



CERTIFICATE OF ACCREDITATION



United States Department of Agriculture

Agricultural Marketing Service

National Organic Program

QUALITY CERTIFICATION SERVICES

5700 Southwest 34th Street, Gainesville, Florida, 32608, U.S.A.

meets all the requirements prescribed in the USDA National Organic Program Regulations

7 CFR Part 205

as an Accredited Certifying Agent

for the scope of

Crops, Handling, Livestock, Wild Crops Operations

This certificate is receivable by all officers of all courts of the United States as prima facie evidence of the truth of the statements therein contained. This certificate does not excuse failure to comply with any of the regulatory laws enforced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture .

Status of this accreditation may be verified at <http://www.ams.usda.gov>

Certificate No: **USDA-78-23**

Effective Date: **04/29/2022**

Expiration Date: **04/29/2027**

Issue Date: **03/08/2023**

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Deputy Administrator
National Organic Program

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National Organic Program
1400 Independence Avenue, SW.
Room 2642-South, STOP 0268
Washington, DC 20250-0268

NATIONAL ORGANIC PROGRAM: AUDIT & CORRECTIVE ACTION REPORT

GENERAL INFORMATION

- **Certifier Name** Quality Certification Services (QCS) Ecuador
- **Physical Address** Av. Edmundo Carvajal Oe4-72 y Av. Brasil Edificio Robalino-Acuña, Oficina 202, Quito, Ecuador
- **Audit Type** Certification Office Audit
- **Auditor(s) & Audit Dates** Lars Crail, Daniel Oliver, 07/22/2024 to 08/10/2024
- **Audit Identifier** NOP-36-24

CERTIFIER OVERVIEW

The National Organic Program (NOP) conducted an onsite certification office audit of Quality Certification Services' (QCS) Ecuador office certification activities for January 1, 2023 through August 7, 2024. The purpose of the audit was to verify QCS's compliance with the USDA organic regulations. Audit activities included a review of certification activities, interviews with QCS personnel, a records audit, two witness audits, and a review audit. Witness audits consisted of the annual inspections of two crop operations in Ecuador.

QCS's Ecuador certification office is in Quito, Ecuador and conducts key certification activities in Ecuador. QCS' Ecuador certification office manages certification activities of 95 operations, covering the handling and crops scopes, including producer groups. Certification activities are performed by 19 employees and contractor inspectors.

NOP DETERMINATION:

NOP reviewed the audit results to determine whether QCS' corrective actions adequately addressed previous noncompliances. The NOP also reviewed any corrective actions submitted as a result of noncompliances issued from findings identified during the audit.

Any noncompliance labeled as “**Accepted**” indicates acceptance of the corrective actions and verification of corrective action implementation will be conducted during the next onsite audit.

Noncompliances from Prior Assessments

None

Noncompliances Identified during the Current Assessment

AIA-2955-24 - Accepted. 7 CFR § 205.501(a)(3) states, “A private or governmental entity accredited as a certifying agent under this subpart must: Carry out the provisions of the Act and the regulations in this part, including the provisions of §§ 205.402 through 205.406 and § 205.670;”

Comments: *QCS does not carry out the provisions of the Act and regulations. The auditors reviewed certification files and found the following issues:*

- 1. QCS approved a retail label that did not identify each organic ingredient as organic in the ingredient statement, as required by § 205.303(b)(1).*
- 2. QCS approved a retail label that incorrectly displayed the "Certified organic by * * *" statement above the information identifying the handler or distributor of the product instead of below, as required by § 205.303(b)(2).*

Corrective Action: QCS collected and approved corrected labels from the operation in question. QCS plans to verify the operation is using the corrected labels during its 2025 annual inspection. Additionally, QCS implemented a new “USDA NOP Label Approval Form” that staff will use to document their evaluation and approval of retail labels. The form includes verification points for identifying ingredients as organic and correct placement of the “Certified organic by * * *” statement. On November 12, 2024, QCS conducted training for certification staff in the Ecuador and Dominican Republic certification offices on label review requirements and use of the new label review form.



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GENERAL INFORMATION

- **Certifier Name** Quality Certification Services, (QCS)
- **Physical Address** 5700 Southwest 34th Street, Gainesville, Florida 32608, U.S.A.
- **Audit Type** Mid-term Audit
- **Auditor(s) & Audit Dates** Patricia Bursten, Kelley Belina, 02/26/2024 to 04/03/2024
- **Audit Identifier** NOP-1-24

CERTIFIER OVERVIEW

The National Organic Program (NOP) conducted an onsite Midterm Audit of Quality Certification Services' (QCS) USDA organic certification program covering the period September 17, 2021, to March 15, 2024. The purpose of the audit was to verify QCS' compliance with the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 (OFPA), the USDA organic regulations (7 CFR Part 205), and the NOP Handbook. Audit activities included a review of certification activities, interviews with QCS personnel, a records audit, two onsite witness audits and one onsite review audit. The review audit was conducted at a handling operation in Turkey. The two witness audits consisted of one onsite inspection of a crops and handling operation in Missouri, and one onsite inspection of a crops and livestock operation in Florida.

QCS is a not-for-profit business, initially accredited on April 29, 2002. QCS is accredited to the crops, wild crops, livestock, and handling scopes. QCS' office is in Gainesville, Florida. QCS certifies 830 operations and offers certification services in 40 states and 9 countries. Certification activities are performed by 75 employees.

NOP DETERMINATION:

NOP reviewed the audit results to determine whether QCS' corrective actions adequately addressed previous noncompliances. NOP also reviewed any corrective actions submitted as a result of noncompliances issued from findings identified during the audit.

Any noncompliance labeled as “**Cleared**” indicates that the corrective actions for the noncompliance are determined to be implemented and working effectively. Any noncompliance labeled as “**Accepted**” indicates acceptance of the corrective actions and verification of corrective action implementation will be conducted during the next audit.

Noncompliances from Prior Assessments

AIA-7744-21 - Cleared.
AIA-7745-21 - Cleared.
AIA-7746-21 - Cleared.
AIA-7747-21 - Cleared.
AIA-7749-21 - Cleared.
AIA-7903-21 - Cleared.
AIA-915-22 - Cleared.
AIA-5870-23 - Cleared.
AIA-6054-23 - Cleared.
AIA-6058-23 - Cleared.

AIA-7750-21 - Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.406(d) states, “If the certifying agent determines that the certified operation is complying with the Act and the regulations in this part and that any of the information specified on the certificate of organic operation has changed, the certifying agent must issue an updated certificate of organic operation pursuant to §205.404(b).”

Comments: *QCS does not consistently verify that certified operations comply with the Act and the regulations prior to issuing updated organic certificates. In one file reviewed, QCS did not remove products from an organic certificate when it was verified that the operation’s organic system plan no longer contained compliant production practices for those products. In another file, a product was added to an operation’s certificate even though the organic system plan did not contain production practices for that product and therefore could not be verified.*

2022 Corrective Action: QCS updated the certified products list for the two operations and submitted the updated products list to the NOP. QCS implemented an internal policy to ensure that all operations’ OSPs describe compliant production practices for the products listed on the organic certificate. QCS also updated all inspection checklists to specifically verify compliant production practices for the products requested for certification. On August 8, 2022, QCS conducted training for certification staff on the policy and implementation using QCS’ database. QCS submitted the new policy, updated inspection checklist questions and the staff training records to the NOP. By the end of 2022, QCS plans to update all initial and final review checklists to include verification that OSPs includes compliant production practices for each product requested for certification, and verification that certified product lists are updated based on changes to the OSP and the most recent on-site inspection.

