



Q&A for Certifiers

Draft 12/01/15

We sent out a recording of the certifier training webinar on 9/16/15 and requested that you send us your questions. Here are the questions we've received so far, with their answers.

1. Can you forward me the template for the data?

You can download the current version of the [basic template](#) at any time, without logging in to the system.

2. Will we need to access the system to obtain our 2014 list of certified operations in the new 2015 template? Or could you send our previous list to us in the new format?

You can download the 2014 operations in the new template when you log in for the first time. However, all items (product list) could not be migrated, so while the operation list is complete, it is likely that only a partial item list will be available for export. If you provide your 2015 data in the old template, we can convert it to the new template and return it to you for review.

3. Could you kindly confirm me if we have understood correctly the next steps below?

a. We now must revise the list in new format you provided us, to make all necessary adjustments such as Operation ID, effective date of operation status, etc.

b. Once revised, we shall upload the file to the *INTEGRITY* database.

c. Once uploaded, we may update the list directly in the *INTEGRITY* database so the list will be already uploaded and updated by the annual submission deadline on January 2, 2016.

d. It will be possible to update the list in the excel spreadsheet and upload it on January 2, 2016. Afterwards, any updates will be due by updating directly into the *INTEGRITY* database.

a. You can either to revise your own system export or spreadsheet into the new format, OR, we can help you export your 2014 data from our system in the new format as a starting point.

b. & c. You can upload the spreadsheet and refine data and data quality issues. Your first submittal must be complete by January 2, 2016. Individual operation information can be updated by spreadsheet upload or editing the operation profile (web-based form) at any time once the first spreadsheet upload has been completed.

d. As above, any changes via file upload or via the operation profile web-based form will be considered part of your January 2, 2016 data submission. The Instruction on Submitting Annual Lists of Certified Operations (NOP 2026) provides more information.

4. Do you want certifiers to submit a trial prior the end of year due date submission?

We absolutely encourage you to submit a trial run at any time. You can upload data directly and see how the system handles it, then revise as needed.

5. For the Excel file uploads, are we required to include columns for the optional fields that we choose to not populate, in order to have the Excel file exactly match the template file? Or will the *INTEGRITY* database be able to take our data based on column headers, thus allowing us to only include those columns of data that we are able to provide?

All columns must be included, but they do not need to be in any particular order. Also, your data needs to start on Row 5 of the sheet.

6. Do the various fields in both the operation and item tabs have rejection criteria? Is there a character limit for any field? Also, for the certification status columns, do our statuses need to exactly match the ones you have displayed? For example, would you accept transition, instead of transitional?

Yes, the template has validations throughout, and the file upload process generates a report with warnings and errors for nonconforming data. Character limits and other validation information can be found in the [Draft Data Dictionary 1.0](#). The statuses should match the dropdown menus in the template/options provided in the documentation.

7. Operation ID: could you confirm that it should include only numbers and so, no letters could be used?

The Operation ID must be 10 numeric digits – the first 3 numbers are the certifier ID; the last 7 numbers are assigned by the certifier. No letters can be used.

8. Do we have to use the Operation ID number generated by the NOP that is in the current data set, or can we create our own?

The first update to *INTEGRITY* data is a complete wipe and replace of last year's operation and item (product) information. Therefore, you can change the NOP Operation IDs when you upload your first file, or add your new operations using the web-based form. Once you have assigned an NOP Operation ID through publication of your first template file data, it cannot be changed.

9. Do you know what our leading three digits for operation IDs will be? I'll need to communicate this to our database developer.

The leading three digits for operation IDs can be found on the [Certifier IDs](#) tab in the template.

10. At the international level, it happens that operation addresses often do not have either a city or a ZIP code. How can we proceed those cases?

The city field can be left blank for International addresses where there is no city. The ZIP code may be left blank. The current [template](#) includes clarification of the city field requirement for non-US addresses.

- 11. The spreadsheet has an Operation Certification Status (columns G, H) and additional columns for Scope status (columns J thru Q). We are trying to figure out what information to provide in the operation status column for the following two scenarios.**
- a. Company is no longer certified. The Handler scope was surrendered but the Crop scope was suspended. Which status does the NOP want to see for the operation status?**
 - b. Company is still certified. The Handler scope is certified. The Crop scope was suspended. Which status does the NOP want to see for the operation status?**

In response to feedback we have received from Certifiers, we are building logic into the database to help clarify these situations.

- a. If no scopes are certified and at least one is suspended, the Operation Status is classified as Suspended.
- b. If at least one Scope is Certified, the Operation is still be classified as Certified.

- 12. I see the NOP Certification Status for items is an optional column; does the NOP expect that transitioning fields will be included if a certifier chooses to report on NOP certification Status? (Basically, I'm wondering if we can report on Certified and Surrendered items but not transitioning items).**

Yes, you can report Certified and Surrendered items but not Transitional if you choose to do so. Transitional status was requested by a number of stakeholders, but we do not require certifiers to report transitioning items.

- 13. At the "Operation Level" is the Effective Date of Operation Status the first date the operation became certified and the NOP Anniversary Date every year?**

Yes, this is correct for certified operations.

- 14. At the "Item Level" is the NOP Status Effective Date the same as the Operation Level – every year's renewal date? And is the Last Review Date be the date certification was revised after the current year renewal date?**

For the Item Level, you should use the information you typically show on organic certificates. The Status Effective Date may differ from the operation or scope date if you want to use the date the item was added to the certificate, for instance. The Last Review Date is the last date the operation has had a complete OSP review.

