.205</u></p>	<p>Crop rotation is important for pest, disease, and weed suppression as well as maintaining soil fertility.</p>
<p><u>Crop Pest, Weed, and Disease Management</u> <u>§205.206</u></p>	<p>Pests, disease, and weed management must follow a progressive methodology for containment: cultural, mechanical, chemical.</p>
<p><u>Recordkeeping</u> <u>§205.103</u></p>	<p>Certified organic producers are required to maintain records of their operation for 5 years. A good rule to keep in mind: if it happens on your operation, write it down and keep it.</p>
<p><u>Labeling</u> <u>§205.300-311</u></p>	<p>Use of the USDA Organic Seal and the representation of products as "certified organic" are federally regulated. This section covers how products must be labeled in order to be compliant with NOP regulations.</p>

This document is a **general summary** of the NOP regulations. It is **not** intended as a substitute for a complete reading and understanding of the law. More information can be accessed from the National Organic Program [website](#). The full text of the USDA organic standards can be accessed online here: [eCFR 7 Part 205](#).

QCS is a USDA accredited certifying agent. QCS cannot provide consultation services to our clients, other than to ensure that their OSP is in compliance with the National Organic Program standards. QCS maintains a list of consultants on [their website](#). Note: it is not required to use an organic consultant and QCS cannot make recommendations on specific consultants.

A Note on Inputs: The National List & Material Review Organizations

Many new organic producers are anxious to use only approved substances on their operations – with good reason! The National List provides information on the individual substances that are allowed and prohibited in organic production. Third party, independent institutions known as material review organizations (MRO) are responsible for auditing branded products for compliance with the National List.

QCS recognizes four MROs: Organic Material Review Institute ([OMRI](#)), California Department of Food and Agriculture ([CDFA](#)), Pennsylvania Certified Organic ([PCO](#)), and Washington State Department of Agriculture ([WSDA](#)).

Always confirm that an input is approved for organic production **prior** to use by calling Quality Certification Services at 352-377-0133 and speaking with your certification reviewer or updating your inputs in your Client Portal.

Documents Required at Inspection

Please note: this is not an exhaustive list and additional documents may be requested by your inspector.

1. A copy of your up-to-date organic grower plan and attachments
2. Seed/seedling/planting-stock sourcing records
3. Planting, field activity, and harvest records
4. Input purchase and application records
5. Post-harvest handling, storage, shipping and/or sales records
6. Most recent soil/tissue tests if using restricted micronutrient inputs
7. Manure application and/or compost records if handling raw manure
8. Up-to-date farm and facility map
9. If running a split operation, conventional production records may be requested as a part of the audit process
10. Any other records which may be needed to verify compliance with the National Organic Program
11. Documentation of calculations pertaining to most recently completed QCS Gross Sales Assessment
12. Most recent soil or tissue tests or other evidence of deficiency if using restricted micronutrient inputs.

*While we'll typically be reviewing records pertaining to the current and preceding year, please be aware that NOP regulations require that records be maintained for not less than 5 years beyond their creation.

Additional Resources

[QCS's Frequently Asked Questions](#) - answers to general questions about certification with a specific crop section.

[QCS's External Resource Page](#) - links to external education and resources.

[Florida Organic Growers \(FOG\)](#) - FOG provides resources to organic growers in Florida and beyond.

[Organic Materials Review Institute \(OMRI\)](#) - an MRO with a wide array of products approved for use in organics.

[National Sustainable Agriculture Service \(NRCS\)](#) - A USDA offices offering conservation solutions so agricultural producers can protect natural resources and feed a growing world.

[USDA Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education \(SARE\)](#) - Farmer-driven innovations in agriculture that improve profitability, stewardship and quality of life.

[Rodale Institute](#) - A non-profit that focuses on research, farmer training, and consumer education.

[USDA Transition to Organic Partnership Program \(TOPP\)](#) - Resources for producers seeking to transition to organic production practices.

[National Center for Appropriate Technology](#): A national service that provides technical assistance, learning opportunities, and research to operators across the agricultural industry.

[Organic Trade Association](#) - A national members-based trade organization that provides resources to organic producers and advocates for organics at a national level.

[Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#) - Organic operators based in the US can apply for cost share reimbursement for 75%, up to \$750, for organic certification costs incurred from October of the previous year to September of the current year.