2024 Verification of Corrective Action: The auditors conducted a witness audit of a crops operation’s annual inspection and found that QCS issued the operation an organic certificate which listed crops that were not included in the OSP and not verified at the annual inspection.

2024 Corrective Action: QCS issued the relevant operation a revised certificate addendum listing only crops included in the operation's OSP and verified at the annual inspection. QCS revised the inspection checklist to include new prompts to list all crops viewed at inspection and for the inspector to explain how they verified compliant production practices for crops requested for certification. QCS conducted training for certification staff and inspectors on June 17 and June 24, 2024 covering crop verification practices, the new inspection checklist questions, and the requirement for reviewers to only list crops on an operation's certificate addendum if the inspector was able to verify production practices at inspection.

Noncompliances Identified during the Current Assessment and Corrective Actions

AIA-1539-24 - Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.501(a)(3) states, "A private or governmental entity accredited as a certifying agent under this subpart must: Carry out the provisions of the Act and the regulations in this part, including the provisions of §§205.402 through 205.406 and §205.670;"

Comments: *QCS does not carry out the provisions of the Act and the regulations. The auditors reviewed certification files and found that QCS does not require operations to provide a description of practices and procedures as required by § 205.201(a)(1). The operation's organic system plan (OSP) did not describe how it complies with the seed and planting stock practice standard, § 205.204(a).*

Corrective Action: QCS revised its Organic Grower Plan (OGP) Section 5 to include a new section for operations to describe their efforts to source organics seeds and how they document seed searches, and a reminder to operations that recordkeeping for commercial availability searches is required. Additionally, QCS developed a Seed and Planting Stock Record template for operations to use to document seed and planting stock purchases and commercial availability searches. QCS implemented the new and revised forms on October 1, 2024, and plans to release them to clients on November 8, 2024; clients will be informed to submit the required updates with their 2025 annual update. QCS plans to conduct training for certification staff and inspectors on the updates to the OGP, verifying seed and planting stock records and evaluating commercial availability searches by December 3, 2024.

AIA-1540-24 - Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.501(a)(3) states, "A private or governmental entity accredited as a certifying agent under this subpart must: Carry out the provisions of the Act and the regulations in this part, including the provisions of §§205.402 through 205.406 and §205.670;"

Comments: *QCS does not always carry out the provisions of the Act and regulations. QCS does not consistently ensure that organic system plans (OSP) accurately describe the operation and its activities. The auditors reviewed certification files and conducted interviews with certification staff and identified that a livestock operation's OSP stated that prohibited treatments would be withheld from sick animals to preserve organic status. QCS reviewers and inspectors did not identify this as a noncompliant practice and did not require additional information from the operation.*

Corrective Action: QCS confirmed that the relevant operation's OSP erroneously stated it would withhold treatment from sick animals to preserve their organic status, in contradiction with other information in the OSP. QCS submitted the inspection report from the witness audit which indicated that the OSP was incorrect and the inspector did not observe any evidence of the operation withholding treatment from sick animals, and submitted the operation's updated OSP with the error corrected. QCS conducted training for all staff on June 24, 2024 on the

requirement to obtain additional information during review and inspection when there are contradictions or apparent noncompliant practices described in the OSP.

AIA-1541-24 - Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.501(a)(3) states, “A private or governmental entity accredited as a certifying agent under this subpart must: Carry out the provisions of the Act and the regulations in this part, including the provisions of §§205.402 through 205.406 and §205.670;”

Comments: *QCS does not consistently carry out the provisions of the Act and the regulations. During a review audit, the auditors interviewed the operation’s staff and found that QCS inspectors routinely provide more than four hours advance notification prior to unannounced inspections. This practice does not meet the requirements of **NOP 2609 Unannounced Inspections**, which only allows up to four hours advance notice in extenuating circumstances.*

Corrective Action: QCS revised its “Organic Inspection Manual” to state that inspectors may provide operations no more than four hours advance notice of an unannounced inspection in specific extenuating circumstances, and to require the inspector to document the amount of advance notice and reason for any prior notification in the unannounced inspection report. Additionally, QCS added a prompt to their inspection checklist for documenting any advanced notice for an unannounced inspection. On June 17, 2024, QCS conducted training for inspectors on their policy for advanced notice of unannounced inspections and revisions to the manual and the inspection checklist.

AIA-1542-24 - Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.501(a)(2) states, “A private or governmental entity accredited as a certifying agent under this subpart must: Demonstrate the ability to fully comply with the requirements for accreditation set forth in this subpart.”

Comments: *QCS does not demonstrate the ability to fully comply with the requirements for accreditation. The auditors reviewed QCS’ “Inspection Manual” and identified that QCS’ procedures allows for notification of unannounced inspections “a maximum of 2 hours before the close of business on the day before an unannounced inspection starting at or before 10am.” This does not meet the requirements of **NOP 2609 Unannounced Inspections**, which only allows for 4 hours notification prior to unannounced inspections.*

Corrective Action: QCS revised its “Organic Inspection Manual” to state that inspectors may provide operations no more than four hours advance notice of an unannounced inspection in specific extenuating circumstances, and to require the inspector to document the amount of advance notice and reason for any prior notification in the unannounced inspection report. Additionally, QCS added a prompt to the inspection checklist for documenting any advanced notice for an unannounced inspection. On June 17, 2024, QCS conducted training for inspectors on their policy for advanced notice of unannounced inspections and revisions to the manual and the inspection checklist.

AIA-1543-24 - Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.501(a)(2) states, “A private or governmental entity accredited as a certifying agent under this subpart must: Demonstrate the ability to fully comply with the requirements for accreditation set forth in this subpart.”

Comments: *QCS does not fully implement the NOP’s international organic trade arrangement policies and procedures, which are outlined in the NOP’s International Trade Policies resources. The auditors reviewed QCS’ Product Verification Forms and identified that some products exported under the US-Canada Organic Equivalency Arrangement are listed with the incorrect attestation statement, “Certified in compliance with the terms of the U.S.-Canada Organic Equivalency Arrangement.”*

Corrective Action: QCS updated its electronic system that generates the Product Verification Form with the correct attestation statement for U.S.-Canada Organic Equivalency Arrangement. QCS submitted an example of a Product Verification Form generated from the system with the correct attestation statement. QCS plans to systematically update the Product Verification Forms for all operations at their next annual renewal.

