



USDA Organic 201

*A Closer Look at the
U.S. Department of Agriculture's
National Organic Program and Related Resources*



Module Overview



- 1. Review of Organic 101**
- 2. Organic Integrity: Governance and Certification**
 - ✓ USDA's role in organic regulation
 - ✓ Certifying Agents and Operations
- 3. Organic System Plans**
 - ✓ Topics addressed in an organic system plan
- 4. Organic Standards**
 - ✓ Basic requirements for organic crops, livestock, and processing/handling
 - ✓ Organic labeling requirements
- 5. Monitoring and Enforcement**
 - ✓ Reporting suspected violations to USDA
- 6. USDA Resources – Review from 101**

A Focus on...

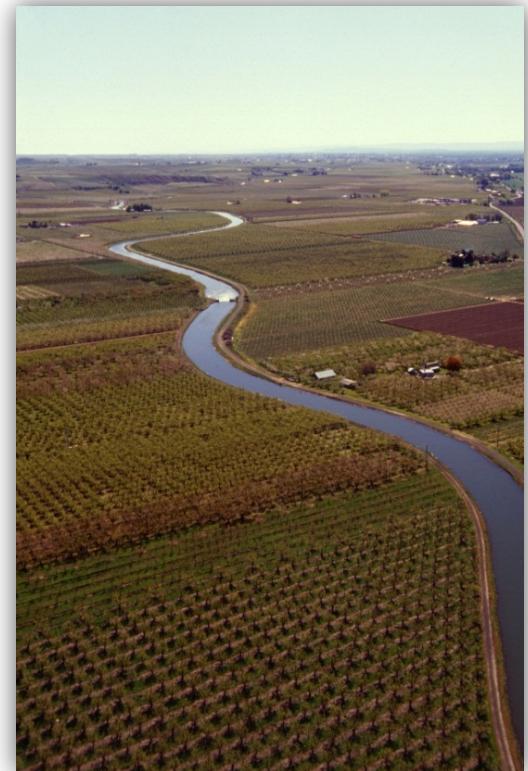


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Review: The Meaning of Organic



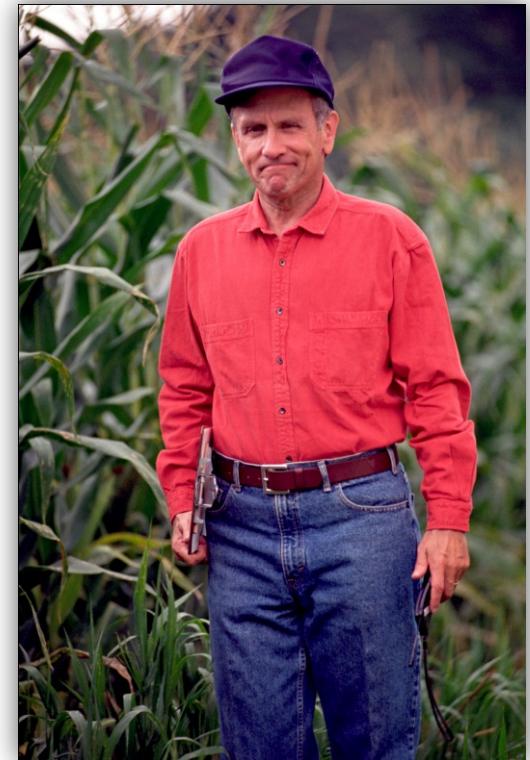
- This training module assumes an understanding of the concepts from a beginning module, **Organic 101**
- The organic label indicates that the food or agricultural product has been **produced using methods approved by the USDA**
- Organic farmers use practices that **foster the cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity**
- Organic farmers **do not use prohibited synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, ionizing irradiation, or genetic engineering**
- Organic practices on farms and ranches are **adapted to the conditions of each location**



Review: Organic Certification



- The National Organic Program (NOP) **accredits certifying agents** to review, inspect, and certify the practices of organic farms and processing facilities
- Organic farms and processing facilities that meet the USDA organic standards are called **certified organic operations**, and include both producers and handlers
- Producers and handlers may choose to work with any accredited certifying agent
- Certifying agents may be **private entities, states, or foreign governments**
- There are **over 90 certifying agents** around the world, with more than 50 in the United States
- Certifying agents are overseen by the USDA

