

Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)
and Organic Certification
Similarities & Differences
Group Activity

As you talk about this topic/theme, think about similarities and differences in both approaches and goals.

GROUP #1:

Topic/Theme: *History: From Origins to Present Day*

Historical origins:

How long ago did it begin? Initial geographic focus/scope?

Initial motivations or cause for efforts and work?

Initial customer base?

Early structure/organization: Decentralized or centralized? Grassroots or top-down? Unified or diverse approaches and services?

Present day overview:

Current geographic focus/scope?

Current motivations or cause for efforts and work?

Current customer base?

Current structure/organization: Decentralized or centralized? Grassroots or top-down? Unified or diverse approaches and services?

GROUP #2:

Topic/Theme: *Standards (present day)*

Why do we have standards?

Who/What initiated? Response to what need?

Basis for standards:

Process-based? Performance-based? Product-based? Science-based? Natural systems-based? Industry and/or consumer-based? Linear view of management practices? Holistic, systemic view of practices?

Standards setting and development:

Who is responsible? Government, private sector or combination of both? Where maintained? Regulation or copyrighted material? Process for proposing changes and influencing standards development?

Assessment framework:

Identification of concerns and mitigation strategies? Analytic tools and measurement protocols? Focus on management practices and/or inputs used? Flexibility to adapt to changing conditions? Record-keeping and maintenance requirements?

GROUP #3:

Topic/Theme: *Roles and Procedures (present day)*

Roles:

Farm – What is producer participation based on? Incentives for producer participation? Legal compliance? Financial benefits? Other benefits?

Service Delivery – Technical assistance and support offered? Consultation and recommendations made to producer regarding management system? Third-party verification of existing management system?

Process (Certification Conservation Planning):

One-step or multi-step process? Goes very quickly or takes some time? With whom from agency/organization does the producer interact (one person or multiple parties)? How many people within the agency/organization are involved in the process? Verbal-basis only or documentation & records involved? Hand-shake agreements or legally binding contracts? Process occurs only once, intermittently over time, or at defined intervals over time?