AIA-1544-24 - Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.403(c)(1) states, “The onsite inspection of an operation must verify: The operation's compliance or capability to comply with the Act and the regulations in this part;”

Comments: *During the witness audit of a crops and livestock inspection, the auditors observed that the inspector did not fully verify the operation’s compliance with the USDA organic regulations, specifically, the recordkeeping requirements. The auditors identified that the inspector did not review any livestock feed purchase records, such as weight tickets, bills of lading, and transportation documentation, when verifying whether the operation was implementing its organic system plan (OSP).*

Corrective Action: QCS collected and reviewed livestock feed purchase records from the relevant operation and verified the operation was implementing its OSP. QCS revised its inspection checklist to include prompts for verifying specific types of records for purchased incoming materials including livestock feed and added a prompt for the inspector to describe the types of documents used to verify incoming materials records. On June 17 and June 24, 2024, QCS conducted training for certification staff and inspectors on the updates to the inspection checklist and the requirement for inspectors to verify records at inspection.

AIA-1552-24 - Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.403(c)(1) states, “The onsite inspection of an operation must verify: The operation's compliance or capability to comply with the Act and the regulations in this part;”

Comments: *QCS inspectors do not fully verify an operation’s compliance with the USDA organic regulations. The auditors reviewed certification files and found that an inspector did not follow QCS’ procedures and did not conduct sufficient mass balance or traceability audit exercises during an annual inspection of a livestock operation. The auditors found the following issues:*

- 1. The inspection report showed the inspector conducted a mass balance of egg production over four days, which QCS confirmed was not appropriate for the size of the operation.*
- 2. The inspector did not follow QCS’ procedures for verifying an operation’s compliance through mass balance and traceability audit exercises. The inspector did not conduct a mass balance for an input in use and did not conduct a traceability audit for a livestock product through all stages of production, handling, and sale as required by the QCS inspection report template and QCS’ policies and procedures.*

Corrective Action: QCS conducted follow-up audit trail exercises with the relevant operations, including mass balance exercises on egg production and feed consumption and a traceability exercise for milk, and submitted documentation for the exercises supporting their determination that the exercises were successful. QCS updated their “Organic Inspection Manual” to clarify required procedures and parameters for traceability and mass balance audits. On June 17 and 24, 2024, QCS conducted training for certification staff and inspectors covering the applicable regulatory requirements, QCS policies for traceability and mass balance exercises at inspection, and reviewer responsibilities for notifying QCS management if the required exercises are not completed at inspection so inspector performance issues can be promptly addressed.

NATIONAL ORGANIC PROGRAM: AUDIT & CORRECTIVE ACTION REPORT

GENERAL INFORMATION

- **Certifier Name** Quality Certification Services (QCS)
- **Physical Address** 5700 Southwest 34th Street, Gainesville, Florida 32608
U.S.A
- **Audit Type** Renewal Assessment
- **Auditor(s) & Audit Dates** Sherry Aultman, Alicia Hudson; Audit: 09/13/2021 –
09/17/2021
- **Audit Identifier** NOP-24-21

CERTIFIER OVERVIEW

Quality Certification Services (QCS) is the certification program of Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc., a non-profit organization. QCS was accredited as a certifying agent on April 29, 2002 to the following scopes: Crops, Wild crops, Livestock, and Handling.

QCS certifies 1,118 operations to the following certification scopes: Crops (735), Wild Crops (7), Livestock (233), and Handler/Processor/Exporters (3324). QCS certifies 24 grower groups in Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Indonesia, and the United States (Virginia). QCS has certified operations in the following US states/territories: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, Puerto Rico, and US Virgin Islands. QCS has certified operations in the following countries: Bahamas, Canada, China, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Indonesia, Jamaica, Turkey, and Vietnam.

QCS' main office is in Gainesville, Florida. QCS' staff (86) consists of: Directors (2), Managers (9), Certification Reviewer/Officers (22), Inspectors (35), Material Review and Training Specialists (3), and Administrative/Support Staff (15). QCS has regional offices located in the Dominican Republic and Ecuador.

NOP DETERMINATION:

NOP reviewed the audit results to determine whether QCS' corrective actions adequately addressed previous noncompliances. NOP also reviewed any corrective actions submitted as a result of noncompliances issued from findings identified during the audit.

Any noncompliance labeled as “**Cleared**,” indicates that the corrective actions for the noncompliance are determined to be implemented and working effectively. Any noncompliance labeled as “**Accepted**” indicates acceptance of the corrective actions and verification of corrective action implementation will be conducted during the next audit.

Noncompliances from Prior Assessments

AIA-3457-20 - Cleared.

AIA-3458-20 - Cleared.

AIA-3459-20 - Cleared.

AIA-3460-20 - Cleared.

AIA-3461-20 - Cleared.

AIA-3462-20 - Cleared.

Noncompliances Identified during the Current Assessment and Corrective Actions

AIA-7744-21 - Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.403(a)(1) states, “A certifying agent must conduct an initial on-site inspection of each production unit, facility, and site that produces or handles organic products and that is included in an operation for which certification is requested. An on-site inspection shall be conducted annually thereafter for each certified operation that produces or handles organic products for the purpose of determining whether to approve the request for certification or whether the certification of the operation should continue.”

Comments: *QCS did not conduct an annual inspection of all its certified operations in 2020. The auditors reviewed certification files and conducted interviews with certification staff and found that annual inspections were not conducted for 137 certified operations in 2020.*

Corrective Action: QCS determined it was unable to complete all required inspections in 2020 due to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the second quarter of 2020, QCS implemented procedures, including a risk assessment, for conducting emergency remote inspections and hybrid inspections when fully on-site inspections are not possible. QCS trained certification staff and inspectors on these procedures on March 31, 2020 and provided additional guidance to staff and inspectors via email on April 17, 2020. QCS implemented a new certification database and submitted a progress report demonstrating that QCS is on track to complete all 2022 annual inspections before the end of 2022. Additionally, QCS created a new administrative position (Certification Project Coordinator) to oversee the annual update process for US clients and revised its inspection scheduling process for renewing operations. QCS submitted the emergency remote/hybrid inspection procedures and risk assessment checklist, training materials and attendance logs, Certification Project Coordinator job description and revised inspection scheduling procedure.

AIA-7745-21 - Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.403(a)(2)(ii) states, “The Administrator of State organic program’s governing State official may require that additional inspection be performed by the certifying agent for the purpose of determining compliance with the Act and the regulations in this part.”

Comments: *QCS did not conduct unannounced inspections of 5% of its total certified operations in 2020, which does not comply with NOP 2609 Instruction: Unannounced Inspections. The auditors review of certification files found that QCS conducted unannounced inspections of 3% of its certified operations in 2020.*

Corrective Action: QCS updated its system for scheduling, performing, and tracking unannounced inspections to include evenly distributing unannounced inspections throughout the year, generating monthly progress reports to inform adjustments to the unannounced inspection plan, and incorporating the ability to conduct occasional remote unannounced inspections. QCS submitted a report to the NOP documenting that it completed unannounced inspections of 5.16% of its certified operations in 2021, and demonstrating it is on track to complete the required number of unannounced inspections in 2022.

