



Oregon Tilth Certification Manual

OTCO Certification Manual

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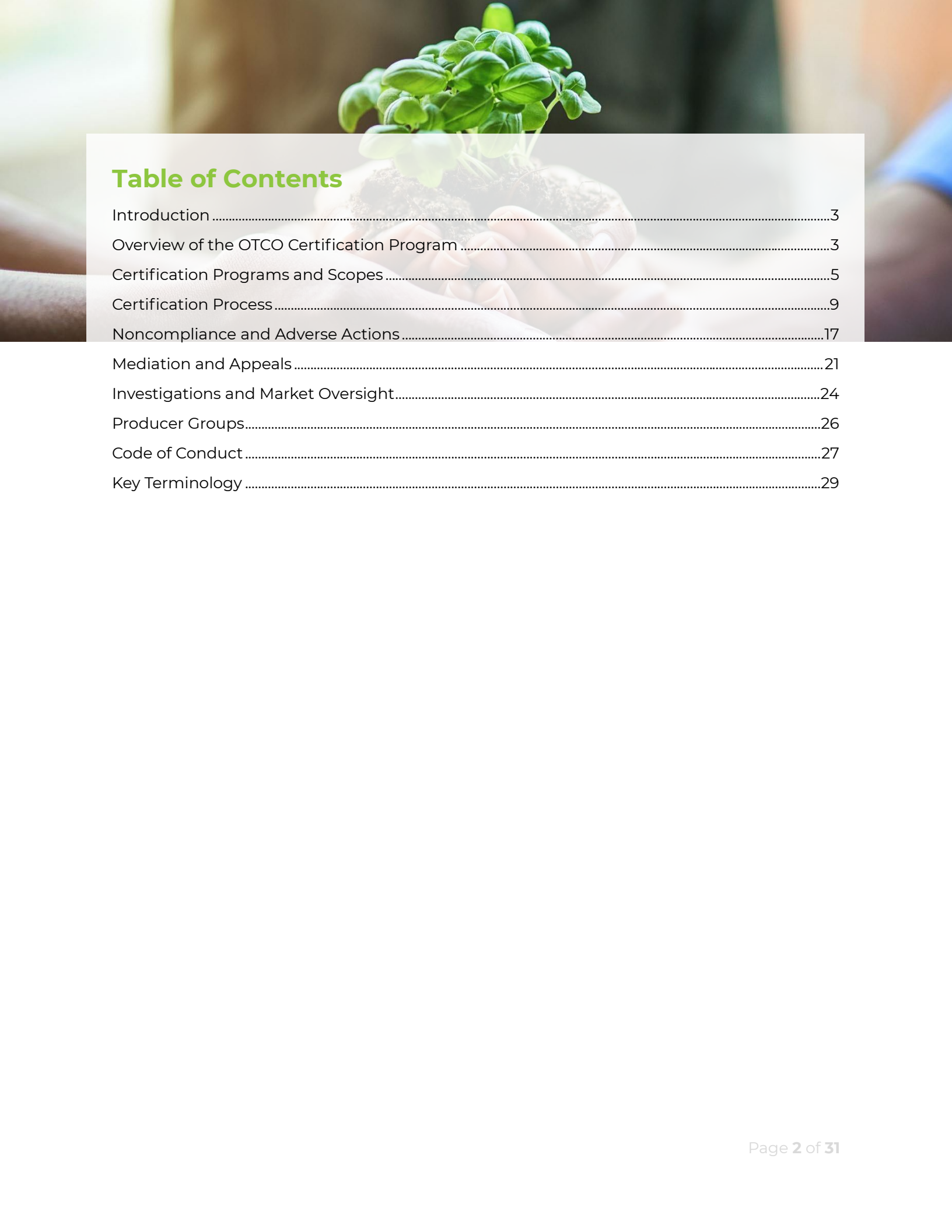


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Introduction

Welcome to Oregon Tilth

Oregon Tilth, Inc. is a nonprofit organization that supports and promotes biologically sound and socially equitable agriculture through education, research, advocacy, and product certification. Tilth began in 1974 as an agricultural organization, which has cultivated a unique urban-rural outlook.

Our efforts continue to shape food systems that benefit people and the planet together. Oregon Tilth is organized as a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation that is governed by the Tilth Board. As part of Tilth's leadership in advocacy, Oregon Tilth offers the Oregon Tilth Certified Organic (OTCO) certification services.

Although many certified operators are active members of Oregon Tilth, membership is not required for OTCO certification.

The OTCO Certification Manual

This manual outlines the policies, procedures, and responsibilities for certification services offered by Oregon Tilth in conjunction with OTCO Terms and Conditions including documents referenced therein, and the Fee Schedule.

It serves both as:

- A reference for accreditation and oversight bodies, and
- A guide for operators seeking to gain or maintain organic certification.

Oregon Tilth operates in accordance with **ISO/IEC 17065** and applicable national and international organic regulations.

All certification activities are conducted impartially, confidentially, and without discrimination.

Overview of the OTCO Certification Program

Purpose

OTCO provides impartial organic certification services to producers, handlers, and processors in compliance with recognized organic standards. Certification confirms that operations implement systems meeting organic production and handling requirements.

Administrative Structure

- **Certification Office (U.S.)** – Responsible for certification policy, evaluation, and decisions. Business hours: Monday–Friday, 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Pacific Time (USA).
 - A voicemail system is available when the office is closed. Messages are checked each business day and returned promptly.
 - Contacting the main office will direct you to the appropriate staff member.

- **Support Office (Mexico)** – Provides administrative, customer service, and local coordination. Business hours: Monday–Friday, 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Central Standard Time (MX).

OTCO Certification Office

Oregon Tilth Certified Organic (OTCO)

Physical:

301 SW 4th St, Ste. 110
Corvallis, OR 97333

Mailing:

PO Box 368
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tilth.org

P 503-378-0690

organic@tilth.org

OTCO Support Office

OTCO Mexico

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CP. 60190, Uruapan, Michoacán

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Personnel

The daily work of certification is managed by the Certification Director and implemented by inspection and certification staff, with additional support provided by administrative staff. OTCO may hire inspectors on a contractual basis and use other contract workers to work on specific projects. OTCO also subcontracts with laboratories for the testing of residues, GMOs, and other issues as needed. Whenever contract or subcontracted services are utilized during the certification process, OTCO retains final authority and responsibility for all certification decisions.

Financial Support for the Certification Program

The certification program is a self-sustaining program within Oregon Tilth that also lends financial support to Oregon Tilth's education, advocacy, and research activities that further support and promote organic agriculture and food systems. The Certification Director, in consultation with the Finance and Administration Director, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Executive Officer, and the Board of Directors as part of the annual budgeting process, determines the fees paid by applicants and certified operations requesting certification to ensure that all expenses of the program are paid in full by the end of each fiscal year.