- 15. We have a question about the term: Transitioning to Organic Status. Please, would you be so kind to explain us about this term; how long crops are considered in transition before providing Organic status?**

Many people consider the three year period after prohibited substance application to be a transitioning period. For more information, please refer to 205.202(b) for Crops and 205.207(a) for Wild Crops.

- 16. In the sheet “Item level,” do you wish to have the list of products for “certified operation” only or for all operations with all types of status (surrender, withdraw...). We would like to include products from “certified operations” only for now.**

Products/items are only required for certified operations; if you would like to provide item information for operations with other certification statuses, you may. Products/items will only be displayed in public search results for certified operations, so even if they are provided for operations with status other than Certified, they will not be visible to the public.

- 17. In the sheet “Item Level,” could you confirm that it will be OK to have only “NOP scope” + “NOP Item Name” (so “NOP Category” is empty)?**

Yes, it is OK to have only NOP Scope and NOP Item Name. Categories help improve search results for users, but are not required.

- 18. Regarding certified organic processed products, how are other certifiers dealing with this? Our current database doesn’t have a cohesive way to pull out reports for our processors with their certified products. The information is currently housed in our database but not easy to obtain in a clear report. We launched a new database this year ourselves as well so we are in the midst of a learning curve too. Would it be OK to list our processors as such: [Other Item: Processed Products]?**

Other certifiers are listing the products using the partial or full taxonomy (NOP Category, NOP Item Name) and/or providing Other Item information at a similar level of detail to the NOP Item Names. You may wish to consider using last year’s submission as a starting point – we can convert your old data to the new template format, and you can update the handling information as needed, so at least the processors you reported last year would have the type of information that consumers and others are looking for while you work towards a solution.

- 19. For dates of surrender & withdrew w/ NONC, will we be required to retroactively input those dates? We do not keep track of those who have withdrawn due to a noncompliance in the past, and are wondering if we need to go find out that information?**

We ask that you start reporting withdrawals for which a notice of noncompliance has been issued, but do not require retroactive research in order to report. It was not clear whether or not you currently keep record of dates of surrender; if you do so, we ask that you provide that information for 2015 if possible, but as with withdrawals with NONC, do not require retroactive reporting.

- 20. In 2016, what would be the frequency requested by USDA to update the database?**

We expect the system will be easy enough to use that you will be able to submit data more frequently than annually – many certifiers have indicated that they could submit data monthly or quarterly, in addition to immediate updates to certification status in the case of operations that are suspended or revoked.

- 21. I was checking the new website and I found that the website does not show some Spanish letters and symbols as the letter "ñ" and the symbol "´", therefore our customers names are not showed in the right way.**

This problem was created during the migration of 2014 operation lists. The new system can accept and display these symbols correctly.

- 22. Do I get the special registration key to expedite system access from you?**

Yes, the NOP Team sent out the special registration key to the Primary Points of Contact designated by each Accredited Certifying Agent. If you have not yet provided the name and email address of your Primary Point of Contact for *INTEGRITY*, please send it to INTEGRITY@ams.usda.gov

- 23. Please let me know if there is any issue with changing the *INTEGRITY* Lead staff person on a later date (likely in 6-9 months).**

There is no problem with changing the *INTEGRITY* Lead staff person at a later date.

- 24. We've been somehow puzzled about the "eAuth level 1 account creation": is it a prerequisite for the "integrity user account registration" or is it intended only for certifier staff? In other words do certifier staff (individual users) register for eAuth level 1 while "certifier leads" register for "integrity user account"?**

In order to access the system, users must first register for an eAuth Level 1 account. This is a requirement for all users, regardless of whether they are an *INTEGRITY* Lead (with user account management privileges) or Staff user. In addition, all users will then have to register for an *INTEGRITY* account, which will be based on their eAuth Level 1 credentials. We have provided instructions on how to do this to the *INTEGRITY* Primary Point of Contact at your organization.

- 25. We would like our programmer to be able to verify that our system matches yours. What's the best way to do this?**

Send a note to INTEGRITY@ams.usda.gov and we will schedule a conference call to discuss your questions.

- 26. Our IT team would like to set up a meeting with the NOP database IT development team so that we can begin working on the needed elements to make the API connection work between our database and the NOP database.**

We will be putting together initial requirements in December—we would love to get your input during the development of the API, so can we touch base in January, when we will have more requirements available. Our API timeline is to develop the API in January-March, and have an API ready for Certifiers to pilot in the spring. You may wish to refer to the [Draft Data Dictionary 1.0](#) for more technical information in the meantime.

- 27. As you may know, our organization is accredited by APEDA in India and issues NOP certification under the USDA's recognition agreement with India. It would be relatively easy for us to submit a list of operations certified to the NOP to be included in the**

NOP's new database. Would it be possible for our organization to be assigned a certifier id number so we could do that?

NOP is not currently accepting lists of operations certified through recognition agreements. This is on our list for possible future consideration.

28. I really don't need another web site or email to keep up with. I forget, what is the purpose of this data base?

The Organic *INTEGRITY* Database is the modernized list of certified operations. Moving forward, your use of *INTEGRITY* will be in lieu of the previous annual certified operations data call.