AIA-7746-21 - Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.501(a)(3) states, “A private or governmental entity accredited as a certifying agent under this subpart must: Carry out the provisions of the Act and the regulations in this part, including the provisions of §§205.402 through 205.406 and §205.670;”

Comments: *QCS does not consistently verify sufficient information to determine the compliance of input materials. The auditors’ review of certification files and input documentation found the following:*

1. *QCS did not request or review documentation to verify the identity of ingredients within a multi-ingredient pesticide product.*
2. *QCS accepted composition and manufacturing process information from the supplier of an input material over the phone without verifying that the supplier has full knowledge of the composition or manufacturing process of the material.*
3. *QCS did not request or review documentation to verify the identity or compliance of ingredients within a multi-ingredient fertilizer product even though documentation provided by the manufacturer indicated a potentially synthetic input was used.*

Corrective Action: QCS implemented the following corrective actions:

1. QCS obtained and submitted to the NOP ingredient identification documentation for one ingredient in the multi-ingredient pesticide product. QCS’ investigation into a second ingredient’s identity found evidence that the ingredient may be a prohibited substance. QCS also submitted a request to NOP for a final determination about compliance of this product, due to the fact that other USDA accredited certifiers have approved the product. QCS revised its material review procedure to require staff to review all information provided for an input, even if it exceeds what QCS requires to be submitted, and to clarify any discrepancies with the manufacturer before making a compliance determination. QCS notified certification staff of the revision on January 20, 2023 and submitted the revised procedure to NOP.
2. QCS obtained ingredient composition documentation for the input material. QCS updated its material review procedures to require input disclosure forms for single-

ingredient inputs to ensure ingredient verification is obtained from an acceptable source. QCS collected the input disclosure form from the manufacturer and completed a review of the information on November 2, 2022. QCS submitted the ingredient composition documentation, the revised material review procedure, the manufacturer correspondence and input review documentation for the material to the NOP.

3. QCS submitted documentation to the NOP confirming the multi-ingredient fertilizer product is approved by another USDA accredited certifier. QCS confirmed with the product manufacturer that no synthetic ingredients are used in the manufacturing process. QCS updated their internal crop material review guidance to include requirements for animal hides and skins, leather and leather by-products in soil fertility inputs, and updated their crop input disclosure form to include verification for animal hides and skins. QCS submitted a copy of the manufacturer correspondence, the updated crop input review guidance and updated disclosure form to the NOP.
4. On August 30 and September 12, 2022, QCS trained certification and material review staff on the changes to material review policies and procedures. QCS submitted copies of the training materials and attendance list.

AIA-7747-21 - Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.501(a)(4) states, “A private or governmental entity accredited as a certifying agent under this subpart must: Use a sufficient number of adequately trained personnel, including inspectors and certification review personnel, to comply with and implement the organic certification program established under the Act and the regulations in subpart E of this part;”

Comments: *QCS does not consistently train personnel to comply with and implement its USDA organic certification program. The auditor’s review of a fertilizer applied to land requested for certification found that a reviewer in the Ecuador office did not follow QCS’s material input review policy or subsequent direction from QCS management. At no point in the review was the full composition of the fertilizer reviewed for compliance. The land to which this fertilizer was applied was determined to be eligible for organic certification based upon an attestation of compliance to EU organic regulations and the assumption that a synthetic ingredient disclosed on the product label was a processing aid not present in the final product.*

Corrective Action: QCS conducted material review training on April 8, 2022 with all staff at the Ecuador office, including a review of internal material review policies and procedures and instructions on how to proceed when a material review is inconclusive. QCS evaluated the input in question, a high nitrogen liquid fertilizer (HNLF), and determined that it did not contain any prohibited ingredients but could not be approved for use as QCS does not have procedures to conduct material reviews of HNLFs as required by NOP 5012. QCS updated its crop material review guidance to reference section 4 of NOP 5012, implemented a new policy on evaluating operations’ use of high nitrogen liquid fertilizers, and has planned training for certification staff on this topic by spring of 2023. QCS hired an International Compliance Specialist, a new position responsible for providing technical training and guidance to Latin America office staff. Additionally, QCS is translating its internal material review policies and procedures into Spanish with expected completion by the end of 2022. QCS submitted the April 2022 training agenda and attendance log, material review guidance and new policy, fertilizer label and record of QCS’ evaluation of the product, and International Compliance Specialist job description to the NOP.

AIA-7749-21 - Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.404(b)(1) – (4) states, “The certifying agent must issue a certificate of organic operation which specifies the: Name and address of the certified operation; effective date of certification; Categories of organic operation, including crops, wild crops, livestock, or processed products produced by the certified operation; and Name, address, and telephone number of the certifying agent.”

Comments: *QCS’s organic certificates do not fully comply with the requirements of the USDA organic regulations at §205.100(a) or the requirements of NOP 2603 Instructions Organic Certificates, section 3.2 “Only one operation per organic certificate.” The auditors’ review of organic certificates found that QCS lists multiple legal entities on a single organic certificate. The certificate lists two legal entities registered to two distinct owners and registered as two distinct business types. Entity 1 is a corporation and Entity 2 is an LLC.*

Corrective Action: QCS updated the identified organic certificates to list only one legal entity. QCS implemented a policy that requires a certified operation’s legal entity name to be listed on the certificate and describes how QCS verifies legal entity information for each operation. QCS also updated all organic system plan (OSP) forms to clarify that the operation name must be a legal entity. On January 24, 2022, QCS conducted training for certification staff on the new policy and updated OSP forms. QCS submitted the updated organic certificates, new legal entity name policy, updated OSP forms and record of staff training to the NOP.

AIA-7750-21 - Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.406(d) states, “If the certifying agent determines that the certified operation is complying with the Act and the regulations in this part and that any of the information specified on the certificate of organic operation has changed, the certifying agent must issue an updated certificate of organic operation pursuant to §205.404(b).”

Comments: *QCS does not consistently verify that certified operations comply with the Act and the regulations prior to issuing updated organic certificates. In one file reviewed, QCS did not remove products from an organic certificate when it was verified that the operation’s organic system plan no longer contained compliant production practices for those products. In another file, a product was added to an operation’s certificate even though the organic system plan did not contain production practices for that product and therefore could not be verified.*

Corrective Action: QCS updated the certified products lists for the two operations and submitted them to the NOP. QCS implemented an internal policy to ensure that all operations’ organic system plans (OSP) describe compliant production practices for the products listed on the organic certificate. QCS also updated all inspection checklists to specifically verify compliant production practices for the products requested for certification. On August 8, 2022, QCS conducted training for certification staff on the policy and implementation using QCS’ database. QCS submitted the new policy, updated inspection checklist questions and the staff training records to the NOP. By the end of 2022, QCS plans to update all initial and final review checklists to include verification that OSPs includes compliant production practices for each product requested for certification, and verification that certified product lists are updated based on changes to the OSP and the most recent on-site inspection.

AIA-7903-21 - Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.501(a)(2) states, “A private or governmental entity accredited as a certifying agent under this subpart must: Demonstrate the ability to fully comply with the requirements for accreditation set forth in this subpart.”