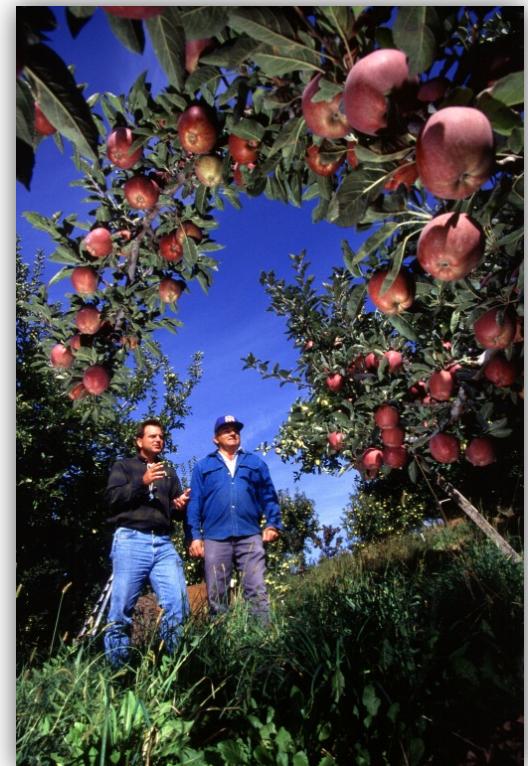


Review: Organic Production



Organic production occurs on both a small and large scale, domestically and internationally.

- There are certified organic operations **in all 50 states**, as well as many foreign countries
 - There are more than 17,000 certified operations **in the U.S.***
 - There are more than 13,000 certified organic operations certified under the National Organic Program in **foreign countries***
- The USDA National Organic Program maintains a list of certified organic operations that is searchable by name, location, or products produced



*Source: USDA National Organic Program Database of Certified Operations, 2011

A Focus on...

