

NOP-Final Rule

Handle: To sell, process or package agricultural products except such term shall not include the sale, transportation or delivery of crops or livestock by the producer thereof to a handler.

The OFPA and NOP-Final Rule do not specifically define post-harvest handling. However, the definition of “handle” as stated in the NOP-Final Rule does provide basic guidance concerning the scope of handling allowable without additional certification requirements for organic production operations. Also producers of organic products must demonstrate compliance or the ability to comply with 205.201 Organic production and handling system plan.

The following acts could be considered as part of the production or post-harvest handling process:

- All acts necessary to successfully produce an organic agricultural product such as: tillage, cultivation, pruning, trimming, irrigating.
- Preparation of the portion of an agricultural product intended for sale such as: harvesting, refrigerating, cleaning, rinsing, drying, temporarily storing and packaging or to prepare in a manner suitable for transport or sale to a handler except in cases where products are packaged and sold direct to the consumer ~~at farmers markets.~~

Definitions pertaining to processing:

OFPA

Handling Operation: Any operation or portion of an operation that receives or otherwise acquires agricultural products and processes, packages or stores such products.

Processing: Cooking, baking, heating, drying, mixing, grinding, churning, separating, extracting, cutting, fermenting, eviscerating, preserving, dehydrating, freezing or otherwise manufacturing and includes the packaging, canning, jarring or otherwise enclosing food in a container.

The OFPA (and NOP-Final Rule) definition of processing include many tasks related to food and agricultural product preparation. Some of these tasks are performed as part of post harvest handling while others are clearly processing. Further, the definition of handling operation provides basic guidance in that an “operation receives or otherwise acquires” perhaps indicating producers can perform certain functions normally considered to be processing without the requirement of additional certification.

The following acts could be considered processing in the context of an organic production operation:

- When a producer is formally packaging and labeling an organic product for direct sale to consumers or handlers. Examples include: combining several agricultural products to create a final product, transforming the natural state of an agricultural product as harvested and the creation of sauces, purees and juices.

In summary the processing committee feels this topic deserves further consideration and invites the industry and the NOP to provide additional input in the coming months.

NOTE: Potential definition for post-harvest handling.

Post-harvest handling (crops): To harvest the portion of a crop intended for sale and prepare in a manner suitable for transport to the purchaser (handler) in accordance with the organic system plan.