



OHIO ECOLOGICAL FOOD AND FARM ASSOCIATION

OEFFA CERTIFICATION

WINTER 2024

BULLETIN

GREETINGS FROM OEFFA CERTIFICATION!

We're sending warm wishes to you and yours for a happy, healthy, and abundant new year!

2024 DEADLINES

PRODUCERS

- **Producers Renewing Certification** – The standard deadline for renewing producers is **April 15th**. An early bird discount is available for those that apply or renew by **March 15th**. The final renewal deadline is **June 15th**. Operations remain in compliance until this anniversary date, though additional fees apply after the standard deadline of April 15th.
- **New Producers Requesting Certification** – The deadline for new producer applicants is **April 15th**. Exceptions to this deadline may be made for producers operating outside of the typical growing season or those that are currently certified and switching to OEFFA.

HANDLERS

- **Handlers Renewing Certification** – Handlers who receive renewal paperwork in December/January must renew by **March 31st** and those that receive renewal notices in June must renew by **September 1st** to remain in compliance.
- **New Handlers Requesting Certification** – New handlers may be accepted year-round. Contact us to talk about your operation if you are interested in applying!

REFERRAL DISCOUNT

We are introducing a referral discount starting in 2024!

If you are renewing your certification with OEFFA and refer a new operation to us, you will receive **\$100 off** of your 2024 certification fees, after the new operation applies and submits payment.

If you are new to OEFFA and are referred by an OEFFA-certified farm or handler, you also receive a **\$100 discount**. Include the name of the person who referred you to OEFFA on your fee sheet for the discount to be applied.

STRENGTHENING ORGANIC ENFORCEMENT

The compliance date for Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) is just around the corner!

Operations and certifiers must fully comply with the rule by March 19, 2024.

The focus of SOE is upholding integrity throughout the organic industry and building consumer trust in the organic label. Read full text of the rule, including explanation and examples from NOP, online at <https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/strengthening-organic-enforcement>. Visit OEFFA's webpage on SOE (<https://certification.oeffa.org/soe/>) for more information on how SOE changes may impact your operation. We also encourage you to review our June 2023 Bulletin, which covers some of the major changes for organic operations and certifiers, as well as our

"Making Sense of the NOP" articles in the OEFFA newsletters for 2023.

You will find updates to OEFFA's policies and forms in your application packet to help ensure compliance with the new standards. There is a new Organic System Plan section, titled Fraud Prevention Plan, which will be required for all certified operations to describe how you ensure organic integrity in the products you purchase and the suppliers that you work with.

If you have questions about SOE, you can always contact us at 614-262-2022 or organic@oeffa.org. We will also have a workshop session at OEFFA's Annual Conference in February focused on SOE. Please come to learn more about this important update to organic standards and bring your questions!

ORGANIC LIVESTOCK & POULTRY STANDARDS

The USDA has finalized and published the Organic Livestock & Poultry Standards (OLPS)! This is a major update to animal welfare rules that has been in the works for over a decade. This rule adds new requirements for livestock handling and transport, slaughter, and poultry living conditions and expands existing requirements for livestock care and non-avian living conditions.

A previous version was finalized before being withdrawn by USDA in 2017, and OEFFA updated many policies based on it, so we are already aligned with many of the provisions.

If you are currently certified for livestock or applying for livestock certification, you will see an additional OLPS Fact Sheet in your application packet. We have also made updates to policies and forms, as needed.

Most operations will need to comply by **January 2, 2025** with some exceptions that give 5 years for certain layer and broiler operations to comply with stocking densities and poultry house exit area requirements. If you have questions about OLPS after reviewing the fact sheet, please contact us at 614-262-2022 or organic@oeffa.org.

RENEWAL FORM IMPROVEMENTS

For those of you who are renewing your certification with OEFFA, we've made some exciting updates to our forms. We're continuing to find ways to simplify and streamline your renewal process, and we've taken your feedback into consideration. This year, most renewing operations have only one packet to review, fill out, and sign. There are supplemental forms to fill out if you are adding something new. Please pay close attention to the instruction cover sheets to guide you through the changes. We realize that it still takes time to adjust to any changes even if they are meant to save time and energy, so don't hesitate to give us a call if you have questions or need any help!

CERTIFICATION FEE CHANGES FOR PRODUCERS AND HANDLERS

OEFFA has continued to closely evaluate our certification fees to ensure that we are doing all that we can to keep organic certification accessible to operations of all sizes while covering our operating costs. We heard from many OEFFA producers in the fall of 2022, that you would prefer we maintain our flat certification fee structure, which we have kept for 2024. In an effort to keep certification affordable for smaller producers, we will not be increasing our producer flat fee for 2024. However, we have had to identify certain services or areas of our work that take more time and are therefore more costly services to provide. As you review the 2024 certification fee sheets and fee schedule, you will see that some fees have increased, such as the livestock fee, and we have had to introduce some new fees, such as a producer new land fee and handler new/additional facility location fee.

We are committed to continuing to evaluate ways we can increase our efficiencies, decrease expenses, and diversify revenue streams to maintain affordable and accessible organic certification. Just as OEFFA works to support farmers in achieving environmental and financial sustainability, we must ensure financial sustainability for our certification program so that we can retain qualified and knowledgeable staff and offer excellent and timely services.

Thank you to the producers that were able to contribute more than their required fees for 2023! These additional contributions help us keep fee increases as low as possible. Your generosity in supporting other organic growers is deeply appreciated.

OEFFA IS SEEKING MENTORS FOR TRANSITION TO ORGANIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

In August of 2022, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the Organic Transition Initiative (OTI). With 300 million dollars allocated to this project, many agencies in the USDA have rolled out programs under OTI. One of these programs you may have heard mentioned is TOPP, or Transition to Organic Partnership Program. The goal of this program is to increase the number of acres in organic production and increase the number of historically underserved producers participating in organic certification. OEFFA is a proud partner in Midwest TOPP, a regional network that provides mentorship, technical assistance, and wrap-around support for transitioning and existing producers.

Do you enjoy sharing your knowledge of organic practices and experience in the organic market? OEFFA's Education program would love to compensate you for that! Opportunities are available for experienced producers with at least 3 years of organic certification in good standing (retired producers welcome too) to help mentor new and transitioning farmers on the ins and outs of organic certification. Mentorship agreements will run for at least a year with the opportunity to reapply, a stipend of \$3,000 per year (more for mentors with more than one mentee or who are fluent in languages other than English) along with professional development related to successful mentoring are included. Please contact our Sustainable Ag Educator, Johnnie Speicher at johnnie@oeffa.org or (614) 947-1647 if you are interested in this opportunity.

OEFFA'S 45TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE
CULTIVATING CARE

February 15–17, 2024 in Newark, Ohio
conference.oeffa.org

This year's 45th annual OEFFA conference, *Cultivating Care*, will bring together hundreds of farm and food advocates for three days in February to connect, learn, and share through:

- **50+ workshops** on everything from pest management to walk-behind tractors
- **Keynote panel** of farmers answering “What is Your Favorite Mistake?” and keynote session with agrarian activist Jim Embry
- **Full-day Food and Farm School classes** on Organic System Plans, wholesale markets, regenerative agriculture, and more
- **A big exhibit hall** with dozens of businesses, nonprofits, services, and products, plus flash demonstrations
- **Easy access to recordings** of workshops and keynotes



- Happy hours, farmers' market fair, raffles, a film screening, food demonstrations, community conversations, an open mic night, and more!

Join us at Ohio's largest sustainable agriculture conference to learn and grow with a community of food and farm advocates! Learn more and register at conference.oeffa.org.



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