**ORGANIC CERTIFICATION**

**A PRIMER FOR PROCESSORS AND HANDLERS**

Why go certified organic? The demand for organic products is growing by leaps and bounds, with organic sales well over $20 billion in 2008! New and different organic products are appearing on the shelves every day, and not just in the traditional “health food store.” As consumer demand continues to skyrocket, certified organic products are popping up in almost every mainstream supermarket. In addition, consumers are willing to pay top dollar for food that is safe and nutritious for their families. The certified organic label assures consumers that your product is produced in accordance with the strict standards of the National Organic Program.

**SUMMARY OF NOP REGULATIONS**

In order to be certified as an organic processor or handler, 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 and ingredients used by your facility must comply with the NOP’s list of approved and prohibited substances. A description of NOP approved and prohibited substances for processors can be found in § 205.600-606 of the NOP.

**Organic System Plan § 205.201**. Certified organic handlers and processors must develop and follow an organic system plan (OSP). Your OSP must provide a list of all your production and handling inputs and a description of how and where they will be used, an explanation of the management and monitoring practices that you will use to comply with the law, and a description of your recordkeeping system. If you seek certification through QCS, your approved handler/processor application is your OSP.

**Recordkeeping § 205.103.** Processors and handlers must maintain records sufficient to demonstrate compliance with the NOP. Records must be maintained for five years, and must fully disclose all activities and transactions in sufficient detail to be readily understood and audited. Typical records for processors and handlers include, but are not limited to, organic certificates, invoices, purchase orders, production records, sanitation and cleaning logs, sales orders, and shipping logs.

**Organic Handling Requirements § 205.270.** The organic handling requirements govern the methods and inputs that can and cannot be used to prepare and preserve certified organic products. For example, biological and mechanical methods of food preparation are generally approved, while the use of synthetic solvents and processing aids is prohibited. This section also governs the use of nonagricultural products in certified organic food.

**Facility Pest Management § 205.271.** Certified organic processing and handling facilities must control pests through appropriate management, sanitation, and mechanical measures as a line of first defense. If these measures are inadequate, NOP approved synthetic and nonsynthetic substances may be used.

**Prevention of Commingling and Contamination § 205.272.** Organic processors and handlers must implement measures necessary to prevent the commingling of organic and nonorganic products and ensure that organic products are not contaminated by prohibited substances.

**Labeling** **§ 205.300-305.** The NOP has specific labeling requirements depending on the composition and percentage of organic ingredients in your product. If you seek certification through QCS, you must submit your labels 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**](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](http://www.omri.org/OMRI_datatable.php)

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.**