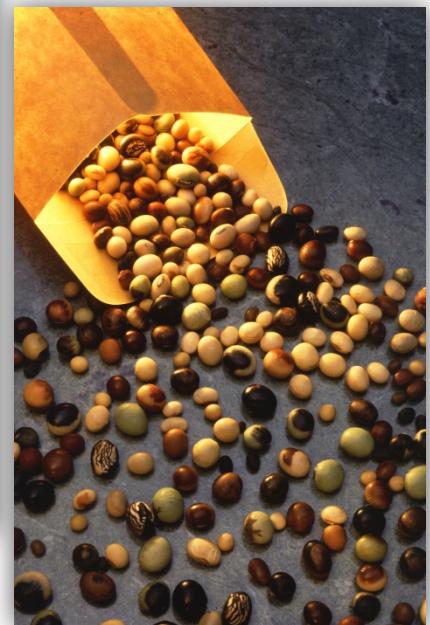


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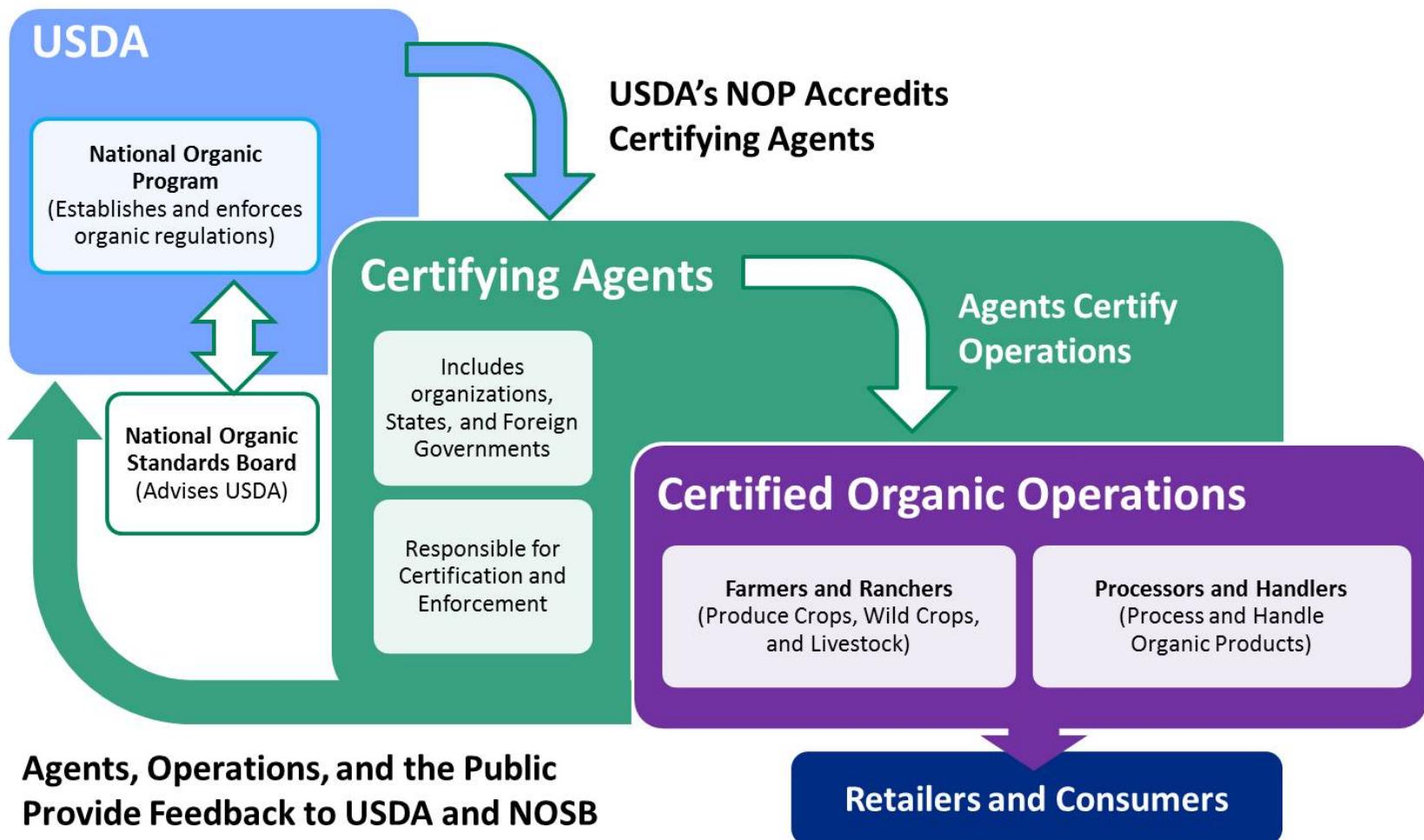
The USDA Regulates the Organic Seal



USDA's National Organic Program (NOP) ensures the integrity of USDA organic products in the United States and throughout the world



A Framework that Ensures Organic Integrity



The Organic Regulations and the NOP



- **Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) of 1990**
 - Established the National Organic Program (NOP)
 - Required national standards for organically produced agricultural products to ensure consistency
- **USDA Organic Regulations**
 - Published in the Code of Federal Regulations
 - Includes standards for production, handling, labeling, certification, and accreditation
 - Updated and maintained by the NOP
- **USDA National Organic Program (NOP)**
 - Develops and enforces the organic regulations
 - Accredits and oversees certifying agents, who certify and oversee organic operations
 - Facilitates trade by supporting equivalency and recognition agreements with other countries

Access the organic regulations at the NOP website:
www.ams.usda.gov/nop

The National Organic Standards Board



The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) is a citizen advisory board of volunteer farmers, handlers, a retailer, scientists, an environmentalist, consumer advocates, and a certifying agent.

- Members are appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture
- Reviews **substances** that are proposed to be allowed or prohibited in organic agriculture
- Advises the USDA and the NOP on organic production and handling practice standards
- Holds **public meetings** where it receives written and oral public comments, and votes on Committee proposals
- Learn More about the NOSB: www.ams.usda.gov/NOSBHome

Certifying Agents and Certified Operations



Accredited Certifying Agents

- Evaluate applications for certification submitted by farming, ranching, processing, and handling operations.
- Review Organic System Plans and conduct on-site inspections.
- Approve an operation's use of the organic label.
- Enforce the correct application of the organic standards.

Farmers, Ranchers, Processors, and Handlers

- Apply to be certified as an organic operation to an accredited certifying agent, providing records and an Organic System Plan
- Undergo annual and unannounced inspections.
- Produce and process agricultural goods according to their approved Organic System Plan; maintain and update the plan.
- Appropriately label and sell goods to consumers and retailers.