Accreditations and Recognitions

- USDA National Organic Program (NOP) – Crops, Livestock, Wild Crops, and Handling.
- Recognized by the European Commission for EU 2018/848 – Categories A, D, and E.
- Recognized by SADER/SENASICA for the Ley de Productos Orgánicos (LPO) in Mexico – Crops, Wild Harvest, and Handling.
- IOAS accreditation for LPO, EU 2018/848, GOTS, and NSF/ANSI 305 compliant with ISO/IEC 17065.

Principles

- **Nondiscrimination:** Access is open to all applicants within OTCO's scope and administrative capacity.
- **Impartiality:** Conflicts of interest are identified and controlled.

- **Confidentiality:** Business and personal data are protected; public disclosures are limited to required directories and regulatory reports.

Certification Programs and Scopes

Oregon Tilth offers certification to operators throughout the United States and internationally, when it is in our administrative capacity to do so. The primary language of OTCO is English and whenever possible OTCO provides translated versions of Standards and Controlled Documents.

Each program operates under the same core certification procedures but includes unique requirements related to scope, trade, and documentation.

Types of Operations

OTCO offers certification services to:

- **Individual operations:** a sole proprietorship, corporation, partnership or similarly defined single company. A single certification may cover activities at multiple sites under the direct management of the applicant's company.
- **Multi-site operations:** a single legal entity that has demonstrated an Internal Control System (a.k.a. Cooperative or Producer Group) and involves a centrally managed association of local growers producing similar crops using similar practices and marketing their products in common. The operation must be constituted as a legal entity in the country where they operate. A single operation may cover numerous individual member farmers. Management must establish and maintain an Internal Control System including access to and education regarding organic standards. Management must also annually conduct a thorough standards compliance evaluation of each member and farm.

CROP PRODUCTION	
Class T Transitional	Transitional agricultural products fall outside the scope of the USDA National Organic Program. Transitional standards are based upon the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 and the applicable production and handling standards established by the USDA National Organic Program under 7 CFR Part 205, <i>except</i> transitional products lack compliance with §205.202(b).
Class O	Organically Grown. Covers farms producing agricultural and horticultural crops including container production. Covers farms producing fungi crops for the USDA National Organic Program.
Class OF	Organically Grown. Covers farms producing fungi crops for the Mexico Organic Program.
Class OW	Organic Wild-Crop Harvest. Covers the sustainable harvest of wild crops growing in a designated area that has been free of prohibited materials for at least 3 years.

Livestock Production	
Class OLP	Organically Grown Livestock and Poultry. Covers farms produce animal products such as meat, eggs, and milk.
Handling Operations	
Class OH	Organic Handlers. Covers businesses preparing food, feed, and processed products as well as those participating in the distribution chain for organic foods such as packers, brokers, wholesalers, distributors and private label companies and brand owners.
Class OR	Organic Retail Stores and Restaurants. Covers retail stores and restaurants which sell organic products to the consumer, either as fresh produce, packaged goods, or ready-to-eat meals.
Class OFT	Organic Fibers and Textiles. Covers the processing and handling of fiber and textile products under the Global Organic Textile Standards.
Class OPC	Organic Personal Care. Covers the processing and handling of personal care products under the NSF/ANSI 305 Standards.

Certification Services Offered

USDA National Organic Program (NOP)



In November 1999, the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service evaluated and awarded OTCO a certificate for compliance with the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) Guide 65: General requirements for bodies operating product certification systems. On April 29, 2002, OTCO was granted accreditation by the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) for organic certification of Crops, Livestock, Wild Crops and Handling operations. Annual audits, including on-site visits to the OTCO office and certified operations, are part of maintaining ongoing accreditation and have evolved with OTCO complying with ISO/IEC 17065. OTCO's accreditation means that production and handling operations certified by OTCO are deemed certified in accordance with the NOP provisions.

Scope

- Available to operations in the U.S., Mexico, Canada (outside COR), and Iceland.
- Covers Crops, Wild crops, Livestock, and Handling.

Key Requirements

- Compliance with 7 CFR Part 205.
- Annual on-site inspection required.
- All products imported to the U.S. must be accompanied by a NOP Import Certificate.

International Trade

Certified operations benefit from U.S. equivalency arrangements with Canada, the EU, Japan, Korea, Switzerland, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom.

Mexico Organic Program – Ley de Productos Orgánicos (LPO)



In 2016, OTCO received recognition by SADER/SENASICA to offer certification to the Mexico Organic Standards (LPO). This allows operations within Mexico with domestic sales to be certified to the nationally recognized standard. The OTCO Mexico Organic Program (MOP) is also accredited by IOAS.

Scope

- Offered to operations in Mexico and the U.S. producing, processing, or marketing organic products under Mexican law.
- Covers crops, wild harvest, mushrooms, processing, and marketing (not livestock).

Key Requirements

- Certification recognized by SADER/SENASICA and IOAS.
- Exports to the U.S. require certification to both LPO and NOP and must be accompanied by a NOP Import Certificate.
- Exports to Canada require a Mexico/Canada Transaction Certificate.

Equivalency

The **Canada–Mexico Organic Equivalency Arrangement (2023)** allows most certified products to move freely between both markets when accompanied by a transaction certificate.

EU Certification Program



OTCO is recognized by the European Commission as an approved certification body for organic certification of operations for crops (Category A), handling (Category D), and livestock feed (Category E). OTCO's accreditation means that production and handling operations certified by OTCO are deemed certified in accordance with the EU provisions (EU 2018/848). The OTCO EU Compliance Program is also accredited by IOAS.

EU 2018/848 Regulations and secondary legal acts may be found online: [Legislation for the organics sector](#)

Scope

- For operations in Mexico exporting to the EU and the United Kingdom.
- Categories:
 - A: Unprocessed plants and seeds
 - D: Processed food products
 - E: Processed feed products

Requirements

- Compliance with Regulation (EU) 2018/848 and applicable amendments.
- Accreditation by IOAS and recognition by the European Commission.
- Exports must be registered in TRACES and accompanied by a Certificate of Inspection (COI) prior to shipment.

High-Risk Products

- Certain crops require at least two physical inspections annually, one unannounced.

KRAV Verification (Sweden)

- Available to EU 2018/848 certified operators exporting to Sweden.
- Provides verification to KRAV additional requirements; does not constitute KRAV certification or authorize use of the KRAV logo.

Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS)



The Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) is the world's leading standard for processing textiles made with organic fibers. The GOTS Standards programs are accredited by International Organic Accreditation Services (IOAS).

- For operations producing, processing, or handling textiles and fibers.
- Certification confirms compliance with GOTS social, environmental, and chemical criteria.
- OTCO is committed to incorporating due diligence into its decision-making process.

NSF/ANSI 305 – Personal Care Products



The NSF/ANSI 305 Standards programs are accredited by International Organic Accreditation Services (IOAS). NSF/ANSI 305 is a voluntary certification standard for personal care products that contain organic ingredients.

For processors and handlers of personal care, oral care, and cosmetic products.

Certified Transitional



Transitional certification is a voluntary program Oregon Tilth offers to producers converting from conventional to organic practices that are working toward organic certification.

Transitional certification may be issued after 9 months of documented compliance; full organic eligibility begins after 36 months.