Comments: *QCS does not fully implement the NOP’s international organic trade arrangement policies and procedures, which are outlined in the NOP’s International Trade Policies resources. The auditors review of certification files found labels for products exported to the EU did not indicate which ingredients were organic as required by the EU organic regulation 834/2007 Article 23(4).*

Corrective Action: QCS notified the operation of the noncompliant labels on July 28, 2022, and the operator confirmed they will discontinue using the noncompliant version. QCS plans to review the updated labels upon receipt and will verify at next inspection that only approved labels have been used. QCS updated its review checklist to include verification that all label ingredient statements, including translations for export, identify organic ingredients. QCS notified all US personnel on July 28, 2022 of the revised checklist question, reiterated the ingredient statement requirements and provided guidance on addressing noncompliant labels which were previously approved. QCS submitted the operator correspondence, the revised checklist question, and a copy of the staff communication to the NOP.

NATIONAL ORGANIC PROGRAM: CORRECTIVE ACTION REPORT

AUDIT AND REVIEW PROCESS

An onsite Mid-Term Assessment of the Quality Certification Services (QCS) organic program was conducted on August 5-8, 2019. The National Organic Program (NOP) reviewed the auditor's report and QCS' corrective actions to assess QCS' compliance to the USDA organic regulations. This report provides the results of NOP's assessment.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Applicant Name	Quality Certification Services (QCS)
Physical Address	5700 SW 34 th Street, Suite 349, Gainesville, FL 32608
Mailing Address	PO Box 12311, Gainesville, FL 32604
Contact & Title	Ram Balasubramanian, Chief Operating Officer
E-mail Address	ram@qcsinfo.org
Phone Number	352-377-0133
Reviewer & Auditors	Penny Zuck, NOP Reviewer; Lars Crail & Jason Lopez, Onsite Auditors.
Program	USDA National Organic Program (NOP)
Review & Audit Date(s)	Corrective Action review: March 26, 2020 and April 23, 2020 NOP assessment review: October 8, 2019 Onsite audit: August 5-8, 2019
Audit Identifier	NOP-03-19
Action Required	None
Audit & Review Type	Mid-Term Assessment
Audit Objective	To evaluate the conformance to the audit criteria; and to verify the implementation and effectiveness of the QCS certification system.
Audit & Determination Criteria	7 CFR Part 205, National Organic Program as amended
Audit & Review Scope	MCS' certification services in carrying out the audit criteria during the period: February 2017 through July 2019

QCS is the Certification Program of Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc., a non-profit organization. QCS was accredited as a certifying agent on April 29, 2002 to the following scopes: Crops, Wild crops, Livestock, and Handling.

QCS certifies 1267 operations to the following certification scopes: Crops (835), Wild Crops (4), Livestock (274), and Handler/Processor/Exporters (352). QCS certifies 25 grower groups. One grower group is in the United States. Certification services occur in the following countries: Bahamas, Canada, China, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, France, Guatemala, Indonesia, Jamaica, Malaysia, Mexico, South Africa, United States, and Vietnam.

QCS' office is in Gainesville, Florida. QCS' staff (81) consists of: Senior Management (4), Certification Staff to include inspectors (63), and Administrative/support staff (14). QCS has two regional offices located in the Dominican Republic and Ecuador.

As part of the onsite accreditation audit activities, three witness audits were conducted of inspections of a grower group, crops, livestock, and handler/processor operations.

NOP DETERMINATION:

NOP reviewed the onsite audit results to determine whether QCS' corrective actions adequately addressed previous noncompliances. NOP also reviewed any corrective actions submitted as a result of noncompliances issued from Findings identified during the onsite audit.

Non-compliances from Prior Assessments

Any noncompliance labeled as “**Cleared**,” indicates that the corrective actions for the noncompliance are determined to be implemented and working effectively. Any noncompliance labeled as “**Accepted**” indicates acceptance of the corrective actions and verification of corrective action implementation will be conducted during the next onsite audit.

AP-384-18.NC1 – Cleared
AP-384-18.NC2 – Cleared
AP-40-18.NC1 – Cleared
AP-371-18.NC1 – Cleared
AP-371-18.NC2 – Cleared
NP4230LCA.NC5 – Cleared
NP7023NNA.NC1 – Cleared
NP7023NNA.NC2 – Cleared
NP7023NNA.NC3 – Cleared
NP7023NNA.NC4 – Cleared
NP7023NNA.NC5 – Cleared
NP7023NNA.NC6 – Cleared
NP7023NNA.NC7 – Cleared

Non-compliances Identified during the Current Assessment and Corrective Actions

Any noncompliance labeled as “**Accepted**,” indicates that the corrective actions for the noncompliance are accepted by the NOP and will be verified for implementation and effectiveness during the next onsite audit.

NOP-03-19.NC1 – Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.642 states, “The certifying agent shall provide each applicant with an estimate of the total cost of certification and an estimate of the annual cost of updating the certification.”

Comments: *A fee estimate for annual certification provided to an Ecuadorean operation did not include the estimated costs for inspector transportation, lodging, and meals. QCS certification staff indicated that this was a standard practice for Latin American operations.*

Corrective Actions: QCS updated the Ecuador fee estimate and structure to include language about fees for inspector meals, transportation, and lodging. The QCS Ecuador office is currently using the updated fee structure and estimate as evidenced by the examples submitted to the NOP that were sent to a client.

NOP-03-19.NC2 – Accepted. 7 C.F.R. § 205.662(a) states, “When an inspection, review, or investigation of a certified operation by a certifying agent or a State organic program's governing State official reveals any noncompliance with the Act or regulations in this part, a written notification of noncompliance shall be sent to the certified operation.”

Comments: *The following two issues were identified:*

- *QCS issued a noncompliance to an Ecuadorean operation for failure to submit an annual update and fees approximately two months after the anniversary date. The noncompliance should have been sent shortly after the anniversary date when the operation failed to submit its annual update.*
- *In one reviewed case, a noncompliance listed in a proposed suspension notification was not initially issued as a noncompliance along with the other stated noncompliances. The notice was not a combined noncompliance and proposed suspension. Hence, the operation receiving the proposed suspension was not previously notified and had no opportunity to respond to the noncompliance.*

Corrective Actions:

- QCS created and filled two new positions for Applications Coordinators in the US and Ecuador offices and clarified roles and responsibilities for staff person in Dominican Republic office to focus on the renewal process. These positions ensure timely renewal reminders are sent to certified operation, process incoming applications, and track operations that fail to submit their annual update. The work instruction, *Generating list of clients past renewal date* requires the designated staff person in each office to generate this list for the Administrative Compliance Specialist who issues notices of noncompliance to the operations, for failure to submit the annual update, no later than 15 business days after the operation’s anniversary date.
- All Certification Reviewers and the Administrative Compliance Specialist are required to complete the NOP Compliance and Enforcement Training in the Organic Integrity Learning Center. QCS is in the process of transitioning to a new certification database and this will include training the staff to issue adverse actions through the new database system in early 2020. The database is formatted to only allow a noncompliance to be listed on a proposed adverse action if it was part of a previously issued notice of noncompliance or if the proposed adverse action is combined with a notice of noncompliance.

