



Organic Transitioning

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How to Transition Your Farm, Ranch or Business to Organic

Resources for anyone interested in becoming USDA certified organic

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What is organic?

- [Organic production and handling](#) respond to site-specific conditions by integrating cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity.
- Organic is a labeling term for food or other agricultural products that have been produced according to the [USDA organic standards](#).

- Producers and handlers must meet these standards to use the word “organic” or the [USDA organic seal](#) on food, feed, or fiber.
- The **USDA National Organic Program (NOP)** maintains and enforces the organic standards and accredits [organic certifying agents](#). These certifiers inspect organic farms and certify individual farms and businesses.

>> [Learn more about organic practices](#)

Who is eligible for organic certification?

- Any person or business who produces or handles agricultural products
- Just about any agricultural product can be certified organic: crops, livestock, livestock products, processed products, and wild crops.
- Farms and businesses can produce and handle exclusively organic products, or both organic and non-organic products
- Any farm, ranch, or business in the United States can apply for organic certification. Farms and businesses outside of the United States may also be eligible for USDA organic certification.

>> [Learn if organic certification is an option for you](#)

How do I get started?

Implement Organic Practices

Before you can use land to raise organic products, you must stop applying inputs like fertilizers and pesticides that are [prohibited in organic production and handling](#).

- To complete your transition to organic, your farm or ranch cannot have used any of these substances in the last three years.
- Some lands, such as fallow or pasture lands, may be certified more quickly if you can show that at least three years have passed since prohibited substances were last used on the land.

NOP has developed detailed educational guides covering organic practices, certification, and regulations for each type of organic producer:

- [Guide for Organic Crop Producers \(pdf\)](#).

- [Guide for Organic Livestock Producers \(pdf\)](#).
- [Guide for Organic Processors \(pdf\)](#).

Explore Financial and Technical Assistance for Conservation

Several programs are available through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS):

- [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\) Organic Initiative](#) — for planning and implementing conservation practices that address natural resource concerns and for opportunities to improve soil, water, plant, animal, air and related resources on agricultural land
- [Conservation Stewardship Program \(CSP\)](#) — for maintaining and improving existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resource concerns
- [Agricultural Management Assistance Program \(AMA\)](#) — for managing risk and solving natural resource issues through conservation

>> [Learn more about the benefits of transitioning to organic](#)

What are the steps to organic certification?

Once you've completed the transition process, there are a few steps to organic certification (see these steps in action in [The Road to Certification](#) interactive video):

1) Choose a USDA-Accredited Certifying Agent and Apply for Organic Certification

Certifying agents, or certifiers, are authorized by the USDA to certify your farm or business as organic. The first step to certification is to [choose a certifying agent](#) that fits your needs.

Your certifier will provide an application packet and fee schedule. You will also need to write an [Organic System Plan \(OSP\)](#), which describes how your farming and processing practices meet organic standards. Transitioning producers may wish to use the publicly available [Transitional Production Plan \(TPP\) - Crops \(pdf\)](#) and [Transitional Production Plan \(TPP\) - Livestock \(pdf\)](#) to begin documenting this information. The TPPs are intended to help transitioning farmers learn how to document their organic practices, in preparation for the OSP process, which is required when they apply for certification.

2) Application Review

Your certifier will review your application. If your application is complete and your OSP meets the organic standards, the agent will schedule an inspection.

3) On-Site Inspection

A representative of your certifier, called an organic inspector, will visit your farm, ranch, or business to assess your organic practices and assess whether they match your OSP ([watch a video about inspections](#)).

4) Application Review

Your certifier will review the inspection report and determine your compliance with the organic standards. You may need to make some changes if your certifier finds you do not fully meet the requirements.

5) Certification Decision

If you are fully compliant with the regulations, your certifier will issue you an organic certificate and you can begin [marketing your products as organic](#).

Other important things to remember:

1. **How long does it take to get certified?** The entire certification process varies. It typically takes around 6 months but can take longer depending on the timing of your application and the growing season.
2. **How much does it cost to get certified?** Organic certification costs vary and are often on a sliding scale, based on the size of the operation. Total fees range from a few hundred for small, simple operations to several thousand dollars for larger, more complex operations. Financial assistance is available through the [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#) .
3. **How often will I be inspected?** Your farm, ranch, or business will be inspected each year to make sure you continue to comply with the organic standards. You may also receive an unannounced inspection at any time.
4. **What if I make changes to my operation?** Changes to how you manage your farm or business must be reflected in an updated OSP and approved by your certifier.

>> [Learn more about organic certification](#)

What kinds of support and resources are available to me?

There are a variety of sources of technical assistance, educational resources, and financial assistance available to support organic producers.

- [Transition to Organic Partnership Program](#)
- [Transitional Production Plan \(TPP\) - Crops \(pdf\)](#)
- [Transitional Production Plan \(TPP\) – Livestock \(pdf\)](#)
- [Sound and Sensible](#) (additional resources on becoming certified organic)
- [USDA Support for Farms and Businesses](#) (infographic)
- [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#)
- [NRCS Technical Assistance and Conservation Planning](#)
- [USDA Organic Training and Transition Assistance](#)
- [New Farmers](#)
- [Steps to Certification, Recordkeeping, and Preventative Practices](#)

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