OPT Grass-Fed Organic



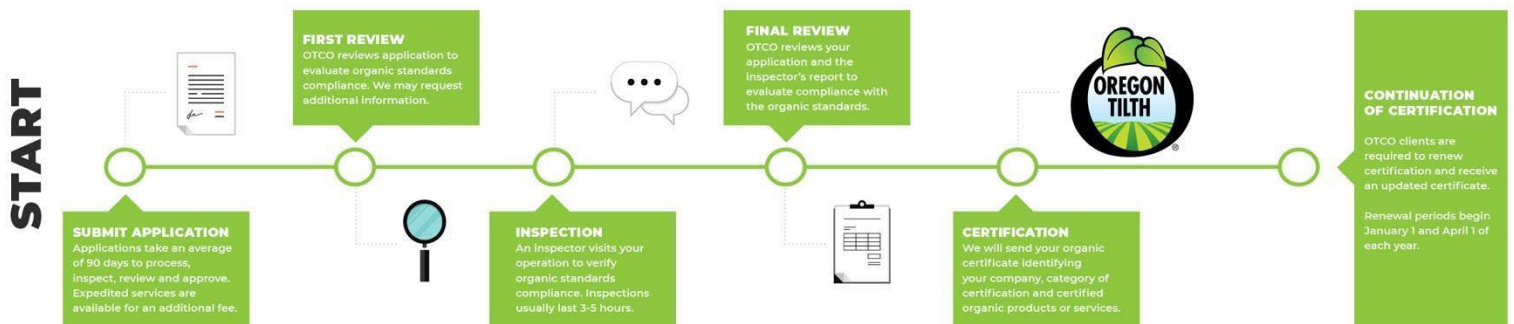
Oregon Tilth offers OPT Certified Grass-Fed Organic certification in partnership with the Organic Plus Trust (OPT). This optional program is for NOP certified organic farmers and handlers who emphasize pasture-based feeding and animal welfare, while limiting grain use.

Salmon Safe



Oregon Tilth partners with Salmon-Safe to offer organic farmers an optional overlay certification. Salmon-Safe is a certification program that helps farmers protect water quality and restore habitat for fish and wildlife. This program focuses on water quality, habitat protection, erosion control, and sustainable irrigation practices not fully covered under USDA organic rules.

Certification Process



Application

First time applicants should contact the OTCO office or visit the website, www.tilth.org, to request an application packet.

The application packet consists of:

- OTCO Certification Manual (this document)
- OTCO Fee Schedule
- Applicable organic standard(s) for which compliance assessment is requested.
- The application form(s) – Organic System Plan (OSP)
- OTCO Terms and Conditions

Applicants submit:

- A completed Organic System Plan (OSP),
- Signed Operation Information form agreeing to OTCO Certification Terms and Conditions, and
- Payment per the fee schedule.

OTCO reviews applications for completeness and compliance ability.

Incomplete applications result in requests for information or noncompliance notices.

Transfers or Dual Certification

OTCO processes operations that transfer from another certification body or requesting dual certification as new applicants. For applicants that are dual certified or transferring certification services from another certification body, OTCO must exchange relevant compliance information about the operation. Relevant information must establish that the operation and products are capable of being certified organic to the applicable standards. Applicants are required to disclose previous certification history, including any denials, suspensions, revocations, and any unresolved noncompliances. Applicants must address all formal notices and resolve any outstanding noncompliances issued by the relevant certification body prior to OTCO making a certification decision. Per § 205.405(c), if an operation does not resolve their noncompliances in the required timeframe, OTCO must issue a notice of denial.

Applying for EU 2018/848 Certification

The previous control body shall share and deliver relevant elements of the control file of the operator concerned. OTCO must ensure that non-conformities noted in the report of the previous control authority or control body have been or are being addressed by the operator. Where the operator withdraws from the control system, the control body of that operator shall, without delay, inform the competent authority. Where a control body finds irregularities or infringements affecting the organic status of products, it shall without delay inform the competent authority of the Member State which designated or approved. That competent authority may require, on its own initiative, also any other information on irregularities or infringements. In case of irregularities or infringements found about products under the control of other control authorities or control bodies, it shall also inform those authorities or bodies without delay.

OTCO will not certify operators or groups of operators that have been withdrawn by their previous certifier in the previous 2 years, unless the recognition of the previous control body has been withdrawn by the Commission of the EU for the specific third country and category of products.

Applying for GOTS Certification

For GOTS applicants, OTCO confirms that the operation does not and will not hold GOTS certification with another Certification Body (CB) at the same time as certification with OTCO. Certification is only with the applying Certification Body, as such, an operator cannot use up existing supplies of labels which identify their previous CB on products they produce from the moment the operator receives the new certificate.

Applicant Withdraw of Application

Applicants may withdraw the application at any time. An applicant who withdraws an application is liable for the costs of services provided up to the time of the voluntary withdrawal. If the withdrawal of application happens prior to a certification decision being made, any notice of noncompliances or denial of certification are not issued to the operation.

Applicants Re-applying for Certification

An applicant for certification who received a written denial of certification may apply for certification again at any time with OTCO.

An applicant who is applying after suspension may re-apply at any time with OTCO, unless the suspension specifies a time period for eligibility. Suspended operations are required to undergo reinstatement.

An applicant who is applying after revocation is not eligible to reapply for 5 years after the previous certificate is canceled. The revoked operator must submit an application with evidence demonstrating corrective actions taken to achieve and maintain compliance with the regulations.

Initial Review

Upon receipt of your OSP application, contract, and payment, OTCO will acknowledge submission.

- OTCO Staff will review the OSP for completeness and compliance (or ability to comply) with the requested standard(s).
- We assess whether OTCO can certify your operation based on location, standard, product, and production type.
- If OTCO has questions about your operation regarding the requested certification scheme, we will contact you to discuss it.
- Initial review findings and a cost estimate will be provided within a reasonable timeframe.
- The OSP must be complete and approved before an inspection can be scheduled.
- Additional fees apply if the OSP is returned for completion.

Material Review

Producers and handlers must list all substances used in production and handling in their OSP.

This includes:

- Crop production inputs (e.g., fertilizers, soil amendments, pest control materials)
- Livestock inputs (e.g., feed, supplements, medications, production aids)
- Processing and handling inputs (e.g., ingredients, processing aids, sanitizers, pest control materials)

OTCO reviews all materials for compliance with applicable organic regulations and communicates approval status.

- OTCO accepts material review decisions from recognized programs such as Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) and Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA).
- If a product has not been previously reviewed, full ingredient disclosure is required for evaluation.

Inspection

OTCO conducts an initial on-site inspection of each production unit, facility, and site that produces or handles organic products and is included in an operation for which certification is requested. An on-site inspection is conducted annually thereafter for each certified operation.

Purpose

To verify compliance with the applicable standard and confirm information in the OSP.

