Quality Certification Services (QCS)
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ORGANIC CERTIFICATION
A PRIMER FOR GROWERS

Why go certified organic? Certified organic growers rely on ecological processes and organic nutrient sources to produce nutritious, tasteful food with minimal impact to the environment. Aside from the satisfaction of improving your soil, producing healthy food, and protecting the environment, organic growing has financial rewards as well. Consumers are willing to pay top dollar for the assurance that their produce is grown in accordance with the strict standards of the National Organic Program.

SUMMARY OF NOP REGULATIONS

In order to be certified as an organic grower, you must comply with the regulations established in the National Organic Program (NOP) standards, which are codified in 7 CFR Part 205. The standards, which are summarized below, were adopted by the USDA to implement the Organic Food Production Act of 1990.

Allowed and Prohibited Substances § 205.105. Organic production is based on the use of nonsynthetic, or naturally occurring, plant, animal, and mineral materials. All inputs used on your organic farm must comply with the NOP's list of approved and prohibited substances. A description of NOP approved and prohibited substances for growers can be found in § 205.600-605 of the NOP.

Organic System Plan § 205.201. Certified organic growers must develop and follow an organic system plan (OSP). Your OSP must explain the management practices that you will use to prevent contamination and commingling of your organic crops. Your OSP must also list all of your farm inputs and describe your recordkeeping system. If you seek certification through QCS, your approved grower application is your OSP.

Land Use Requirements § 205.202. The NOP requires that land be free of prohibited inputs for at least three years before it is eligible for organic certification, and to be managed in accordance with all applicable land management provisions.

Soil Fertility and Crop Nutrient Practices § 205.203. The NOP requires that growers manage soil fertility and crop nutrients through appropriate tillage and cultivation practices, crop rotations, cover crops, and the application of plant and animal materials. NOP regulations governing the production of compost and the application of raw manure to crops can be found in § 205.203(c).

Organic Seeds, Seedlings, and Planting Stock § 205.204. The NOP requires growers to use **certified organic seeds, seedlings, and planting stock**. There is a commercial availability exception for seeds, but annual seedlings must, without exception, be certified organic.

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Crop Rotation Practice Standard §205.205. The NOP requires growers to implement a crop rotation standard to improve soil health, address pest problems, manage plant nutrients, and control erosion.

Crop Pest, Weed, and Disease Management §205.206. The NOP requires growers to use various physical and cultural methods as their first line of defense against pests, weeds, and disease. Such practices include, but are not limited to, crop rotation, sanitation, appropriate plant selection, use of beneficial insects, trapping, mulching, mowing, grazing, and the application of nonsynthetic biological, botanical, or mineral inputs.

Recordkeeping § 205.103. The NOP requires growers to maintain records for a minimum of five years. Recordkeeping requirements include field activity logs, harvest levels, sales receipts, input, seed and seedling invoices, equipment cleaning logs, and all other records necessary to document compliance with the regulations.

Labeling § 205.300-311. The NOP has specific labeling requirements for organic products. If you seek certification through QCS, labels must be submitted to us for pre-approval.

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. The full text of the National Organic Program standards can be accessed from the USDA's website, http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop, and is also provided in your QCS application packet.

Additional Resources:
Florida Organic Growers (FOG) http://foginfo.org
Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) http://www.omri.org
National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service: http://attra.ncat.org/
USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education http://www.sare.org
Organic Trade Association http://www.ota.com and http://howtogoorganic.com

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. Florida Organic Growers maintains a list of consultants and can be reached at 352-377-6345.