NOP-03-19.NC3 – Accepted. 7C.F.R. §205.403(c)(1) states, “The on-site inspection of an operation must verify: The operation's compliance or capability to comply with the Act and the regulations in this part;”

Comments: *The auditor observed the following issues during a witness audit:*

- *The QCS inspector did not identify or inquire about a spill (what appeared to be petroleum oil) at the main farm milk house and a crushed oil filter on the floor of the salt/mineral storage shed. These occurrences were signs that maintenance or improvement of natural resources (§205.200) was not occurring.*
- *The inspector did not complete the in/out balance activity during the on-site inspection. The inspector completed the activity after the exit interview and off-site.*
- *The inspector did not assess and verify the operation's current physical on-farm feed inventories. Verification of current onsite feed volumes provide a benchmark to evaluate the plausibility of mass balance calculations.*

Corrective Actions:

- QCS management conducted training for staff on August 12, 2019 including the witness audit findings. The QCS Senior Organic Inspection Manager addressed the issues identified through a notice to all inspectors. The QCS annual inspector training in 2020 will include a refresher discussion of the noncompliances identified. The inspector who conducted the NOP witness audits will undergo a follow up witness audit evaluation by the end of the first quarter of 2020 to ensure improvements have been implemented.

NOP-03-19.NC4 – Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.501(a)(4) states, “A private or governmental entity accredited as a certifying agent under this subpart must: Use a sufficient number of adequately trained personnel, including inspectors and certification review personnel, to comply with and implement the organic certification program established under the Act and the regulations in subpart E of this part;”

Comments: *A witness audit and review of records revealed the following issues:*

- *The USDA organic regulatory citations recorded in several exit interview documents were not consistently accurate for the stated findings.*

Corrective Actions: QCS management conducted training for staff on August 12, 2019 including the witness audit findings. QCS will update the inspector training Module I-8 Exit Interviews to include the updated Exit Interview format and highlight the topic of exit interview citations. The quiz at the end of the module will be revised to include an assessment of the accuracy of USDA Organic Regulation citations. In addition to using this module to train new inspectors, QCS will assign the updated module to all NOP staff and contract inspectors for completion by May 30, 2020. The inspector who conducted the NOP witness audit will undergo a follow up witness audit evaluation by the end of the first quarter of 2020 to ensure improvements have been implemented.

NOP-03-19.NC5 – Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.403(d) states, “The inspector must conduct an exit interview with an authorized representative of the operation who is knowledgeable about the inspected operation to confirm the accuracy and completeness of inspection observations and information gathered during the on-site inspection. The inspector must also address the need for any additional information as well as any issues of concern.”

Comments: *The auditor's review of an exit interview document found that the recorded organic system plan updates, issues of concern, and additional information requests were indistinguishable from one another. Regulatory citations were included for all statements and bulleted points on the form; however, several citations were not applicable. The information*

recorded by the inspector and the format of the exit interview form made it difficult to determine whether a compliant exit interview was conducted.

Corrective Actions: QCS management conducted training for staff on August 12, 2019 including the witness audit findings. QCS revised the exit interview form with separate sections for the inspector to respond to each required exit interview component. The QCS Senior Organic Inspection Manager notified all inspectors of the updates and how to complete the new exit interview in the database.

NOP-03-19.NC6 – Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.501(a)(8) states, “A private or governmental entity accredited as a certifying agent under this subpart must: Provide sufficient information to persons seeking certification to enable them to comply with the applicable requirements of the Act and the regulations in this part.”

Comments: *Organic System Plan (OSP) templates are not adequately designed for operators to demonstrate compliance to §205.201(a)(3) in which there shall be “a description of the monitoring practices and procedures to be performed and maintained, including the frequency with which they will be performed, to verify that the plan is effectively implemented.”*

Corrective Actions: The QCS OSP’s are revised to include descriptions of monitoring practices and procedures to be performed and maintained, including the frequency with which they will be performed, to verify the plan is effectively implemented. QCS plans to have the Spanish version documents revised and implemented by June 2020.

NATIONAL ORGANIC PROGRAM: CORRECTIVE ACTION REPORT

AUDIT AND REVIEW PROCESS

The National Organic Program (NOP) received Quality Certification Services (QCS) accreditation renewal application to maintain U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) accreditation as an organic certifier on November 2, 2016. The NOP has reviewed QCS' renewal application, conducted an onsite audit, and reviewed the audit report to determine QCS' capability to operate as a USDA accredited certifier.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Applicant Name	Quality Certification Services (QCS)
Physical Address	214 W. University Avenue, Suite A, Gainesville, FL 32601
Mailing Address	P.O. Box 12311, Gainesville, FL 32604
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E-mail Address	ram@qcsinfo.org
Phone Number	(352) 377-0133
Reviewer(s) & Auditor(s)	Penny Zuck, NOP Reviewer; Patty Heckart and Robert Yang, Onsite Auditors.
Program	USDA National Organic Program (NOP)
Review & Audit Date(s)	CA review: August 18, 2017 NOP assessment review: March 17, 2017 Onsite audit: January 23-26, 2017; February 6-9, 2017 (grower group witness audit)
Audit Identifier	NP7023NNA
Action Required	Yes – see NP4230LCA.NC5
Audit & Review Type	Renewal Assessment
Audit Objective	To evaluate the conformance to the audit criteria; and to verify the implementation and effectiveness of QCS's certification system.
Audit & Determination Criteria	7 CFR Part 205, National Organic Program as amended
Audit & Review Scope	QCS's certification services in carrying out the audit criteria during the period: August 19, 2014 through February 9, 2017

QCS is the Certification Program of Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc., which is a non-profit organization. QCS was accredited as a certifying agent on April 29, 2002 to the National Organic Program (NOP) for crops, wild crops, livestock, and handling operations.

QCS certifies 1096 operations to the following scopes: Crops (753), Wild Crops (3), Livestock (228), and Handler/Processor/Exporters (300). QCS certifies 13 grower groups outside of the U.S. Certification services occur in the following countries: Belgium, Bahamas, Dominican

Republic, Ecuador, France, Guatemala, Jamaica, Malaysia, Mexico, Puerto Rico, South Africa, Vietnam, and the Virgin Islands.

QCS' office is located in Gainesville, Florida. QCS' staff consists of: Technical Staff (21), Inspectors (56), and Administrative/support staff (8).

As part of the onsite accreditation audit activities, two witness audits (WA) were conducted on a crops grower group operation and one handler/processor operation. A witness audit will be conducted at a livestock (cattle)/crops operation at a later date during grazing season and reported with another audit identifier.

NOP DETERMINATION:

NOP reviewed the onsite audit results to determine whether QCS's corrective actions adequately addressed previous noncompliances. NOP also reviewed any corrective actions submitted as a result of noncompliances issued from Findings identified during the onsite audit.

Non-compliances from Prior Assessments

Any noncompliance labeled as "**Cleared**," indicates that the corrective actions for the noncompliance are determined to be implemented and working effectively. Any noncompliance labeled as "**Outstanding**" indicates that either the auditor could not verify implementation of the corrective actions or that records reviewed and audit observations did not demonstrate compliance. Any noncompliance labeled as "**Accepted**" indicates acceptance of the corrective actions and verification of corrective action implementation will be conducted during the next onsite audit.