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The Organic System Plan



The Organic System Plan (OSP) is:

- **Written** by the producer or handler seeking certification
- **Reviewed** by the Certifying Agent and validated through annual inspections
- Updated **annually**, and whenever changes in practices occur
- Designed to **address** all scopes of organic certification maintained by the operation, including:
 - Crops
 - Wild Crops
 - Handling
 - Livestock

The NOP provides sample forms for Organic System Plans:

[www.ams.usda.gov/
NOPProgramHandbook](http://www.ams.usda.gov/NOPProgramHandbook)

OSPs are located in the Appendix



Organic System Plan Contents



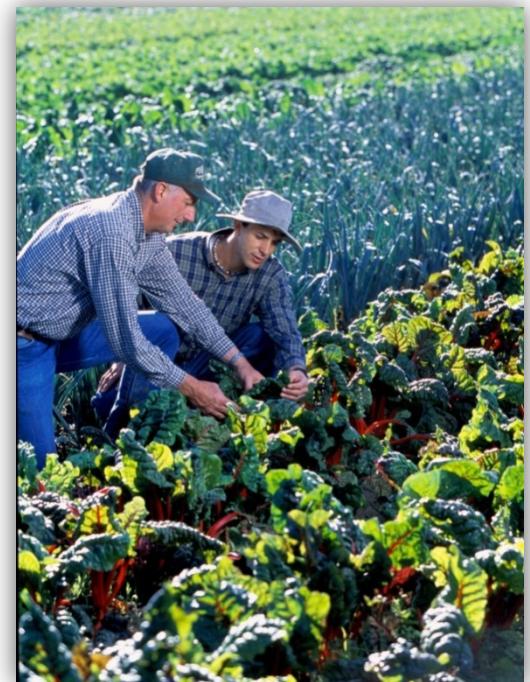
- A **description of practices and procedures** to be performed and maintained, including the **frequency** with which they will be performed
- A list of **substances** used in production or handling, indicating its composition, source, and location(s) where it will be used
- A description of the **monitoring** practices to ensure organic integrity
- A description of the **recordkeeping** system
- A description of the **management** practices and **physical barriers** established to prevent commingling and/or contamination with non-organic materials



Updating the Organic System Plan



- Certified operations submit updated OSPs **at least annually** for review by the certifying agent
- Producers and handlers must update OSPs to **reflect any planned changes** to the operation, including the use of additional substances
- Producers and handlers must **notify** their certifying agents and **obtain approval** *before* making any changes
- Certifying agents must receive an updated OSP **before conducting the annual inspection** of a certified operation



A Focus on...

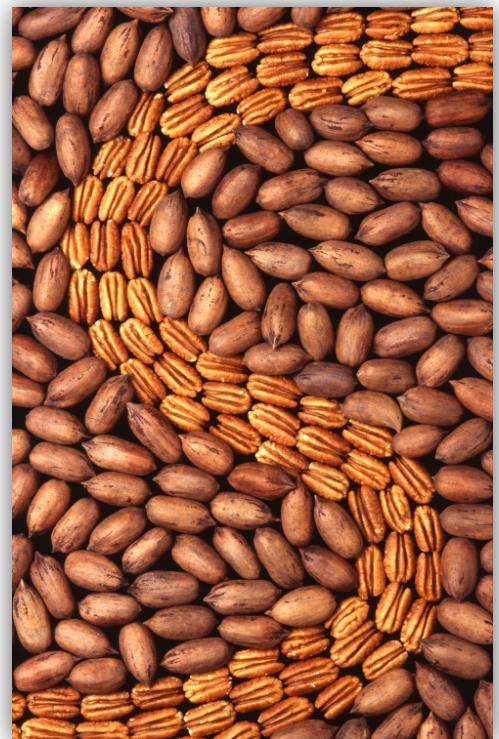


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The USDA Organic Standards



- The **USDA National Organic Program (NOP) develops production standards** for crops, wild crops, and livestock, as well as organic handling standards
- Standards can be found in the **USDA organic regulations** and the **NOP Program Handbook**
 - The Regulations are published in the Federal Register: Chapter 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Section 205
 - The Program Handbook is published by the NOP and contains guidance, instructional documents, and policy memos



Requirements for Organic Crops



Crop farms must:

- Maintain and implement an **Organic System Plan**
- Maintain distinct, defined boundaries and **buffer zones** to prevent prohibited substances from impacting organic areas
- **Not use prohibited substances**, such as excluded fertilizers or pesticides

As long as the farm is certified, farmers:

- **May NOT** use prohibited substances, sewage sludge, irradiation, or genetic engineering
- **MUST** use organic seeds and organic seedlings (for annual crops), when commercially available
- **MUST** document management of pests and weeds
- **MUST** implement tillage and cultivation practices that maintain or improve soil conditions and minimize erosion
- **MAY** use natural inputs and/or USDA-approved synthetic substances



Requirements for Livestock Operations



Livestock operations must:

- Maintain and implement an **Organic System Plan**
- Use **100% organic feed**: Feed **must not** contain antibiotics, growth hormones, slaughter byproducts, or genetic engineering
- Provide **access to the outdoors** and good living conditions year-round
- Maintain a **pasture plan** for grazing animals
- **Document** the organic status of all animals

Learn More about Organic Grazing Rules:
[Pasture for Organic Ruminant Livestock](#)



Requirements for Different Animals



Ruminants:

- Must have **access to pasture** during the grazing season: 30% of the animal's dry matter intake must come from pasture; grazing season must be at least 120 days
- Must meet animal **health and welfare standards**

Breeding animals: Must be managed organically no later than **the last third of gestation** for the offspring to be considered organic

Dairy animals: Must be managed organically for **one year** before their **milk** may be considered organic

Poultry: Must be managed organically from the **second day of life**

A ruminant is an animal with four stomachs. In organic agriculture, the primary ruminant animals are dairy and beef cattle, sheep, and goats

Requirements for Wild Crop Operations



Wild Crops are any plant or portion of a plant collected or harvested from a site that is not cultivated or otherwise managed agriculturally.

Wild crop operations must:

- Maintain and implement an **Organic System Plan**
- Have a **defined area** from which crops are harvested
- Maintain or improve **natural resources**
- Be restricted to **sustainable harvesting**
- Utilize only **minimal agricultural practices**, such as
 - Re-seeding from existing plants
 - Removing non-native species
 - Pruning
- Harvest crops in a way that **does not damage the environment**

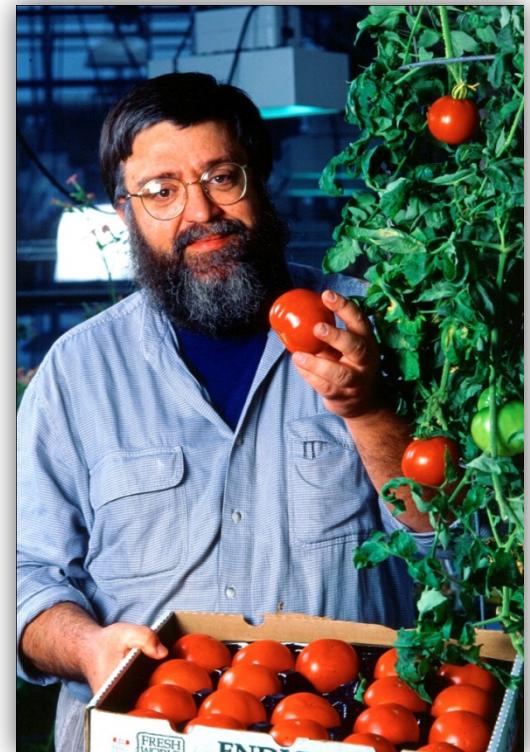


Requirements for Processors and Handlers



Handling and processing operations must:

- Maintain and implement an **Organic System Plan**
- Prevent the **commingling or contamination** of organic products by non-organic products during processing
- **Prevent pests** using only approved practices
- Use **certified organic agricultural ingredients** in organically-labeled products
- Use only **approved label claims**
- Not use **irradiation or genetic engineering**



Handler and Processor Certification



Some food handlers are exempt from organic certification. These include:

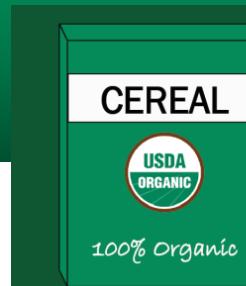
- Distributors who handle **packaged or contained products** and do not unpack or process the products
- **Retail** food establishments that do not process organic products
- Operations that handle only products with **less than 70% organic** ingredients



*Even exempt operations **MUST prevent commingling or contamination** of organic products with non-organic materials*

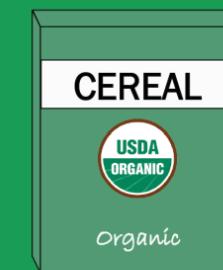
Labeling of Organic Processed Products

- Only products with 95% or more organic content can be labeled with the organic seal.
- Products with 70% or more organic content can be labeled “made with Organic”
- Products with less than 70% organic content may only have organic ingredients listed in the ingredient list



100% Organic

Use of the USDA Organic Seal is optional



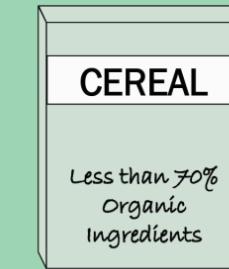
Organic

95% or more Organic ingredients
Use of the USDA Organic Seal is optional



Made with Organic Ingredients

At least 70% Organic Ingredients



Less than 70% Organic Ingredients

Organic Ingredients denoted in ingredient list only

Allowed and Prohibited Substances



In general, synthetic substances are prohibited in organic products unless specifically allowed and non-synthetic substances are allowed unless specifically prohibited.

