



DO I NEED TO BE CERTIFIED?

HANDLER FACT SHEET

Operations that produce or handle organic products usually need to be certified under the National Organic Program. To “handle” broadly means to sell, process, or package agricultural products. Many operations that were previously exempt or excluded from certification **must become certified by March 19, 2024** in order to handle organic products. Organic products handled by a non-exempt operation that is not certified after this date lose their organic status.

- **HANDLE.** *To sell, process, or package agricultural products, including but not limited to trading, facilitating sale or trade on behalf of a seller or oneself, importing to the United States, exporting for sale in the United States, combining, aggregating, culling, conditioning, treating, packing, containerizing, repackaging, labeling, storing, receiving, or loading. [NOP §205.2]*

The definition of handle includes examples of handling activities that have the potential to affect organic integrity. Operations that conduct these, or similar, activities must be certified (unless exempt per §205.101(b-h)). **The absence of a specific term in the definition of handle does not mean the activity is not handling or that an operation conducting this activity does not need certification.**

What follows is a flow chart to help you determine whether your operation needs to be certified organic. Use this flow chart for all aspects of your business. Even if some portions of your business are exempt from certification, others may require it. “Split” operations that handle both organic and non-organic products must be certified for the organic activities. Your buyer may also request that you certify to help them meet their own supply chain traceability requirements. Contract handlers, who provide services to certified operations, may be required to certify. If the contract handler is exempt under the regulation, the handler must

be described in the Organic System Plan (OSP) of a certified operation. Products produced or processed by operations exempt under §205.101(a)(c)(d) cannot be used or represented as organic in products processed by other operations.

Exempt operations must still follow all organic rules, including keeping records to show compliance with organic regulations. Records must “demonstrate that agricultural products identified as organic were organically produced and handled; and verify quantities of organic agricultural products received and shipped or sold” [§205.101(i)]. Records must be kept for at least three years. If the exempt operation handles products that will be used by another organic operation, the exempt operation is responsible for providing records to their buyer to show compliance.

NEXT STEPS:

- Follow the flow charts to see if your operation needs to be certified. If you aren’t sure or have questions, please contact OEFFA.
- Review all parts of the National Organic Standards that apply to your operation.
- Apply for certification with a certification agency. OEFFA offers a streamlined Organic System Plan (OSP) for Non-Processing Handlers as well as an OSP for Handlers. OEFFA’s application materials can be requested by emailing organic@oeffa.org or found on our website: <https://certification.oeffa.org/>.
- The certifier will review your OSP application, conduct an initial inspection, and issue an organic certificate if your operation complies with certification requirements. This process usually takes a few months, so apply by fall 2023 to ensure you are certified before March 2024.