NP4188MVA.NC1 – Cleared

NP4188MVA.NC2 – Cleared

NP4188MVA.NC3 – Cleared

NP4188MVA.NC4 – Cleared

NP4230LCA.NC1 – Cleared

NP4230LCA.NC2 – Cleared

NP4230LCA.NC3 – Cleared

NP4230LCA.NC4 – Cleared

NP4230LCA.NC5 – Accepted. 7 CFR §205.403(a)(2)(ii) and NOP 2609, Unannounced Inspections states that, "... certifying agents conduct unannounced inspections of 5 percent of their total certified operations per year..."

Comments: *QCS' January 2, 2013 submitted List of Certified Operations indicates 661 total operations and a minimum of 33 operations are expected to receive unannounced inspections for 2013. During 2013, QCS conducted unannounced inspections of 29 operations.*

Corrective Actions: At the beginning of 2014 the *QCS Certification Policy Manual* and *QCS Certification Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)* were both amended to reflect the five percent unannounced inspection requirement. The QCS Administrative Manager was also tasked with meeting this regulatory requirement. QCS has 835 total operations based on the January 2, 2014

list sent to the NOP; a minimum of 41 operations were required to have an unannounced inspection in 2014. QCS conducted a total of 42 unannounced inspections by the end of 2014. The *2014 QCS Unannounced Inspection List, Policy Manual and Standard Operating Procedures* were provided to the NOP. QCS reviewed and discussed the progress of the five percent unannounced inspections for operations with staff during its November 2014 staff meeting. A Training Memo regarding this change was also issued to staff. The minimum requirement will also be addressed as an agenda item during a January 2015 staff meeting.

2016 Verification of Corrective Actions: QCS did not meet the five percent of operations requirement for unannounced inspections in 2016. QCS indicated there were 955 operations on Jan 1, 2016, which would require 48 unannounced inspections. 44 unannounced inspections were conducted during 2016.

2017 Corrective Actions: QCS has implemented the following strategies: 1) Improved planning by developing an unannounced inspection plan earlier in the year 2017. The plan includes conducting unannounced inspections of 66 operations, which is more than 5% of total certified operations. As of May 2017, 17 of the unannounced inspections have occurred. 2) Improved communication with inspectors by notifying the inspectors of deadlines for conducting and submitting reports for unannounced inspections. 3) Increased oversight by the Inspection Coordinator who is providing monthly reports on the status of unannounced inspections at staff meetings. QCS has designated a staff inspector as the Inspection Manager to oversee the implementation of the unannounced inspection plan. Procedures in the Administrative Standards Operating Procedure for planning unannounced inspections has been updated to include the implemented strategies. QCS plans to hire an inspector who will focus in part on unannounced inspections.

Action Required: QCS should submit a report to the NOP by January 2, 2018 with all unannounced inspections that were conducted during the 2017 calendar year.

Non-compliances Identified during the Current Assessment

Any noncompliance labeled as “**Accepted**,” indicates that the corrective actions for the noncompliance are accepted by the NOP and will be verified for implementation and effectiveness during the next onsite audit.

NP7023NNA.NC1 – Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.662(e) states, “If the certified operation fails to correct the noncompliance, to resolve the issue through rebuttal or mediation, or to file an appeal of the proposed suspension or revocation of certification, the certifying agent shall send the certified operation a written notification of suspension or revocation.”

Comments: *QCS is issuing proposed settlement agreements to operations that are in proposed suspension without receiving a request for mediation or appeal, and/or completing the mediation process.*

Corrective Actions: The QCS Organic Certification Review Standards Operating Procedure has been revised to include mediation must be requested in writing and the process of mediation prior to a settlement agreement. OCS created a Mediation Request Form that certified operations may complete to request mediation. QCS provided training to all certification staff on March 15, 2017 to include this requirement. Copies of the staff training agenda, attendees list, and training slides on mediation were submitted to the NOP.

NP7023NNA.NC2 – Accepted. 7 C.F.R. §205.663 Mediation states, “Any dispute with respect to denial of certification or proposed suspension or revocation of certification under this part may be mediated at the request of the applicant for certification or certified operation and with acceptance by the certifying agent. Mediation shall be requested in writing to the applicable certifying agent.”

Comments: *QCS has a procedure for mediation after a proposed suspension is issued to an operator. However, QCS does not require the operator to request mediation in writing.*

Corrective Actions: The QCS Organic Certification Review Standards Operating Procedure has been revised to include mediation must be requested in writing and the process of mediation prior to a settlement agreement. OCS created a Mediation Request Form that certified operations may complete to request mediation. QCS provided training to all certification staff on March 15, 2017 to include this requirement. Copies of the staff training agenda, attendees list, and training slides on mediation were submitted to the NOP.

NP7023NNA.NC3 – Accepted. 7 C.F.R. § 205.501(a)(21) states, “... a certifying agent under this subpart must: Comply with, implement, and carry out any terms and conditions determined by the Administrator to be necessary.” Specifically, the U.S. – Korea Equivalency Arrangement is limited to “processed food” products that meet the definition of the Korean Food Code.

Comments: *QCS approved a tobacco strip product, which does not meet the definition of “processed food” under the Korean Food Code, for export under the U.S - Korea Equivalency Arrangement. A review of documentation and interviews with staff indicated that the product has not been exported to Korea.*

Corrective Actions: QCS notified the operation that tobacco cannot be exported to Korea under the terms of the US-Korea Equivalency Arrangement. QCS removed the listing for tobacco strip product certified to the terms of the US-Korea Equivalency Arrangement from the operation’s list of organic products. QCS informed certification reviewers that organic tobacco and organic tobacco products do not fall under the Korean Food Code definition of “processed products” and may not be exported to Korea under the US-Korea Equivalency Arrangement and presented this information during a full staff meeting on May 1, 2017.

NP7023NNA.NC4 – Accepted. 7 C.F.R. § 205.501(a)(21) states, “... a certifying agent under this subpart must: Comply with, implement, and carry out any terms and conditions determined by the Administrator to be necessary.”

Comments: *A review of export certificates issued by QCS for products exported to Japan under the U.S. – Japan Equivalency Arrangement indicated that the compliance statement in the Remarks section was incorrect. The certificates either stated, “Products covered under this export certificate are not known to be produced with alkali-extracted humic acid, or lignin sulfonate as a flotation agent” or “Organic agricultural products and organic processed products, accompanied by this Certificate, were produced or processed using zero prohibited substances.”*

Corrective Actions: To facilitate maintenance of an up to date quality system, of which export certificates are one component, QCS created a new position, the Policy and Quality Assurance Manager, who will ensure adequate oversight of quality system updates in response to changes to standards or international agreements. QCS hired a Quality System Assistant who will be tasked

with identifying when changes to the Certification Manual and related documents are needed. QCS updated the TM-11 certificate template with the current Japan TM-11 from the NOP website. QCS notified administrative staff regarding the update to the TM-11 used for export to Japan.