- The National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances (National List) is part of the **organic regulations**. It identifies substances that may and **may not be used** in organic production and handling.
- The National List includes: **Synthetic** substances which are **allowed**; **Natural** substances which are **prohibited**.
- The National List has separate sections for **crops, livestock, and handling/food processing**.
- All substances are reviewed by the **National Organic Standards Board**. The Board makes recommendations on substances to the USDA, which then engages in rulemaking as appropriate.



Excluded Methods



Organic products must be produced without the use of:

- **Genetic Engineering:** a variety of methods used to genetically modify organisms or influence their growth and development by means that are not possible under natural conditions or processes and are not considered compatible with organic production
- **Ionizing radiation:** as described in Food and Drug Administration regulation, [21 CFR 179.26](#)
- **Sewage sludge:** a solid, semisolid, or liquid residue generated during the treatment of domestic sewage in a treatment works



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Enforcing Organic Regulations



- The NOP Compliance and Enforcement Division investigates reported or suspected violations of the organic regulations, often with the support of certifying agents and State Organic Program officials.
- Anyone may report a suspected violation to the NOP:
www.ams.usda.gov/NOPFileaComplaint



Penalties for Noncompliance



Suspension or Revocation

- If an investigation shows that a certified operation has failed to comply with the organic regulations, the operation's certification may be suspended or revoked
- Suspended or revoked operations **may not sell or represent** their products as organic
- The USDA maintains a list of suspended and revoked operations online

Civil Penalties

- Willful violations of the regulations may result in **civil penalties**
- Civil penalties are fines of up to **\$11,000 per violation** and may be levied against both **certified and uncertified** operations



Monitoring Imported Organic Products



- The United States establishes and maintains **equivalency and recognition agreements** to facilitate organic trade.
- Equivalence arrangements with the **European Union** and **Canada** allow organic operations certified to the USDA organic or those foreign organic standards to be labeled and sold as organic in both areas.
- The USDA monitors organic certification activities around the world through assessments of international certifying agents and foreign government organic programs.
- Requirements may vary , but all products certified as “organic” have been produced using **clearly defined organic production methods**.



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How Does the USDA Support Organic?



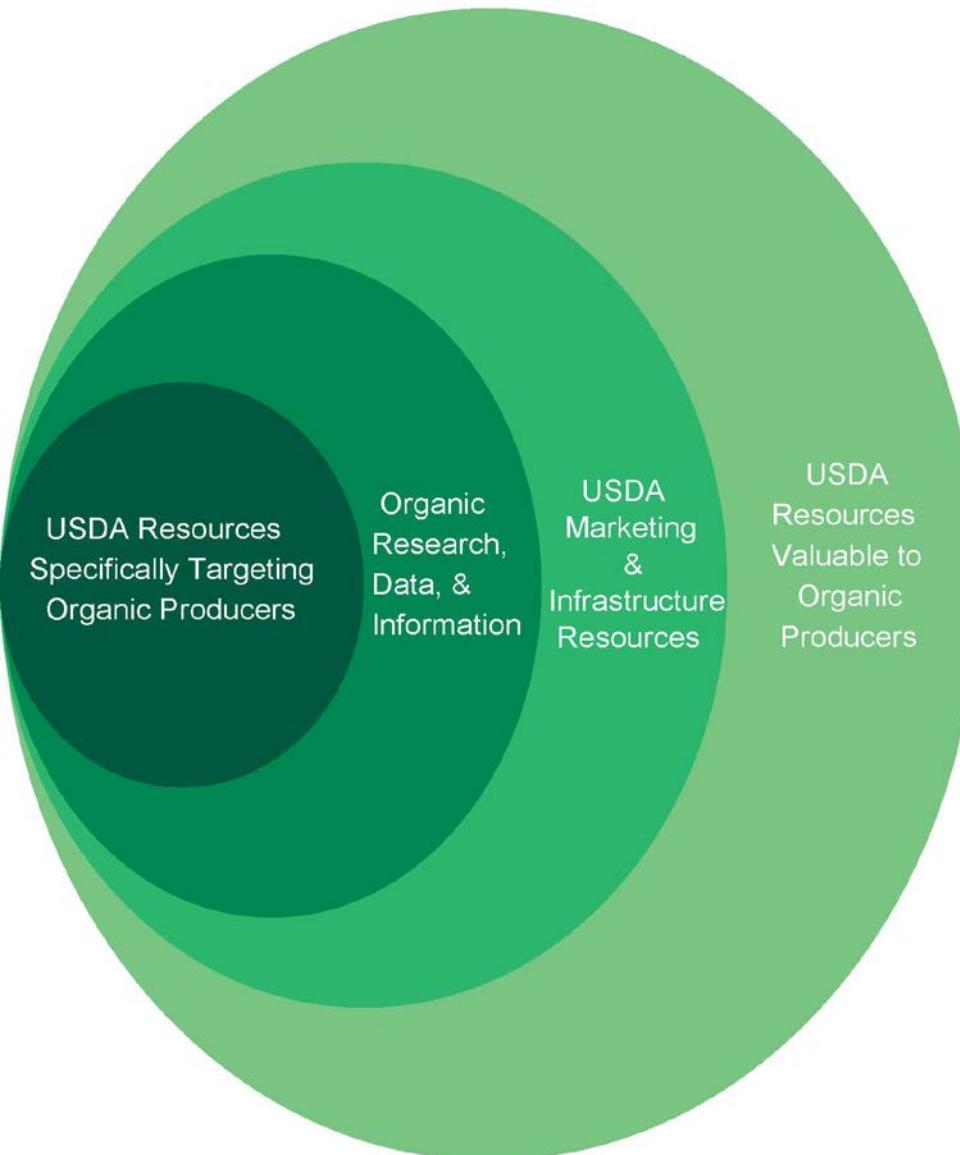
- Many USDA programs support organic producers and handlers
- Some are specifically **targeted** to organic agriculture
- Others are not targeted to organic agriculture, but **all USDA programs are open to organic producers and handlers**