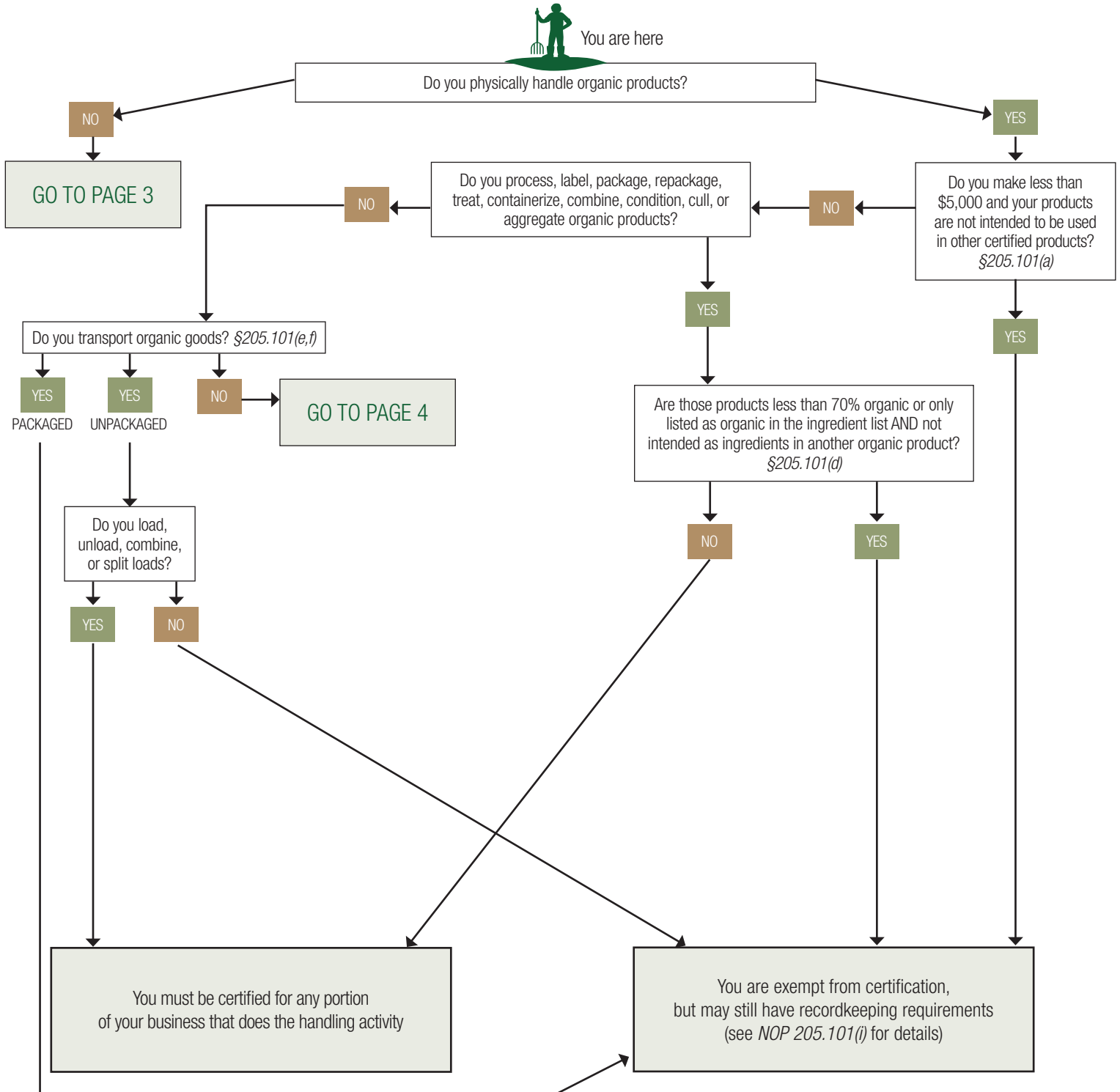




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Use this flow chart for all aspects of your business. Uncertified portions of your operation may now need to be certified under new NOP regulations.





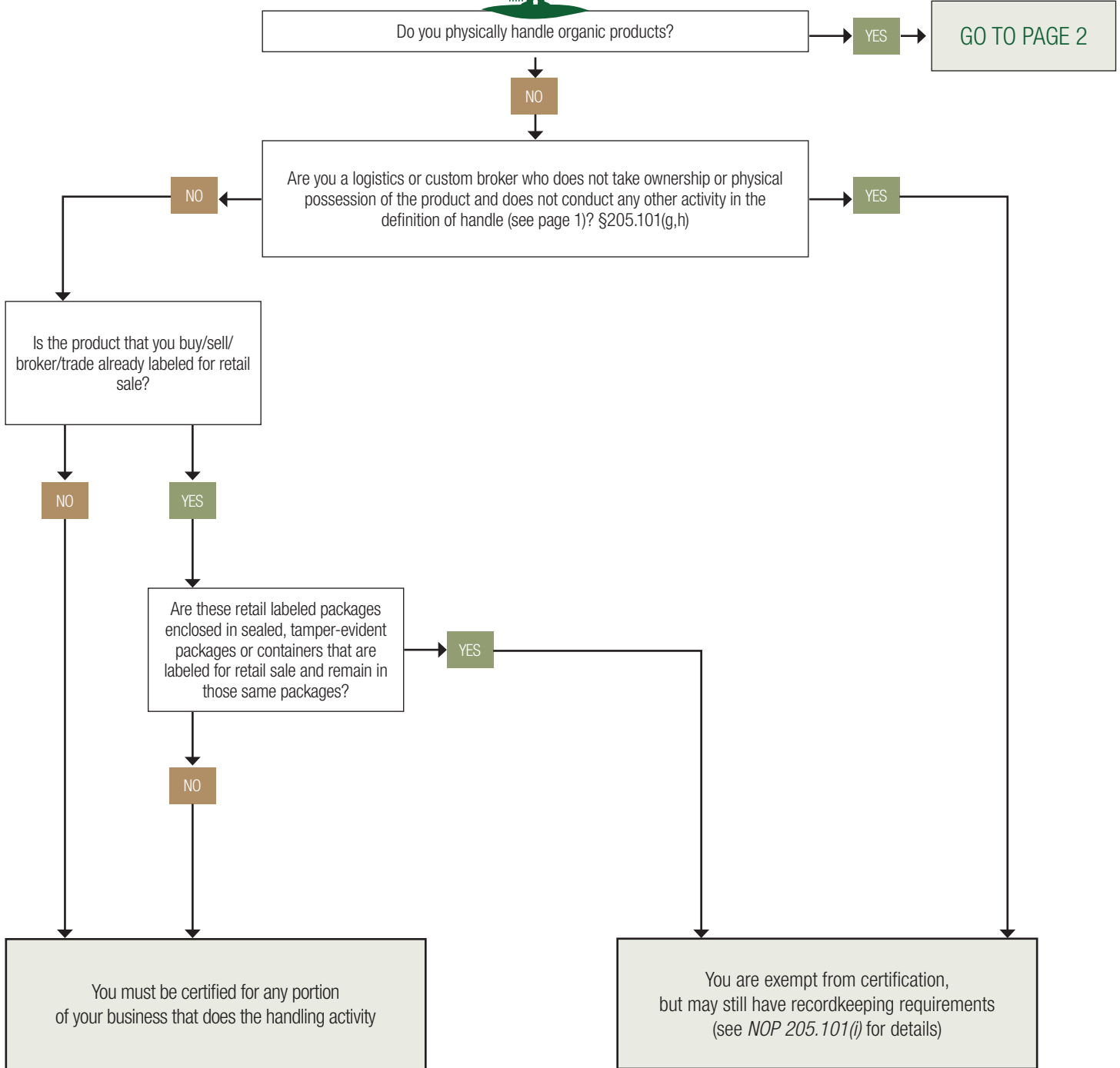
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For Operations or portions of operations that do not physically handle organic products



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OHIO ECOLOGICAL
FOOD AND FARM
ASSOCIATION





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