Types

- **Onsite:** First inspection must be onsite and required annually thereafter for all certified operations, except low-risk, fully virtual businesses that may qualify for subsequent virtual inspections.
- **Hybrid:** Combines onsite and remote components.
- **Remote:** Limited to document review; not allowed for new applicants.
- **Unannounced:** All certified operations are subject to unannounced inspections. No additional fees are assessed for unannounced inspections. Selections are risk-based and OTCO reserves the right to randomly select operations to receive an unannounced inspection.
 - 5% of NOP and NSF/ANSI 305 operations
 - 10% of EU and LPO operations
 - 2% of GOTS operations receive unannounced inspections annually.
- **Additional:** Announced or unannounced inspections, including sampling as needed, to verify changes, corrective actions, compliance issues, and high-risk crops based on identified risks or staff/inspector recommendations.
 - For the EU and LPO, OTCO conducts additional inspections of 10% of high-risk operations. These inspections are generally conducted as unannounced inspections, in addition to unannounced inspection requirements; however, they may be announced.

Requirements

- Inspections must occur when a knowledgeable, authorized representative is present and when operations, facilities, and activities can be observed.
- Initial inspections may be delayed up to 6 months from application receipt to ensure appropriate timing.
- All operations must be inspected every calendar year.
- If more than 12 months pass between inspections, scheduling will be adjusted to realign annual inspection frequency.
- Failure to schedule inspection could result in a noncompliance.
- Inspectors must have full access to all areas (including non-certified), facilities, and all relevant records, including financial documents.
- Clients must abide by Terms and Conditions and Operator Standards of Conduct agreements
- Inspectors must have appropriate qualifications and are rotated at least every three years for the EU and LPO programs to maintain impartiality.

Inspection Process

1. Inspector reviews the operation's certification file.
2. Inspector contacts the operation to schedule the inspection and discuss preliminary questions.
3. Inspection begins with an opening meeting with an authorized representative.
4. During the inspection, the inspector documents:
 - Compliance or ability to comply with applicable standards
 - Accuracy of the OSP and actual practices
 - Absence of prohibited substances (sampling/testing may be conducted if needed)
 - Records review including audit trail and mass balance exercises.
5. Inspector observes records, fields, facilities, equipment, materials, and site boundaries.
6. Inspection concludes with an exit interview to confirm findings, address concerns, and identify any additional information needed. A copy of this form becomes part of the inspection report.
7. The inspector will complete the inspection report and submit it to OTCO for review. A copy of the inspection report and any test results are sent to the inspected operation within a reasonable amount of time.

Inspector Choice

OTCO reserves the right to make all inspection assignments and the right to use subcontractors for inspection as necessary. Clients may not influence the choice of inspector or contact inspectors directly to solicit inspection assignments.

If a certification applicant or certified operator objects to the assignment of a particular inspector, the applicant may submit their objections in writing to the Inspections Department. Objections may be based on any of the following reasons:

- Previous encounters with a particular inspector were not positive.
- Former relationship outside of a defined conflict of interest i.e., Consultant 3+ years ago, previous neighbor, etc.

The Inspection Department may reassign an inspection to another inspector at its discretion; reassignment is not guaranteed.

Compliance Investigations

OTCO may perform an additional inspection for the purpose of investigations due to complaints, suspected fraudulent activity, positive residue results, detections of GMOs, verification of Supply Chain Traceability, fulfillment of regulatory directives and/or other concerns with the integrity of the organic certification. Activities from increased oversight may result in additional fees that would be the responsibility of the client.

Producer Group Inspections

Producer Groups are potentially high-risk operations due to complex supply chains and Internal Control Systems (ICS).

- During mandatory inspections or producer groups OTCO inspects:
 - For LPO a minimum of 10 members is inspected; if the group has 10 or fewer members, all are inspected.
 - For NOP and LPO, inspect at least 1.4 times the square root or 2% of the total number of members.
- All members classified as high risk must be inspected.
- For groups with defined production units (based on geographic proximity), at least one member per unit is inspected.
- OTCO may inspect additional members as needed to address risks to organic integrity.

NSF ANSI 305 Inspections

- Inspection may be waived if the facility holds valid certification under another OTCO program. All new operations that do not hold a current OTCO certification undergo a full inspection prior to being certified.

Granting Certification

After inspection, OTCO reviews reports and supporting documents to determine compliance and make a certification decision. Applicants are granted certification based on their ability to comply with regulations of the applicable standard based on the operator's Organic System Plan and the inspection report.

When approved, the operator receives:

- A Certificate of Organic Operation,
- Listing in the OTCO Directory ([OTCO Producer Search](#)), and
- Authorization for logo and seal use by program rules.

Organic products sold as certified organic must be labeled in compliance with the regulations of the applicable scope and service.

Labeling Guidelines are available on our website:

- [NOP Labeling Guide](#) (English)
- [OTCO Canada Labeling and Regulations Guide](#) (Eng/SP)
- [Mexico Labeling Guide](#) (English)
- [Mexico Labeling Guide](#) (Spanish)
- [EU Labeling Guide](#) (English)
- [EU Labeling Guide](#) (Spanish)
- [OTCO Guide to International Trade](#) (English)

Transaction Certificates

In addition to the organic certificate and proper labeling, operations selling products to foreign countries may be required to accompany the certified product with a transaction certificate.

- Organic products entering the United States from other countries must have a NOP Import Certificate to enter the US.

- For products going from Mexico to Canada, the trade agreement requires a transaction certificate.
- For products exported to the European Union a Certificate of Inspection (COI) is required to be issued out of TRACES.
- For products exported to Switzerland, Sweden, or the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, a transaction certificate is required.
- Transaction certificates are required for the various US equivalency arrangements with other countries: Japan, Taiwan, EU, etc.
- Businesses certified under the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) must use transaction certificates for all trade within the GOTS supply chain.

More information about transaction certificate requirements can be found on our [website](#).

Granting GOTS Certification

OTCO shall issue a Scope Certificate within 30 calendar days of the completion of audit if no noncompliances or improvement measures have been identified.

OTCO will give a maximum of 45 days to address improvement measures after completion of a renewal audit.

Operations must submit corrective actions to close noncompliances within 90 days of the completion of the audit and OTCO shall issue the certificate within 15 days after noncompliances are resolved.

Surrender of Certification

A surrender of certification is when an operator cancels certification services with OTCO. Without undue delay, when a certified operator wants to surrender their certification, OTCO acknowledges the request with the operator and cancels the requested certification services.

OTCO reviews the operator's status and determines next steps based on the stage in the certification process.

- Upon surrender of certification, OTCO cancels certification.
- After cancellation, the operator must not sell or represent products as certified organic unless certified by another certifier.
- The operator may not use labels identifying OTCO as the certifying agent.
- To regain certification with OTCO, the operator must submit a new application.
- Surrenders that occur when in adverse action (proposed suspension/revocation notice has been issued) may not resolve the adverse action and the sequence could continue to suspension or revocation.

Continuation of Certification

Operators are required to renew annually to continue certification. OTCO carries out the renewal periods beginning January 1 and April 1 of each year. Certification is renewed annually upon:

- Payment of renewal fees, and
- Submission of an OSP reflecting any operational changes.

OTCO sends reminders to operators that are missing information and/or missing payment for renewal. If reminders are not addressed within the provided time, OTCO will send a notice of noncompliance to the operator.