The next section describes specific programs and services that may benefit organic producers and handlers. *



* As of June 2012.

How Does the USDA Support Organic?



The following USDA resources are grouped in categories that correspond with the **USDA Organic Resource Guide**

What USDA Programs Directly Support Organic Producers?

USDA Resources
Specifically Targeting
Organic Producers

- The NOP's [**Organic Cost Share Program**](#) can help reimburse eligible producers and handlers for up to 75% of the cost of organic certification (up to \$750).
- NRCS programs such as the [**Environmental Quality Incentives Program Organic Initiative**](#), the [**Conservation Stewardship Program**](#), and [**Agricultural Management Assistance Program**](#) provide technical and financial assistance for producers to assist in implementing conservation practices, some of which can help meet organic certification requirements.
- Farm Service Agency programs such as the [**Conservation Loan Program**](#) and the [**Transition Incentives Program**](#) give priority to those planning to use organic or sustainable farming practices.
- The Risk Management Agency (RMA) offers Organic [**Federal Crop Insurance**](#) for all crops grown under the organic farming practice, provided they meet standard terms and conditions. RMA publishes separate [**organic prices**](#) for corn, cotton, processing tomatoes, soybeans and avocados, but for all other crops, the prices are the same as those grown using conventional means.
- USDA's [**Market News**](#) (AMS) reports organic prices and movements at shipping points, wholesale terminals, and retail outlets for organic fruits & vegetables, dairy, grain & feedstuffs, and poultry & eggs.

Where Can I Find Information on Organic Agriculture?

- USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) and Economic Research Service (ERS) collect and analyze data on organic production and management.
- USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) supports organic agricultural research around the country, particularly through its Natural Resources and Sustainable Agricultural Systems programs. Search ARS's website to learn more about such projects and the scientists doing them.
- USDA's National Agricultural Library is home to the Alternative Farming Systems Information Center, which provides information on many aspects of organic agriculture.
- The eOrganic online community of scientists and practitioners offers a wealth of information on organic agriculture, including articles, webinars, videos, and "Ask the Expert."

Where Can I Find Funding for Organic Research and Education?

Organic
Research,
Data, &
Information

USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) supports the following competitive grants:

- The Organic Agricultural Research and Extension Initiative and Organic Transitions Program fund research, extension, and education activities of organizations working on critical organic agriculture issues.
- Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education (SARE) grants are managed by regional councils to encourage site-specific experimentation that pushes the boundaries of current thinking. Many have focused primarily on organic production or marketing in the past. Unlike other grants, producers are among those eligible.
- Beginning Farmer Rancher Development Program funds organizations who train, educate, and provide technical assistance to beginning farmers.

