

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How long will it take to get my operation certified?

The certification process for new applicants can take 8–12 weeks from the date OTCO receives the certification application and payment. There are several variables that can affect this. Factors that can contribute to time delays include: farm location, completeness of organic plan, and the ability to demonstrate compliance at the time of inspection.

What is Oregon Tilth's involvement with the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) standard?

Oregon Tilth is one of the USDA NOP accredited certifiers. We certify to the standard of the USDA, following their guidelines as our only standard for agricultural products in the USA. The USDA does not actually have any direct interaction with you, the producer, so as an accredited certifier, we authorize people to use the USDA label after they have undergone the certification process outlined in this brochure.



Why should I certify my farm USDA Organic?

There are many reasons why you should consider certifying your farm USDA Organic. The USDA National Organic Standard seal assures consumers that your farm procedures are authentically organic and meet the stringent standards set forth by the USDA. To this end, it makes the product that comes from your farm more marketable to the consumer. Also, the measures you take to implement organic agricultural practices should be recognized, especially as our society becomes increasingly aware of the value of buying organic.

Do I have to be an Oregon resident farmer to be OTCO certified?

No. Over the years, Oregon Tilth has made its certification process available to people in many states and countries.

Is an OTCO organic certification specific to one industry, aspect of agriculture, or product?

No. At Oregon Tilth, we recognize the increasing reach and impact of organic business. We strive to provide for that growth by offering certification services that include, but are not limited to:

- 🌱 Commercial producers of organic crops and livestock
- 🌱 Processors of organic foods, feed, and fiber
- 🌱 Handlers of organic products such as packers, brokers, distributors, and wholesalers
- 🌱 Marketers of processed or co-packed organic products
- 🌱 Restaurants and retailers specializing in organic fare

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The OTCO Procedures Manual, Fee Schedule, and the entire USDA National Organic Standards are available for free—download from the Oregon Tilth website, www.tilth.org. Additional information can be viewed on the USDA National Organic Program website, www.ams.usda.gov/nop.

Our dedicated and knowledgeable Oregon Tilth staff is available to answer all of your questions and help make your farm-certification process a success. Call us Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. PST, 503.378.0690.

Farms

ORGANIC CERTIFICATION PROCESS



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ORGANIC CERTIFICATION

ENDORSE YOUR ORGANIC PRACTICE. VALIDATE YOUR ORGANIC PRODUCT.

At Oregon Tilth, we've been working to promote and support organic farmers, gardeners, producers, and consumers since the early seventies and have since played an integral role in helping create the current USDA Organic Standards. In 1982, we began offering organic certification to help ensure product authenticity and quality, and support our local organic advocates in their efforts to expand sustainable agriculture.

Today, the Oregon Tilth Certified Organic (OTCO) program is an internationally recognized symbol of organic integrity. The organic-certification process must cover not only the end product, but also every step of the process from harvest to market. In order

to ensure quality throughout a product's journey to the consumer, OTCO provides a system that combines strict production standards, on-site inspections, and legally binding contracts to protect the producers and buyers of organic products.

Our farm-certification team has extensive experience and expertise in crop production—ensuring excellent customer service. The OTCO program complements Oregon Tilth's research, education, and advocacy programs to further promote and support organic food systems. We invite you to learn more about OTCO, and we commend your efforts to further the organic community.

THE CERTIFICATION PROCESS

If you've already taken the initiative to make your farming practice organic, then we want the certification process to be easy, straightforward, friendly, and supportive for you. The steps below outline the OTCO-certification process.

1 First, you should note that your **APPLICATION** for certification doubles as your Organic Farm Plan, the foundation of organic certification. The Farm Plan will include a map of your property, describe your record keeping, field and crop locations, pest and disease management practices, and the methods you use to prevent contamination.

A trained organic **INSPECTOR**, familiar with your type of operation, will contact you to schedule your annual inspection visit. The inspector will examine each component of the farm to verify your Plan is an accurate description of organic-standards compliance and will summarize his or her findings during an exit interview. Inspections typically last 3–5 hours, depending on the complexity of the operation.

OTCO conducts a **REVIEW** of your application and the inspector's report to evaluate compliance with the organic standards. A summary is presented to the Application Review Committee that makes the final certification decision. **3** OTCO will then notify you of the certification decision, which may note items that require clarification or correction prior to completing certification.

Your proposed **RESOLUTIONS** for any minor points of noncompliance will be promptly reviewed by OTCO. Once these are cleared, the operation is approved for organic certification. **4**

OTCO will send you a **CERTIFICATION** contract and your organic certificate. Your certificate is a legal document identifying your farm name and address, category of certification, and your certified organic products. Your organic certification remains in effect until surrendered, suspended, or revoked. **5**

THE BASIC REQUIREMENTS

§205.103 Record Keeping

Records kept must include: receipts for purchased inputs, applications and harvest records, label information for fertility and pest management inputs. Required records may also include information regarding transitional crop harvest, farmers' market take in/return logs, composting process records, equipment clean-out logs, and seed labels.

§205.202 Land Requirements

The organic farm parcel must be free of any prohibited substances, as listed in §205.105, for a period of 3 years preceding harvest of the crop. The parcel must have defined boundaries and buffer zones to prevent contamination from neighboring conventional practices.

§205.203 Soil Fertility and Crop Nutrient Management

Maintaining and improving physical, chemical, and biological condition of soil is necessary. The farm must also minimize soil erosion.

§205.204 Seeds and Planting Stock

Organically grown seeds, annual seedlings, and planting stock must be used if commercially available. Non-organic untreated seeds may be used if an equivalent organic variety is not available.

§205.206 Crop Pest, Weed, and Disease Management

The producer must use management practices to prevent crop pests, weeds, and diseases including crop rotation, nutrient management, sanitation, and other cultural practices.

§205.601 Synthetic Substances Allowed for Use in Organic Crop Production

A material listed in §205.601 or a non-synthetic compound (not listed in §205.602) may be used for organic crop production.

HOW MUCH WILL CERTIFICATION COST?

Fees for growers are based on gross income and are determined using fee schedule charts. These charts are available from our website or call the OTCO office for an estimate of your certification costs.