Reporting Updates

All clients are required to establish, implement, and maintain an Organic System Plan (OSP). The OSP is a living document that must be updated any time practices regarding organic activities change or are to be changed. This includes changes to the program of services, products, product formulations, acreage, or facilities to be certified.

Operators must immediately report:

- Changes in ownership, management, location, or products.
- Self-report any infringements or violations of the organic regulations.
 - Any suspected contamination, commingling, or noncompliance.

OTCO will determine if an additional inspection is required before approving changes.

- If the changes to the system are minimal, consistent with existing practices described in the Organic System Plan and are clearly compliant with regulations, OTCO issues an amended certificate to the operator.
- If the changes are extensive or a document review is not sufficient, OTCO requires an inspection of the new production and/or handling system before adding the update to the certificate (i.e., adding new fields, sites and facilities).

Changes of Ownership

NOP Certification and certificates issued to certified operations are not transferrable to new owners in cases of mergers, acquisitions, or other transfers of ownership per [NOP Program Handbook: NOP 2063 Organic Certificates](#). Additionally, OTCO's Terms and Conditions clearly state that use of the Oregon Tilth name, OTCO claims, or Oregon Tilth's symbols and seals are non-transferable.

It is imperative that OTCO be notified of a change in ownership prior to the closure of the acquisition/merger. A change in ownership that involves a change in business name and/or the creation of a new legal entity or new business registration will require a new certification application, a new Organic System Plan, and on-site inspection. OTCO must be notified as soon as possible in advance of the change of ownership to avoid delays and impacts to certification status.

Because organic certificates are non-transferable, operations that change ownership without notifying OTCO may be issued a Combined Notice of Noncompliance and Proposed Suspension and a Cease and Desist Letter requiring the cessation of both production, sale, labelling, or representation of products as “organic” as well as any use or identification of Oregon Tilth, OTCO or its symbols and seals.

Derogations (LPO and EU programs)

OTCO reserves the right to grant special allowances with regulations. Derogations must be requested in advance and may be issued for limited cases such as:

- Retroactive recognition of conversion
- Use of in-conversion or non-organic seeds or agricultural ingredients in processed food when organic is unavailable.
- Parallel plant production in the following cases where varieties cannot be easily differentiated:
 - Container production in specific cases.
 - Production of sprouted seeds provided that seeds are organic and the obtaining of chicory heads included by dipping in clear water is allowed.

Noncompliance and Adverse Actions

Noncompliance Procedure

If an operation is found to be in violation of the regulations, OTCO issues a notice of noncompliance which provides a description of each noncompliance, the facts upon which the notice of noncompliance is based, and the date by which the operator must respond.

Operators must respond to the notice of noncompliance with corrective actions or an action plan to correct each noncompliance along with supporting evidence to demonstrate compliance. Operators may also rebut noncompliances. All notice of noncompliances must be responded to within the time provided, otherwise Noncompliances will graduate into the Adverse Action sequence. The Adverse Actions sequence is a process that could result in loss of organic status. This sequence will be described further below and can be referenced here: [Noncompliance and Adverse Actions Flow Chart](#). Operators have due process in the Adverse Action sequence. This due process is further described in the section Mediation and Appeals.

Notice of Noncompliance for New Applicants

When OTCO has reason to believe that an applicant cannot comply or is not compliant with the regulations, OTCO provides a written notice of noncompliance to the applicant.

The notice of noncompliance provides a description of each noncompliance, the facts upon which the notice of noncompliance is based, and the date by which the applicant must reply and rebut or correct each noncompliance and submit supporting documentation of each such correction when correction is possible.

When correction of a noncompliance is not possible, a notice of noncompliance and a notice of denial of certification may be combined in one notice. OTCO issues a notice of denial of certification if any prohibited materials or practices are described in the Organic System Plan.

Adverse Action Procedure

- **Denial:** Only issued to new clients when noncompliances are not corrected or insufficient.
- **Proposed Suspension/Revocation:** Issued to certified operations when corrective actions are inadequate.
- **Final Suspension/Revocation:** Issued to certified operations after failed mediation or appeal or if mediation or appeal is not requested in the required timeframe. Revoked operations may not reapply for 5 years.

Applicant Denial of Certification

OTCO issues a written notice of denial of certification to an applicant who fails to respond to the notice of noncompliance, and/or fails to sufficiently implement corrective actions.

A notice of denial of certification:

- States the reason(s) for denial
- Explains the applicant's right to reapply with OTCO or another NOP-accredited certifying agent
- Outlines the right to request mediation or appeal the denial with the NOP or an applicable State Organic Program

Notice of Proposed Suspension or Notice of Proposed Revocation for Certified Operations

If a rebuttal of a noncompliance is unsuccessful or adequate corrective measures are not completed within the prescribed time, a notice of proposed suspension or proposed revocation is issued. An operation that is issued a proposed suspension or proposed revocation has the option to request mediation or file an appeal with the NOP or applicable State Organic Program. A combo notice of noncompliance/notice of proposed suspension may be issued when noncompliances are not correctable.

Willful Violations

If violations are found uncorrectable or willfully violating the regulations, OTCO issues a notice of noncompliance combined with a notice of proposed suspension or a notice of proposed revocation.

If OTCO has reason to believe that an applicant has willfully made a false statement or otherwise purposefully misrepresented the applicant's operation or its compliance with the regulations, a denial of certification is issued without first issuing a notice of noncompliance.

Notice of Suspension or Notice of Revocation

A notice of suspension or notice of revocation is issued when mediation and appeal options are not successful, or if appeal or mediation is not requested within the required timeframe to comply with § 205.662(e)(1).

If suspended under the NOP, an operation must request reinstatement to receive certification.

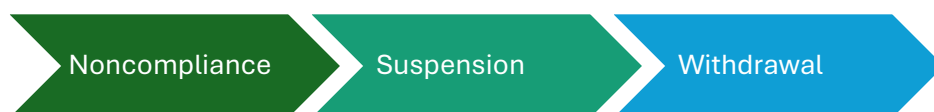
If revoked under the NOP, an operation and all responsibly connected parties are ineligible to reapply for certification for a total of 5 years with OTCO or another certifying agent.

Once an operator's certification is suspended or revoked, the operator's certification is removed (or otherwise cancelled) by OTCO. For operations certified under the NOP, their certification status is updated as suspended or revoked in the Organic Integrity Database. Operators must not sell or represent any product produced or handled as certified organic and must immediately cease use of any national seals including but not limited to the NOP seal, EU Logo, or LPO seal; as well as the OTCO logo, and all references in labeling, advertising, or otherwise to organic production.

GOTS Noncompliances and Adverse Actions

Definitions

- **Suspension:** The limitation of a scope certificate or accreditation due to a specific nonconformity or issue. A suspension may be lifted when the non-conformity or issue is resolved, and the scope certificate or accreditation becomes active again immediately.
- **Withdrawal:** The revocation of a scope certificate or accreditation due to a specific nonconformity or issue, or at the request of the accredited/certified party. Following a withdrawal of accreditation/certification, a new assessment/audit is required for accreditation/certification to return to active status.



