



Organic Labeling at Farmers Markets

Farmers markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operations are great places for customers interested in locally sourced products to find and purchase organic products. Many of these consumers appreciate knowing how and where the products that they purchase were grown, and the organic certification status of the farmers.

Organic Regulations and Certification

Farmers and vendors who use the word “organic” to describe their products or practices in the marketplace must comply with the USDA organic regulations. The Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) states that no person may affix a label to, or provide other marketing information concerning, an agricultural product if that label or information implies, directly or indirectly, that such product is produced and handled using organic methods, except in accordance with the OFPA.

Most farms and business that grow, handle, or process organic products must be certified. The only exception is for producers and handlers that sell less than \$5,000 per year of organic products. These operations may choose to obtain certification but they are not required to do so. If you are uncertain you need to be certified, see NOP’s brochure “Do I Need to Be Certified Organic?”

Exempt Producers Must Comply with Requirements

Farms exempt from organic certification that want to sell products as organic must comply with organic requirements such as:

- Applying only allowed fertilizer, pest, disease and weed management inputs for three years prior to harvest. The inputs must be approved by EPA, the Organic Materials Review Institute, or by a USDA accredited certification agency, and allowed under the USDA organic regulations.
- Not using genetically engineered organisms (GMOs) and ensuring that preventative practices are used to protect organic products from GMOs.

- Using organic seeds unless organic seeds were not commercially available.
- Not planting any seeds treated with synthetic substances such as fungicides or insecticides.
- Only using seedlings and transplants that have been grown organically using approved potting mixes and inputs.
- Implementing a soil building crop rotation on the farm, where annual crops of the same type are not grown in succession in the same field.
- Not applying manure to fields growing crops for human consumption any sooner than 90 days before harvest for crops that are not in contact with soil (e.g. sweet corn), or 120 days before harvest for crops that are or may be in contact with soil (e.g. all root crops like potatoes and carrots and other crops like tomatoes and peppers).
- Ensuring that compost containing manure meets the requirement of having a carbon to nitrogen ratio between 25:1 and 40:1; a temperature of 130 to 170° F for 15 days, having been turned 5 times, or, if in a static vessel, the same temperature for 3 days.
- Managing all mammalian livestock organically from the last third of gestation to the day of slaughter and managing all poultry organically from the second day of life. Organic management includes providing certified organic feed.
- Providing all livestock with access to the outdoors, with ruminants receiving 30% of their nutrition from pasture during a minimum 120 day grazing season.
- Using animal health products and feed supplements that have been approved by the Organic Materials Review Institute or by a USDA accredited certification agency and that are allowed under the USDA organic regulations.

The above is a list of highlights. For an exhaustive list of requirements see §7 CFR 205 at [USDA Organic Regulations](#). All farmers and vendors must comply with all organic requirements to label their product as organic.

How Much Does Certification Cost?

Fees charged for certification vary among certifying agents and with the size and complexity of the farm operation, the costs of inspection, and other factors. Certifiers must provide information on their fee structures upon request.

USDA Organic Certification Cost Share Programs reimburse certified organic operations for as much as 75 percent of certification costs, up to a maximum of \$750 per certification category – crops, wild crops, livestock, and processed products – annually. Certified organic operations should contact their State Departments of Agriculture for more information and an application.

You can locate your State Agency contact at <http://bit.ly/NOPCostShareStates>.

Want to Learn More About Organic Agriculture?

USDA's Organic Literacy Initiative is a package of training and outreach materials that provides an overview of organic agriculture and USDA programs and services for organic farmers, ranchers, and processors.

Learn what organic means, how certification works, and how to access helpful resources. The online training modules and accompanying handouts provide a quick, easy overview of the USDA organic seal.

Access the Organic Literacy Initiative at:

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/organicinfo>

Want to File a Complaint?

If you are concerned that an organic product may not meet the USDA standards, or that an operation is making an organic claim without certification, you may submit a complaint to the USDA.

If a farm or business violates the USDA organic regulations, civil penalties may include fines up to \$11,000 per violation and/or suspension or revocation of an operation's organic certificate.


Suspected violations of the organic regulations may be reported to the USDA by sending an email to NOPCompliance@ams.usda.gov or by calling the National Organic Program at 202-720-3252.

Is Organic An Option For Me?

Information on Organic Agriculture for Farmers, Ranchers, and Businesses

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This brochure provides an overview of the USDA organic regulations and how USDA supports organic agriculture. It includes information on getting certified, funding opportunities, and educational resources.

For more information, visit www.ams.usda.gov/organicinfo or, if viewing this brochure online, use the  icons in each section.

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