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**GROWING A NEW GENERATION  
OF ILLINOIS FRUIT AND VEGETABLE FARMERS**

# **THE STEPS TO BECOMING A CERTIFIED ORGANIC OPERATION**

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# Today's Objectives

- Increased knowledge of the principles of organic agriculture
- Increased knowledge of the requirements for organic certification and the certification process
- Increased awareness of resources and organizations that provide organic information and support



# What We'll Cover

- Short discussion about what is organic agriculture
- Answering some frequently asked questions
- Detailed information about how to get certified and how to find a certifying agent



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# What is organic?



<http://extension.agron.iastate.edu/organicag/whatis.html>



# “Feeding the soil, not the plant”

- In the simplest terms, organic growing or farming is based on maintaining a living soil with a diverse population of micro and macro soil organisms.



## Healthy Soil, Healthy Plant, Healthy Food

From Organic Farming Principles and Practice, John Biernbaum



# USDA National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) Definition

- Organic agriculture is defined as "an ecological production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity. It is based on minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain, or enhance ecological harmony. The primary goal of organic agriculture is to optimize the health and productivity of interdependent communities of soil life, plants, animals and people." (NOSB, 1997)



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# Is this what “organic” means?

- Simply stated, organic produce and other ingredients are grown without the use of pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, genetically modified organisms, or ionizing radiation. Animals that produce meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products do not take antibiotics or growth hormones.

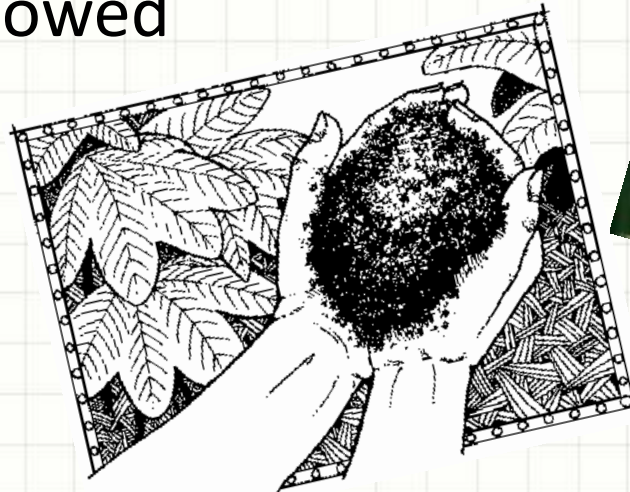


<http://www.organic.org/home/faq>



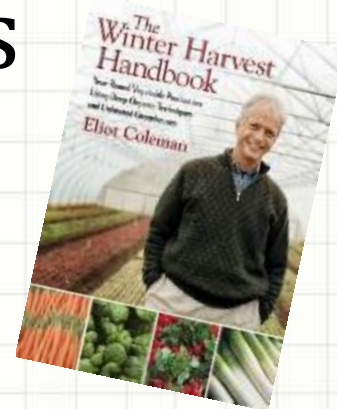
# Or is this what organic means?

- It is instead a proactive management system based on ecologically-sound practices in concert with allowed inputs.





# Deep Organic Versus Shallow Organic



- Deep organic strives to minimize off farm inputs and mimic nature as much as possible. Farmers use knowledge to capitalize on ecosystem services and the myriad benefits they provide.
- Shallow organic substitutes organic inputs for conventional inputs.



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To certify or not to certify...  
that is the question



# What is organic certification?

- Organic certification verifies that your farm complies with the USDA organic regulations and allows you to sell, label, and represent your products as organic.



# Alternatives to Organic Certification

Certified Naturally Grown      Certified Humane Raised



[www.naturallygrown.org](http://www.naturallygrown.org)