Operations are given up to 90 calendar days after the renewal audit to correct identified noncompliances.

If certification is surrendered, suspended, or withdrawn, OTCO must update Global Trase-Base (GTB) within 3 working days to reflect the change in status.

In cases of suspension, withdrawal, or termination:

- Entities must stop using public claims or trademarks indicating certification.
- The reduced scope or loss of certification must be clearly stated in certification documents and public information.

Upon suspension:

- OTCO must notify the entity and Global Standard in writing immediately.

- The entity is given up to 90 calendar days to correct noncompliances.

Certification will be withdrawn if noncompliances are not corrected within 90 calendar days after the renewal audit.

EU Catalogue of Measures

OTCO issues notices to operators that fall into three categories as defined by the EU: minor, major and critical.

Levels are based on:

- How well the operation's precautionary measures are implemented.
- Impact on the organic integrity of the product.
- Ability to trace and control affected products in the supply chain to prevent export.
- Response to past notices or requests from OTCO.

Determinations regarding the level of noncompliance issued follow the OTCO Catalogue of Measures. All major and critical actions are reported to accreditation authorities.

Categories of Noncompliance

- **Minor Noncompliance:** Correctable issues not affecting organic integrity.
 - Issued when appropriate precautionary measures are in place, organic integrity is not impacted, and affected product can be excluded from organic sale or export.
 - Operator must submit an action plan within the specified timeframe explaining how the issue will be corrected.
- **Major Noncompliance:** Serious issues or uncorrected minor issues.
 - Issued when precautionary measures are insufficient, organic integrity is affected, affected product can be excluded from organic sale or export, or minor issues were not corrected by the specified time.
 - May result in notice of proposed suspension or denial or certification (new clients).
 - Operator may be placed into a new conversion period and/or have the scope of certification reduced.
 - Entire lots or production runs may be excluded from sale as organic.
 - The operator may be prohibited from exporting organic products to the EU for a defined period.
- **Critical Noncompliance:** Intentional (willful), fraudulent, or repeated violations.
 - Issued when precautionary measures are insufficient, organic integrity is affected, affected product cannot be excluded from organic sale or export, major issues are not corrected by specified time, or noncompliances are repeated or ongoing.
 - Operator may be placed into a new conversion period, have scope reduced, or be suspended, denied (new clients), or withdrawn (revoked).
 - All affected product must be removed from sale as organic.
 - Operator may be prohibited from exporting organic products to the EU for a defined period.

- Upon suspension or withdrawal, operators must immediately cease use of the OTCO seal, EU logo, and all organic references.
- Withdrawn operators are ineligible for recertification for 2 years.
- OTCO maintains the online record of operators that have been withdrawn for 5 years.

Mediation and Appeals

Mediation

Mediation is a collaborative process between OTCO and an operator where parties settle any dispute with respect to denial of certification, proposed suspension or proposed revocation.

Operators may request mediation within 30 days of an adverse action notice. Once a request for mediation is received, OTCO acknowledges receipt and either accepts or rejects the request.

- If OTCO accepts the request for mediation, a neutral qualified mediator which is mutually agreed upon by the parties is selected.
 - Parties must reach an agreement within 30 calendar days.
 - Successful mediation results in a settlement agreement signed by both parties. Settlement agreements must comply with the regulations.
 - If mediation is unsuccessful, the operator has 30 calendar days from the receipt of the unsuccessful mediation notice to submit an appeal to the NOP or applicable State Organic Program.
- If OTCO rejects a mediation request, it must provide this rejection, and the justification for the rejection, in writing to the applicant for certification or certified operation.
 - The rejection must include the right to request an appeal, pursuant to [§ 205.681](#), within 30 calendar days of the date of receipt of the written notification of rejection of the request for mediation.
- If the terms of the finalized settlement agreement are violated, OTCO will issue adverse actions and/or follow process as outlined in the Settlement Agreement.
- The applicant or certified operation will assume all costs incurred by the mediation procedures.

Appeals

Filing an Appeal with the NOP or State Organic Program

An operation may file an appeal with the NOP or applicable State Organic Program to dispute a notice of denial of certification, proposed suspension or proposed revocation within 30 calendar days of the date of receipt of the notice. Appeals must be sent and comply with the [USDA NOP Handbook: NOP Organic Appeals procedures](#).

Appeals to the Administrator and Requests for Hearing:

Appeals to the Administrator and Requests for Hearing must be filed in writing. All appeals must include a copy of the adverse action and a statement of the appellant's reasons for believing that the action was not proper or made in accordance with applicable program regulations.

NOPAppeals@usda.gov or
Administrator, USDA-AMS
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Room 2642-South, STOP 0268
Washington, S.C. 20250-0203

Appeals to a State Organic Program (for operations in California only):

- Appeals to the State organic program must be filed in writing to:

Website: California State Organic Program
Email: cdfa.legaloffice@cdfa.ca.gov
Phone: 916-654-0466
Fax: 916-900-5347

Filing an Appeal with OTCO

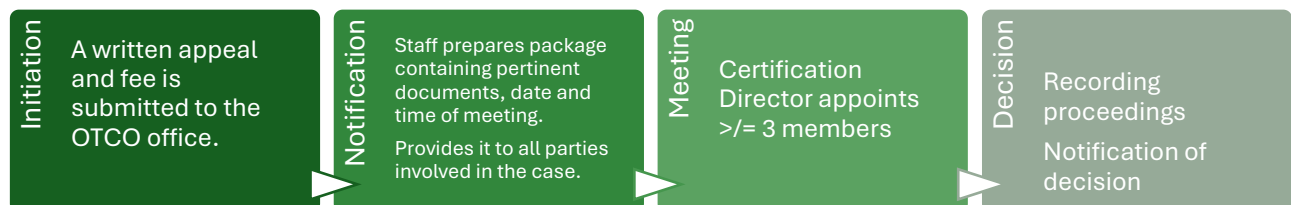
An operation certified to the EU, LPO, GOTS, or NSF/ANSI 305 (outside the scope of the NOP) may file an appeal with OTCO to dispute a notice of denial of certification, proposed suspension or proposed revocation within 30 calendar days of the date of receipt of the notice.

- Appeals must be sent to organic@tilth.org.
- OTCO formally acknowledges an appeal on the date it is received.
- The appellant is responsible for the cost of the appeal.

All appeals shall be reviewed, heard, and decided by persons not involved with the certification decision being appealed. OTCO does not cancel certification when an appeal is pending resolution.

- The appeal must be made no later than 30 days after receipt of the certification decision.
- The appeal must contain relevant background information on the case:
 - OTCO's actions and rulings on the case
 - Reasons for changing OTCO's position
 - Evidence to support the appellant's assertions
 - A suggested resolution to the problem

Adjudication Committee



When an Adjudication Committee is needed, the Certification Director appoints at least three appropriately qualified people to reside on the appeal. The members of the Adjudication Committee must have a good understanding of the organic foods industry and must not have been involved in the certification decision-making process of the operation.

The Certification Director chairs the Adjudication Committee meetings but is not a voting member of the committee. Adjudication Committee members must provide annual declarations of interests. Members with a conflict of interest in a particular case must temporarily step aside, allowing an alternate member to take their place during the deliberations on that case.

All Adjudication Committee members and alternate members must sign a Confidentiality/Non-disclosure Agreement regarding all cases brought before the committee. Appointment as an Adjudication Committee member remains effective until the person voluntarily resigns or is excused from the position by the Certification Director.

Reinstatement

In all cases OTCO will follow prescribed policies identified by the accreditation body or authorities.

NOP Reinstatements

An operation can request reinstatement per the [NOP Program Handbook 2605: Reinstating Suspended Operators](#). Requests for reinstatement of a suspended operation under the USDA NOP are reviewed according to NOP policy. Please note that Reinstatement application certification decisions are made by NOP.

If reinstatement is granted, OTCO makes all necessary modification to formal certification documents public information, and authorizations for use of mark to ensure that the validity period, revised scope, and reinstated date are clear and transparent.

Suspended operations may reapply after corrective actions are verified; revoked operations must wait 5 years.

EU Reinstatements

Operations suspended from the OTCO EU Certification program may reapply with OTCO in accordance with regulations. Operators whose certificate is revoked are not eligible to reapply for 5 years after the previous certificate is canceled. The application request must be accompanied by evidence demonstrating correction of each noncompliance and corrective actions taken to comply with and remain in compliance with regulations.

Investigations and Market Oversight

Complaints and Investigations

OTCO conducts investigations to protect the integrity of organic certification, including but not limited to:

- Complaints or reported violations
- Suspected fraudulent activity
- Positive pesticide residue results
- GMO detections
- Supply chain traceability verification
- Regulatory directives or oversight requests
- Other risks to organic integrity

OTCO accepts information or complaints about suspected violations from consumers, inspectors, farmers, distributors, brokers, government officials, or any other interested party. OTCO investigates all credible complaints related to certified operations. Details about the suspected problem must be submitted in writing before OTCO begins a formal investigation. Following receipt, OTCO acknowledges the complaint to the sending party.

Investigations may include:

- Document review
- Interviews
- Announced or unannounced inspections

For operations certified under EU 2018/848, products under investigation may be excluded from organic sale until the suspicion is eliminated; particularly any events where prohibited substances are found above unacceptable levels of residue.

Upon completion, OTCO provides the complainant with a courtesy notification confirming resolution. OTCO will notify applicable oversight authorities of compliance actions, as required by organic regulations and standards.

Residue Testing of Certified Organic Products

All products sold or represented as organic must be made available for examination by OTCO or applicable regulatory authorities. Certified operations must provide access to products, inputs, and relevant records upon request.

OTCO or other governing authorities may require testing based on risk to organic integrity, including:

- Pre-harvest or post-harvest product testing
- Soil or input testing
- Suspicion of prohibited substance use or contamination
- Suspicion of GMO use or presence
- Use of non-approved inputs

A designated representative will conduct the testing for OTCO or the governing authority, at the official's or OTCO's expense.

Residue and/or GMO Testing

- Conducted when contamination is suspected or as part of routine surveillance.
- Minimum of 5% of operations tested annually (NOP, NSF/ANSI 305, LPO, and EU programs)
- Operations may be selected randomly or based on risk.
- Testing is performed by ISO/IEC 17025-accredited laboratories.

OTCO investigates to determine the source of prohibited substances or contamination. If a violation is confirmed, OTCO will issue noncompliance and/or take adverse actions in accordance with applicable regulations. Operations may be subject to additional, or follow-up testing based on risk or prior findings. OTCO may implement increased monitoring to ensure continued compliance.

GOTS Sampling Requirements

Annual GMO and Pesticide Residue sampling is required for organic cotton before ginning. Testing results must be submitted to OTCO before fiber is sold. If GMO contamination is found, cotton must be held until cleared by OTCO. A designated representative will conduct the testing for OTCO, at the operation's expense.

Supply Chain Traceability Audits

OTCO conducts supply chain traceability audits for products or operations with complex supply chains to verify integrity and detect fraud.

Audits are triggered by:

- Regulatory directives
- High-risk operations or products
- Market concerns
- Import/export activity
- Suspected fraud or contamination (e.g., prohibited substances)
- Compliance concerns, patterns, or anomalies

Audit scope may include tracing the movement, sale, custody, handling, and organic status of products, and may involve collaboration with other certification bodies as needed. The frequency and extent of audits are determined by the number, scope, and complexity of certified operations.

Market Surveillance

OTCO periodically investigates marketplace establishments to monitor the use of the OTCO name and logo in the marketplace. Product label claims are evaluated for compliance with labeling provisions established in applicable organic regulations and provisions according to the Certification Terms and Conditions - Oregon Tilth Certification Services and Trademark Use. OTCO notifies operations of any discrepancies and takes the appropriate action.

Producer Groups

Applicable to groups in Mexico under the NOP and LPO programs.

Definitions

- **Producer group member.** An individual engaged in the activity of producing or harvesting agricultural products as a member of a producer group operation.
- **Producer group operation.** A producer, organized as a person, consisting of producer group members and production units in geographic proximity governed by an Internal Control System (ICS) under one organic system plan and certification.
- **Producer group production unit.** A defined subgroup of producer group members in geographic proximity within a single producer group operation that use shared practices and resources to produce similar agricultural products.
- **Internal Control System (ICS):** An internal quality management system that establishes and governs the review, monitoring, training, and inspection of the producer group operation, and the procurement and distribution of shared production and handling inputs and resources, to maintain compliance with the USDA organic regulations.

Requirements for NOP and LPO

Producer group operations under the USDA National Organic Program must include a detailed Internal Control System (ICS) within their Organic System Plan.

ICS – Operational Requirements

- Define geographic proximity criteria for members
- Establish procedures for onboarding new members (inspection + compliance check)
- Identify high-risk members or production units
- Describe distribution of shared resources (inputs, practices)
- Outline training, education, and technical support for members and staff
- Outline safeguards to prevent conflicts of interest and protect staff from retaliation

Structure & Operations

- Operate as a single legal entity
- Under LPO, individual members may not act as brokers or traders
- Use centralized processing, distribution, and marketing systems
- Organize into defined production units
- Ensure all organic products come only from certified group members
- Prohibit members from selling products as organic outside the group unless individually certified

Reporting & Compliance

- Submit annual reports to the certifier (members, locations, crops, yields, production areas, etc.)

- Conduct annual internal inspections for each member (with mass-balance reconciliation)
- Maintain full traceability from production to sale
- Implement procedures to ensure compliance with organic regulations

Requirements for EU

- OTCO does not currently offer organic certification for Producer Groups under EU 2018/848.

Code of Conduct

Responsibility of OTCO

OTCO also maintains its responsibility for granting, maintaining, suspending, or revoking certification of an operation. OTCO has the right to outsource work related to certification (e.g., testing and/or inspection) to an external body or person; in which case, OTCO takes full responsibility for such contracted and subcontracted work, including confidentiality. Upon applying for organic certification with OTCO, applicants consent to the use of contractors and subcontractors during the certification process.

Responsibility of Client

OTCO clients will honor the Terms and Conditions and Operator Standards of Conduct at all times.

Nondiscrimination

OTCO makes its certification services available to all applicants and operators whose activities fall within the scope of its certification programs and administrative capacity. Certification is accessible to operations of any size, including those holding certification from other certifying agents, and is not conditioned on membership in any association or group or on the number of certificates already issued.

OTCO accepts all operations without discrimination based on race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital or family status.

Affiliations and partnerships between Oregon Tilth and other bodies do not confer preferential treatment, exclusivity, unfair treatment, or inequitable access to opportunities and services offered by OTCO, including assessed certification fees.

Particularly for the GOTS program, Oregon Tilth accepts GOTS inspection assignments regardless of whether they are for the entire processing chain, parts thereof or single operator.

Confidentiality

OTCO has a duty to maintain certification information in a confidential manner. Where information is not publicly available, OTCO maintains strict confidentiality with respect to its operators and does not disclose business-related information to third parties that are not involved in the regulation or certification of the operation.

OTCO provides access to publicly available information via the NOP Organic Integrity Database (OID) which is a directory of all operations certified to the NOP, including the status of the operation's certification. OTCO also provides public information at www.tilth.org which is a directory of all OTCO operations certified. In cases of revocation, operators remain listed for 5 years. Operators may request scope certificates issued by OTCO and the results of laboratory analysis for residues of pesticides during the current and three preceding calendar years from the date of the request.

Upon application, operators agree to the Certification Terms and Conditions - Oregon Tilth Certification Services and Trademark Use, which includes the provisions for confidentiality and public information, including OTCO's right to release information on operations as required by local, state, or federal law, to accreditation authorities. Per NOP 205.504(b)(5)(iii), laboratory test results for pesticide residues and other prohibited substances obtained during the current calendar year and the previous three calendar years may be released to any member of the public upon request.

The Certification Terms and Conditions - Oregon Tilth Certification Services and Trademark Use obligates OTCO to exchange information necessary with another certification body to determine status of compliance, including information to certify, decertify or investigate an operation for the purpose of verifying compliance with supply chain traceability and audit trail documentation and other information as required by the NOP regulations. Other regulatory and certification bodies involved in the exchange of information are upheld to the same requirements of confidentiality.

OTCO is required to report information through various submissions to accreditation bodies, the USDA NOP, state organic programs, and international regulatory agencies. These submissions are submitted in a confidential manner. Types of reporting include the Organic Integrity Database (OID), NOP and Organic Farming Information System (OFIS) Annual Reports, pesticide residue reports required by national or international government agencies, and any additional information requested through directives, memos, investigations, or other requests.

Safeguarding Impartiality

OTCO safeguards the impartiality of certification activities. OTCO takes responsibility for its management and certification activities at all levels of the organization to ensure certification is handled in an objective and transparent manner. OTCO monitors the risk to impartiality, takes preventive actions and takes appropriate measures to minimize or eliminate any risk to the impartiality of services offered to its operator.

Key Terminology

Key terminology includes OTCO definitions and the NOP terminology can be found [Subpart A -Definitions, 205.2 Terms Defined](#)

OTCO Definitions

- **Additional Inspections.** In addition to mandatory inspections, OTCO reserves the right to perform additional inspections that are announced or unannounced of the operators.
- **Administrative Capacity.** OTCO 's ability to provide certification services for all the programs and scopes of services offered by OTCO.
- **Cancellation of Certification.** When OTCO issues a suspension or revocation of services, or when the operation withdraws an application or surrenders certification, the operator's rights to sell or represent any product produced or handled as certified organic are canceled, and the operation must immediately cease use of the OTCO logo, NOP seal and all references in labeling, advertising, or otherwise to organic production. Operations that are revoked are ineligible to reapply for certification for a total of 5 years with OTCO or with another certifying agent.
- **Certification Office.** The legal site of the organization that is responsible for the certification activities conducted by OTCO; except for certification activities that occur at certified operations or applicants for certification, such as inspections and sampling. (7 C.F.R. §205.2) This includes any home office that is used as the certifier's primary location from which certification activities are conducted and any contracted third parties. It does not include the location of an individual person working remotely, unless it is the primary office from which the certifying agent conducts certification activities, or it is the only site where records used for organic certification activities are accessible.
- **OTCO Certification Office Activities.** Activities; including but not limited to: policy formulation and approval, process and procedure development and approval, initial assessment of competence and approval of technical personnel, contractors and subcontractors, control of monitoring or competence of personnel, contractors and subcontractors and outcomes. Contract review; including technical review of applications and determining the technical requirements for certification activity in new technical areas or areas of limited sporadic activity, decision on certification, including technical review of evaluation tasks (such as design and documentation review, sampling, testing, inspection and audit, client liaison and other).
- **Geographical Proximity.** A common geographic area with common environmental and climate characteristics and is within sufficient proximity to the ICS headquarters to allow for adequate ICS monitoring and control. In some cases, OTCO may allow production located farther away from headquarters by monitoring the group's control over resources (economic, time, distance, personnel, etc.) and/or by establishing production units.
- **Hybrid Inspection.** Evaluations performed by Inspectors using a combination using both onsite and remote components. Participants at minimum must include the inspector and an authorized representative of the operation.

- **Remote Inspection.** Evaluations performed by Inspectors using advanced technology to perform a desk inspection of an operator's documents and records. Remote inspections are not allowed for service additions. Participants at minimum must include the inspector and an authorized representative of the operation.
- **Self-Reporting.** When an operation suspects contamination or has concerns about the status of any incoming organic or in-conversion products, the operator verifies that the supplier certificate, labeling and all available audit trail documents are accurate and applicable to the product. If the operation suspects contamination or has concerns about the organic status of their own product, the operator immediately investigates the potential cause of any contamination and notifies OTCO. If the operator is able to substantiate (i.e., positive test or detections) or if suspicion cannot be eliminated, operations immediately notify OTCO to further investigate.
- **Support Office.** The legal site of the organization that is responsible for the general support, customer service and the liaison of activities with a certification office.
- **Support Office activities.** Activities include: the administration of an office, maintaining data, liaison with government agencies, the certification office and local events and meetings, and clerical and financial activities that support the certification office.
- **Unannounced Inspections.** An inspection of all or a portion of the production or handling activities of a certified operation without advance notice to determine compliance with regulations.



**WE BELIEVE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE SHOULD BE
BIOLOGICALLY SOUND AND SOCIALLY EQUITABLE.
THIS BELIEF HAS GUIDED OREGON TILTH FOR NEARLY
FIVE DECADES.**

TILTH.ORG

OUR MISSION

*Support and promote biologically sound and
socially equitable agriculture.*

OUR VISION

*Community-led food systems that
enrich people and planet, together.*

OUR VALUES

- Integrity
- Transparency
- Compassion
- Harmony
- Teamwork
- Knowledge