

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: company 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 USDA Organic?

There are many reasons why you should consider certifying your handling, processing or distribution channel USDA Organic. The USDA National Organic Standard seal assures consumers that your 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 operation more marketable to the consumer or to companies requesting your produce product. Also, the measures you take to implement organic practices and support organic production should be recognized, especially as our society becomes increasingly aware of the value of buying organic.

Do I have to be an Oregon resident 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 certification process a success. Call us Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. PST, 503.378.0690.

Processors, Handlers & Distributors

ORGANIC CERTIFICATION PROCESS



OREGON TILTH

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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 processing certification team has extensive experience and expertise in food science, handling and distribution—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 processing and/or distribution 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 Handling Plan (OHP), the foundation of organic certification. The OHP will describe your record-keeping system, product formulations, process flow, pest-management practices, and the methods used to prevent contamination. It also includes a facility floor plan and your product labels.

A trained organic **INSPECTOR**, familiar with your type of operation, will contact you to schedule your first annual inspection visit. The inspector will examine each component of the facility 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. 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.

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



THE BASIC REQUIREMENTS

§205.103 Record Keeping

Records must fully disclose all activities and transactions in sufficient detail as to be readily understood and audited. Your records must provide a clear audit trail of incoming ingredients, production runs, product storage, and sales.

§205.271 Pest Management

Organic handlers must implement Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies, including preventive practices and regular monitoring. Measures must be taken to avoid contamination of organic products and packaging with any pest-control materials.

§205.272 Contamination and Commingling Avoidance

Operations handling organic and non-organic products in the same facilities must demonstrate their ability to maintain the organic product integrity. Management practices must be in place to secure critical control points and prevent contamination or commingling.

§205.301 Product Composition

Organic ingredients must be certified by a USDA-accredited certification agent to the USDA standards. Non-agricultural ingredients or processing aids are limited to those listed in the "National List" in the standards. Products may carry different label claims ("100% Organic," "Organic," and "Made with Organic ingredients") depending on the final product composition.

HOW MUCH WILL CERTIFICATION COST?

OTCO's certification fees are determined by the type of operation, the products produced, and/or services provided. Fees range from 0.0025% to 0.5% of gross sales of organic products and/or organic handling

services, plus inspection expenses. Complete information is available in the OTCO Fee Schedule or by request from the OTCO office.