<http://certifiedhumane.org>





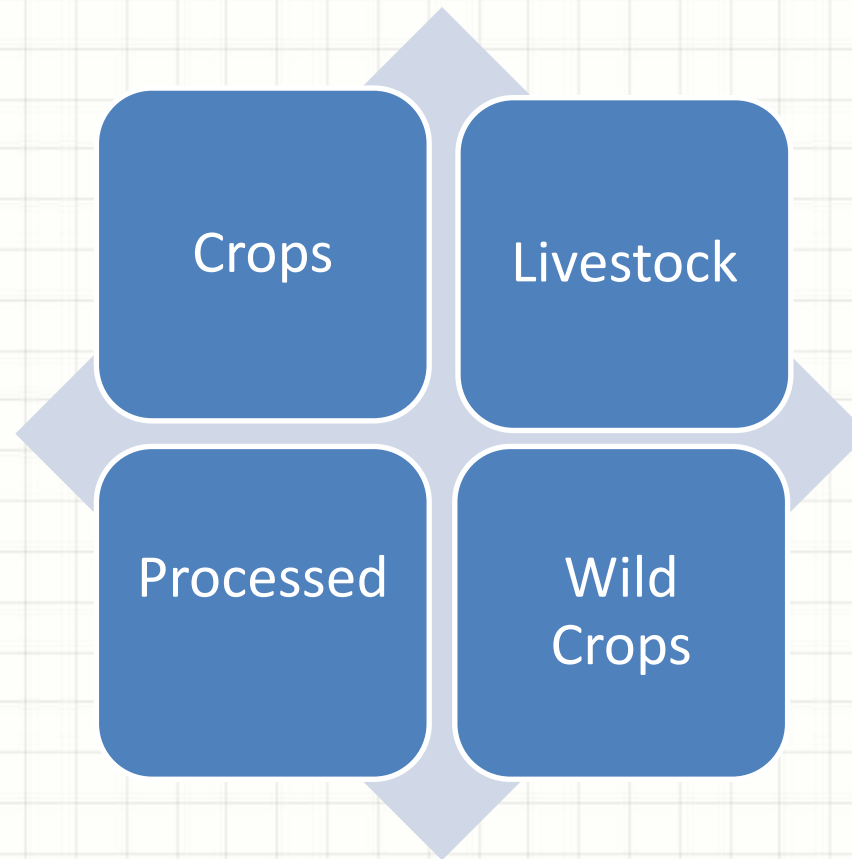
# Who needs to be certified?

- Receives more than \$5,000 in gross annual organic sales
- Receives less than \$5,000 in gross annual organic sales

**Yes**

**NO**

# What types of crops are eligible for organic certification?



# Why is certification required?



# Who Certifies Farms or Businesses?

- Your farm may be certified by a certifying agent
  - Private (domestic)
  - State
  - Foreign





# So how do I choose the right agency to work with me?

- Do you certify other farms or operations of my type?
  - The agency should be familiar with your type of production so your certification goes smoothly.
- Do you certify other farms in my region?
- How do you charge for organic certification services?
- How quickly can you inspect and certify my farm once I have submitted my application?
- Ask other farmers in your region.
- Talk to buyers of organic commodities, especially the projected buyer for your crop.



# How do I choose a certifying agent?

- When selecting a certifying agent, you may wish to consider the following criteria:
  - Distance to your farm or business
  - Fee structure
  - Accreditation to other standards
  - Additional services, such as educational resources or member services

[www.ams.usda.gov/NOPACAs](http://www.ams.usda.gov/NOPACAs)

<http://bit.ly/certifierselection>



# How Do I Get Certified Organic?



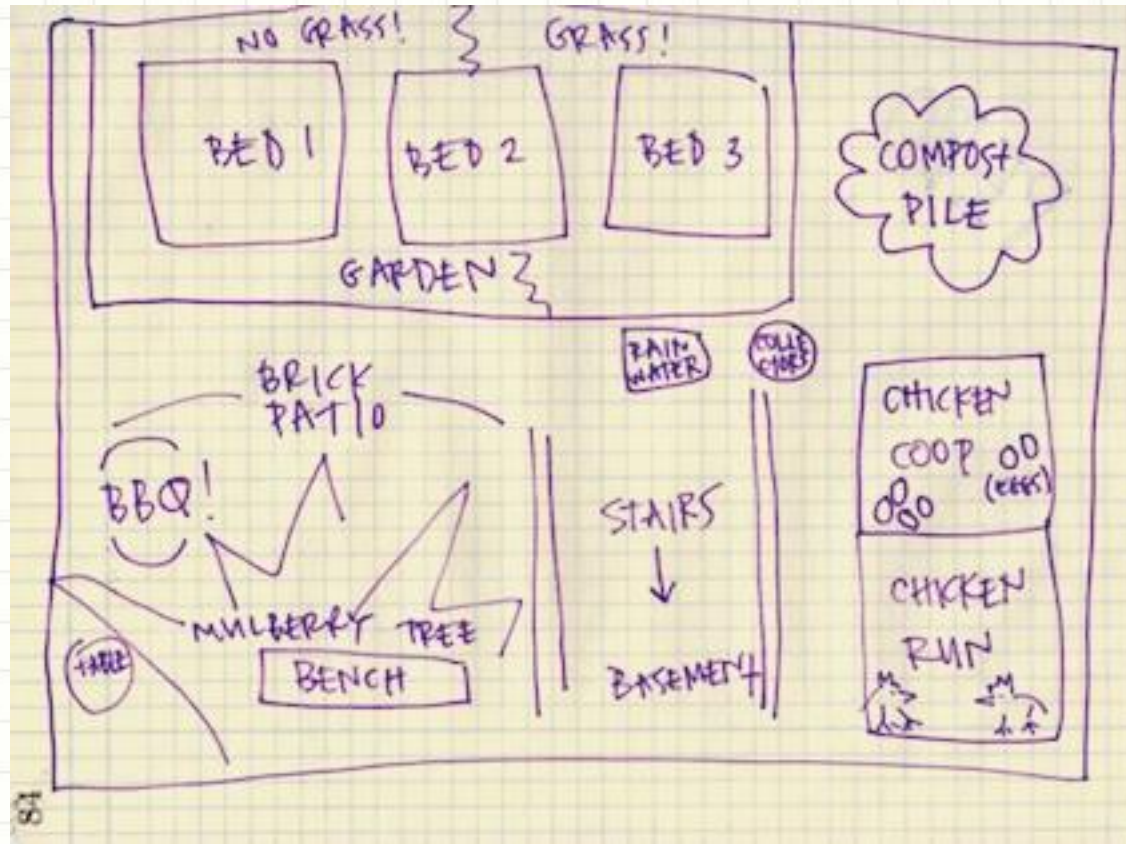
organic



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# 1. A detailed description of the operation to be certified





## 2. History of substances applied to land during the previous 3 years

Generic Materials  
List



Products List

[www.omri.org](http://www.omri.org)

National Organic Program

[National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances](#)



### 3. Names of the organic products grown, raised, or processed



# 4. Must have a written Organic System Plan

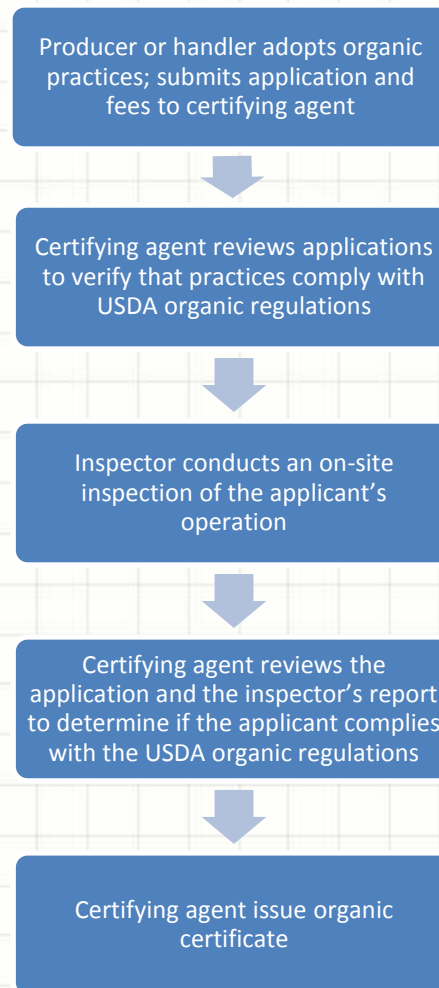
- A complete Organic System Plan consists of one or more of the following elements, as appropriate to the individual operation
  - Organic Farm Plan
  - Organic Livestock Plan
  - Organic Handling Plan

<https://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/summaries/summary.php?pub=359>

**Organic System Plan Template for Crop  
and/or Livestock Production**



# What are the steps in the organic certification process?





# Do I have to recertify each year?



# Is There a Transition Period?



Opportunities in Agriculture

## Transitioning to Organic Production



**PART 1**  
**Introduction to Organic Farming**

As a grower, a farmer, or a producer, you may be looking for ways to increase your income and reduce your risk. One way to do this is by transitioning to organic production. Organic production is a way of growing crops and raising animals that uses natural processes and avoids synthetic pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers. Organic production is a growing industry, and there are many opportunities for growers to get involved. This article provides an overview of organic production and discusses the challenges and opportunities associated with transitioning to organic production.

**What is Organic Production?**

Organic production is a way of growing crops and raising animals that uses natural processes and avoids synthetic pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers. Organic production is a growing industry, and there are many opportunities for growers to get involved. This article provides an overview of organic production and discusses the challenges and opportunities associated with transitioning to organic production.

**Why Transition to Organic Production?**

There are many reasons to transition to organic production. One reason is that organic products often command a premium price in the marketplace. Another reason is that organic production is a more sustainable way of farming that uses natural resources and avoids synthetic inputs. Finally, many consumers are looking for organic products because they believe they are healthier and safer.

**Challenges of Organic Production**

There are several challenges associated with transitioning to organic production. One challenge is the cost of organic production, which is often higher than conventional production. Another challenge is the time and labor required to transition to organic production, which can be significant. Finally, there is the risk of crop loss due to pests and diseases, which is often higher in organic production.

**Opportunities of Organic Production**

There are many opportunities associated with transitioning to organic production. One opportunity is the growing demand for organic products in the marketplace. Another opportunity is the potential for higher prices for organic products. Finally, there is the opportunity to build a more sustainable and resilient farming operation.

**Conclusion**

Transitioning to organic production is a challenging but rewarding process. It requires a commitment to natural processes and a willingness to take risks. However, the benefits of organic production, including higher prices and a more sustainable way of farming, make it a worthwhile investment for many growers.



# How Much Does Organic Certification Cost?

- Application fee
- Inspection fees
- Certification Fees
- Fees assessed on sales
  - Differs for agency



[www.ams.usda.gov/NOPFinancialAssistance](http://www.ams.usda.gov/NOPFinancialAssistance)

# Ecocert ICO

## 2013 Fee Schedule



- Application Fee \$350\*
  - Initial application and then annually
- Inspection Fee \$410 plus\*
  - Fees based on the amount agreed upon between ICO and the inspector
- Certification Fee \$215-\$1,350\*
  - Based on the number of acres

Ecocert ICO does not charge fees based on sales







the web community for  
<http://eorganic.info> organic agriculture

funded by CSREES Integrated Organic Program and eXtension

[www.extension.org](http://www.extension.org)



# Small organic farms

- Less than \$5,000 (in gross annual organic sales) you are exempt
  - Certification
    - Don't need to be certified to sell, label, or represent your products as organic.
  - Organic System Plan
    - You are not required to document the specific practices and substances used to produce and/or handle organic products.

**MUST FOLLOW ALL OTHER REQUIREMENTS IN THE  
USDA ORGANIC REGULATIONS**



# Small organic farms

- You must follow these requirements:
  - Maintain records for 3 years
  - Not use the USDA organic seal or refer to them as certified organic
  - Not sell your products as ingredients for use in someone else's certified organic product



# Resources

- Good Growing Why Organic Farming Works, Leslie Duram

<http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/product/Good-Growing,672895.aspx>

- USDA National Organic Program (NOP)

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/nop>

- University of Illinois Extension, Local Food Systems and Small Farms website – Organics

<http://web.extension.illinois.edu/smallfarm/organic.html>





# ATTRA: The National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service

- Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas is provided by the National Center for Appropriate Technology
- <http://attra.ncat.org/>
- Highlights:
  - Comprehensive list of 200+ publications on organic topics
  - Submit questions to staff professionals
  - [Organic Farming](#)



# MOSES (Midwest Organic

## Sustainable Education Service)

- MOSES promotes organic and sustainable agriculture by providing the education, resources and expertise farmers need to succeed.
- <http://mosesorganic.org>
- Highlights:
  - [Organic Broadcaster](#)
  - [Guidebook for Certification](#)
  - [Organic Fact Sheets](#)
  - [Organic Link E-News](#)
  - [Organic Resource Directory](#)



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# The Rodale Institute

- The Rodale Institute provides a venue for information, action, and interaction
- <http://rodaleinstitute.org>
- Highlights:
  - Results from [Rodale's own research](#)
  - [Grassroots OPX](#): a volunteer organic price index
  - [Organic Transitions Course](#)
  - [Organic System Plan](#)



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# Summary

- There are many benefits of organic production and certification
- You may use organic practices without being certified, but are restricted in the use of the word “organic.”



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# To reach us

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