How Can I Fund Organic Marketing & Infrastructure?

- Visit a nearby USDA [Rural Development \(RD\)](#) office for information on [grants](#) and [loans](#) such as:
 - **Value-Added Producer Grants** for planning activities or working capital to market value-added agricultural products.
 - **Business & Industry Guaranteed Loans** to improve, develop, or finance business, industry, and employment, and improve the economic and environmental climate in rural communities. This purpose is achieved by bolstering the existing private credit structure through the guarantee of quality loans.
- USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) offers:
 - **Farmers Market Promotion Grants** to organizations to improve and expand farmers' markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs, agri-tourism activities, and other producer-to-consumer market options.
 - **Specialty Crop Block Grants** to State Departments of Agriculture, who then grant funds to others to enhance the competitiveness of fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops in their state.
- USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) helps U.S. producers (including organic), exporters, private companies, and other trade organizations finance promotional activities for U.S. agricultural products through the [Market Access Program](#).

What Other USDA Resources Should Organic Producers Know About?



- Visit a nearby USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) office for the following:
 - **Farm loans and loan guarantees** for purchases related to farm operation or ownership.
 - **Disaster assistance programs** help producers recover from losses.
 - **Conservation Programs** help landowners protect eligible fragile croplands and grazing lands using rental contracts, cost-share and incentive payments, or conservation easements.
- Visit a nearby USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office for a wide range of conservation programs that can help producers reduce soil erosion and build soil quality, plant cover crops and field borders, increase pollinator & wildlife habitat, mulching and more!
- USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):
 - Regulates meat, poultry, and egg products processing and product labeling, including the use of the organic label.
 - Runs the **Small Plant Help Desk**, where small meat, poultry, and egg product establishments can ask questions about agency regulations and obtain information about other food safety resources: InfoSource@fsis.usda.gov or 1-877-FSISHelp (1-877-374-7435). The Small Plant Help Desk is staffed Monday through Friday, 8 am to 4 pm, ET.
- USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is responsible for preventing the introduction and spread of agricultural pests. APHIS strives to use a variety of methods, including those that can be used without impacting the status of organic products.

Learn More: Internal Resources for USDA Employees



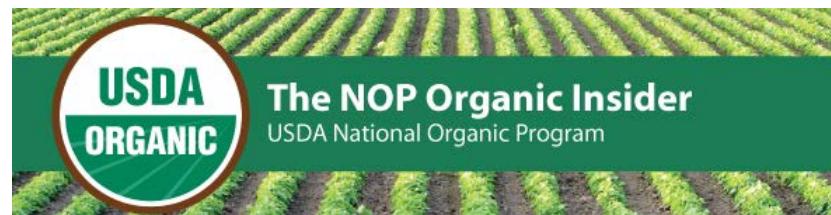
- **AgLearn Organic Training** <https://aglearn.usda.gov>
 - **Organic 101** provides an introductory look at the meaning of the term organic, organic certification, and USDA resources.
- **USDA Connect** <https://connections.usda.gov/communities/community/organic>
 - For USDA employees only. Organic Community Page contains answers to FAQs, links to helpful resources, and discussion boards

Learn More:

USDA Organic Resources For the Public



- **USDA Organic Resource Guide**
 - Provides information on USDA programs available to organic producers and handlers
 - » www.ams.usda.gov/OrganicInfo
- **National Organic Program Website**
 - Outreach materials and public information about organic regulations
 - National List of Approved Substances and Petitioned Substances
 - List of certifying agents and certified operations
 - » www.ams.usda.gov/nop
- **Alternative Farming Systems Information Center** at the National Agricultural Library
 - Provides resources about sustainable food systems and practices
 - » afsic.nal.usda.gov/organic-production
- **The NOP Organic Insider**
 - NOP's regular e-mail service with updates and news on organic agriculture
 - » <http://bit.ly/NOPOrganicInsider>



Beyond USDA: Additional Resources



- **National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (ATTRA-NCAT):** an online and phone resource, offering guidance in preparing for certification and in production methods for a range of organic crops and livestock
attra.ncat.org/organic.html
- **eOrganic:** an extension online community dedicated to organic production
eorganic.info



Support for Organic Across USDA



“Organic agriculture is an important part of what we do at USDA. Every part of USDA has some responsibility for supporting organic farmers and ranchers. Thank you for taking the opportunity to learn this information, and for putting it to good use.”

- Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan