



# OEFFA Organic Certification Fact Sheet

www.oeffa.org • 41 Crosswell Road, Columbus, OH 43214 • (614) 262-2022 • organic@oeffa.org

## Preparing for an Inspection

**I**nspections can be involved and require time away from your regular operation. However, they are a necessary part of the organic certification process. There is no reason for an inspection to be stressful. The inspector's job is to confirm what the producer or processor submits to the office in their Organic System Plan and to look for compliance with the NOP rules. Having a good recordkeeping system in place goes a long way toward minimizing the time required to prepare for an inspection. In the end, no one should expect perfection and the inspector may find areas of noncompliance or items that need improvement. This fact sheet should help familiarize new applicants and certified operations alike with the inspection process and how to make it easier for everyone involved.

### Overview of the Inspection Process

The certification office sends client files with complete OSPs to inspectors based on a number of factors including types of products requested for certification, nature of the operation, geographic location, and previous inspections. Although the timing of your inspection may be affected by these factors, considering them allows us to control our costs and thus to keep fees to clients low and avoid the need to bill inspection costs separately (except in rare circumstances).

The initial inspection must occur before harvest to verify your OSP but subsequent inspections may occur before, during, or after harvest in order to observe relevant activity on the farm each year.

An inspector will contact you to schedule an on-site inspection of your operation at a time that is convenient for both you and the inspector. The operator must make an effort to schedule this inspection in a timely manner; you may cancel a scheduled inspection appointment only for emergency situations. The person responsible for the management of the operation must be present for the entire inspection.

During the inspection, the inspector will survey the operation, review your records and recordkeeping practices, ask for documentation to verify compliance with the rule, and complete a report verifying the information in the OSP you submitted. This report is submitted to the office and, with your OSP, is the basis for the certification decision you receive each year.

### The Inspection in a Nutshell

The inspector is there to verify the information submitted in your OSP. This generally entails a tour of the applicable parts of your operation requested for certification, including fields, barns, storage and processing facilities, and equipment. The inspector will also carefully analyze your records and recordkeeping system for compliance with the rule.

### About Inspectors

Organic inspectors are independent contractors. They operate as their own business and are not employees of OEFFA. They may do inspections for many different certification agencies in a season. That said, OEFFA maintains a close relationship with the inspectors we send to our clients. Not only are they our eyes and ears in the field, they also often represent OEFFA to our clients.

It is important to remember that inspectors are thoroughly trained in the NOP rules and their application to the types of operations they inspect. Many also have direct personal experience in production and/or processing. Inspectors do not come to your operation to find things you are doing wrong; they are looking for compliance with the rule. Where they do find things that are not compliant, they must report them to the certification office so that we can adequately assess the status of the operation and let our clients know where they need to make changes.

The inspector is only at your operation to report back to the certification office. They do not make any certification decisions. Inspectors also cannot act as a consultant to help operations comply with NOP, but s/he may share general knowledge and assist you in finding resources that will help you on your way.



## **Basic Steps to Prepare for Your Inspection**

Most of the preparation needed for an organic inspection can and should be done as you go. Keeping track of the inputs, production, storage, and sales on paper and filing these documents accordingly as you go will greatly reduce the amount of time needed to prepare for an inspection and the time and stress involved in the inspection itself. That said, it is a good idea to review and organize the following items once you have scheduled the inspection as to be fully-prepared when the time comes. You may also want to take notes during the inspection to refer to later. You will also receive a copy of the inspection report with your certification decision letter and certificate.

- Set aside time for the inspection. Be sure that you do not have commitments that will interfere with the inspection (or the other way around).
- Re-review the NOP rules. Make sure you have your copy on-hand and review the parts that are applicable to your operation. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact the office.
- Review your OSP and make updates. Since some time has elapsed since you submitted your paperwork to the office, be sure to update the OSP and have copies of updated pages ready for the inspector.
- Review all communications from OEFFA since your last inspection. Make sure that you have resolved all minor noncompliances issued with the previous year's certificate and that any information we have indicated that you should have for the inspector is prepared.
- Note any changes to your operations since last inspection. If you have new land, animals, a new crop or building, the inspector will likely ask questions about these items since they have not been inspected previously.
- Review records since last the inspection and organize them so that you can find individual items easily upon request.
- Make sure that your records allow you to trace an organic product all the way through your system; seed to sale, birth to sale, and/or inputs to final product.
- Secure a comfortable space for you and the inspector to review records that will not disturb the rest of your operation and/or family.



## **Crop Inspection Records Checklist**

- Updated OSP.
- Current field history, including all crops planted and acreages.
- Records of all inputs including seeds (organic or untreated and non-GMO), fertilizers/soil amendments, and pest management.
- Field activity logs including planting, input dates and rates, cultivation, pest management, harvest, etc.
- Organic integrity including neighboring land use, buffers, monitoring, equipment cleaning, and storage.
- Sales.
- Other audit trail documents, if applicable.

## **Livestock Inspection Records Checklist**

- Updated OSP.
- Detailed list of animals requested for certification.
- Source of livestock.
- Feed, water, and supplements/additives.
- Housing.
- Manure.
- Product handling (milk and/or eggs), if applicable.
- Slaughter/processing, if applicable.
- Healthcare including preventative management practices and inputs.
- Drugs and treatments of illness(es).
- Pest management.
- Animal identification.
- Sales.

## **Handling Inspection Records Checklist**

- Updated OSP.
- Product profiles and labels.
- Documentation of all inputs.
- Facility maps.
- Production flow charts.
- Audit control including the lot identification system, etc.
- Quality assurance.
- Cleaning and sanitation.
- Packaging.
- Pest management.
- Waste management.
- Maintenance of organic integrity (extra care and documentation will be needed for split operations).
- Storage.
- Sales.
- Transportation.

## **Resources**

Experience may be the best resource you can have to know what to expect at your organic inspection. Talk to other certified growers in your area before your first inspection, if possible.

ATTRA has created a publication called *Preparing for an Organic Inspection: Steps and Checklists*, which was very helpful in preparing this document. It is available at [http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/organic\\_inspection.html](http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/organic_inspection.html) or by calling (800) 346-9140.