NP7023NNA.NC5 – Accepted. 7 C.F.R. § 205.504 states, “... a certifying agent must submit the following documents and information to demonstrate ... its ability to fully comply with and implement the organic program established in §§ 205.100 and 205.101, §§ 205.201 through 205.203, §§ 205.300 through 205.303, §§ 205.400 through 205.406, and §§ 205.661 and 205.662;”

Comments: *QCS’ Certification Manual does not demonstrate QCS’ ability to fully comply in the following manner:*

1. *The manual incorrectly states that products intended for export to Japan must not be produced with alkali-extracted humic acid or lignin sulfonate as a flotation agent. Such requirements do not exist under the U.S. – Japan Equivalency Arrangement.*
2. *The manual incorrectly states the U.S. – Korea Equivalency Arrangement is limited to organic products for which the final processing or packaging occurs within the country of export either U.S. or Korea. The equivalency arrangement is limited to “processed food” products that meet the definition of the Korean Food Code. The code defines “processed food” as a “food manufactured, processed, and packaged”*
3. *The manual does not address the requirements for trade under the U.S. – Switzerland Equivalency Arrangement.*
4. *The manual states that if a client willfully violates, QCS reserves the right to not accept the client’s request to surrender certification. Additionally, the manual incorrectly cites § 205.504 as the applicable citation. QCS’s standard operating procedures, forms, and templates were corrected to allow surrender, but the Certification Manual was not updated.*
5. *The QCS Certification Process flow chart in the manual incorrectly states that a client can respond with corrective actions upon receiving a notice of proposed suspension. Pursuant to the USDA organic regulations, upon receiving a notice of proposed suspension, a certified operation may only request mediation or file an appeal.*
6. *The manual states that certificates are not issued until all fees have been paid or other arrangements have been made. This policy does not comply with the USDA organic regulations for issuing organic certificates.*

Corrective Actions:

- QCS created new positions to facilitate the maintenance of an up to date quality system, of which the Certification Manual is one component. The new Policy and Quality Assurance Manager will ensure adequate oversight of quality system updates in response to changes to standards or international agreements. QCS hired a Quality System Assistant who will be tasked with identifying when changes to the Certification Manual and related documents are needed.
- The QCS Certification Manual was updated to demonstrate compliance as follows:

- a. The USDA NOP-Japan Equivalency Arrangement section of the QCS Certification Manual and the TM-11 template were revised to state, “certified in compliance with the terms of the US-Japan Organic Equivalency Arrangement.”
 - b. The USDA NOP-Korea Equivalency Agreement section of the QCS Certification Manual was updated to specify that “This arrangement is limited to organic ‘**processed food**’ (emphasis added) products for which the final processing or packaging occurs within the country of export either US or Korea.” The manual also includes the Korean Food Code definition of ‘processed food.’
 - c. A new section was added to the QCS Certification manual, **USDA NOP/Switzerland Equivalency Arrangement**, which describes the requirements for trade under the U.S. Switzerland Equivalency Arrangement.
 - d. The Surrender of Certification section of the QCS Certification Manual was revised to state, “At any time a certified operation may surrender its organic certification through written notification...**QCS accepts all surrender requests**; however, operations that have surrendered NOP certification may be subject to noncompliances and adverse actions that must be corrected prior to any future organic certification.”
 - e. The QCS Certification Process flowchart was updated to remove any reference to corrective action after a proposed suspension/revocation is issued. QCS provided training to all staff during the 2017 QCS Annual Staff Training on this topic.
 - f. The statement “certificates are not issued until all fees have been paid or other arrangements have been made” was removed from the QCS Certification Manual, Section 10 Fees, Collection Policy and replaced with “QCA may issue a noncompliance followed by adverse action in as appropriate to any operator whose fees remain unpaid.”
- A memo was sent to all QCS staff on May 1, 2017, notifying them of the changes to the Certification Manual and reviewed at the staff meeting. QCS updated the job description for the Quality System Manager/Internal Auditor by clarifying responsibilities relating to updating the NOP Certification Standards Manual, QCS Certification Manual, and other regulatory manuals.

NP7023NNA.NC6 – Accepted. 7 C.F.R. § 205.403(c)(2) states, “The onsite inspection of an operation must verify: That the information, including the organic production and handling system plan, provided ... accurately reflects the practices used or to be used by the certified operation”

Comments: *During the annual onsite inspection of a handling operation, it was observed that the inspector did not verify whether the operation’s handling system plan accurately reflected the practices used by the operation. Example of sections in the operation’s Organic Handling Plan that were observed to be inaccurate during the witness inspection, but were not addressed by the inspector to be inaccurate included Pest Management; Cleaning and Sanitizing Substances; and Storage.*

Corrective Actions: QCS has removed the deficient inspector from the list of active inspectors and notified the inspector of the removal. QCS provided feedback to the inspector by completing a Witness Audit Evaluation based on the observations made by a QCS staff inspector during the USDA NOP Witness Audit. QCS scheduled a follow-up inspection with a different inspector at the facility. QCS issued Inspector Guidance 20170411 to all QCS staff and contract inspectors on

April 11, 2017 reiterating training points related to verification of the organic system plan and verifying organic certificates. Additional training of inspectors on the topics were covered during the 2017 QCS Annual Staff Training on March 16, 2017 and the annual training for contract inspectors scheduled on June 12, 2017.

NP7023NNA.NC7 – Accepted. 7 C.F.R. § 205.501(a)(5) states, “A certifying agent under this subpart must: Ensure that its ... contractors with inspection ... have sufficient expertise to successfully perform the duties assigned.”

Comments: *During the exit interview of the inspection, it was observed that the inspector incorrectly informed the operation that one of its supplier organic certificates was expired. The expired organic certificate was an EU organic certificate; not a USDA organic certificate.*

Corrective Actions: QCS has removed the deficient inspector from the list of active inspectors and notified the inspector of the removal. QCS provided feedback to the inspector by completing a Witness Audit Evaluation based on the observations made by a QCS staff inspector during the USDA NOP Witness Audit. QCS scheduled a follow-up inspection with a different inspector at the facility. QCS issued Inspector Guidance 20170411 to all QCS staff and contract inspectors on April 11, 2017 reiterating training points related to verification of the organic system plan and verifying organic certificates. Additional training of inspectors on the topics were covered during the 2017 QCS Annual Staff Training on March 16, 2017 and the annual training for contract inspectors scheduled on June 12, 2017.

NATIONAL ORGANIC PROGRAM: CORRECTIVE ACTION REPORT

AUDIT AND REVIEW PROCESS

The National Organic Program (NOP) conducted a Mid-term Assessment of Quality Certification Services. During July 2014, QCS underwent a NOP Compliance Assessment involving several Witness and Review Audits, focused on certified livestock operation activities. This onsite Mid-term Assessment was conducted and the audit report was reviewed to determine Quality Certification Services' capability to continue operating as a USDA accredited certifier. This two-day audit was limited in scope and intentionally did not conduct full file reviews of any livestock operations. One Witness Audit of a certified crop operation was conducted in Virginia during the month of July. A USDA ISO 17065 Program Reassessment was conducted concurrently with the NOP Mid-Term Assessment.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Applicant Name	Quality Certification Services (QCS)
Physical Address	1810 NW 6th Street, Suite F, Gainesville, FL 32604
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Contact & Title	Ram Balasubramanian, Chief Operating Officer
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Phone Number	(352) 377-0133
Reviewer & Auditors	Janna Howley, NOP Reviewer Lars Crail and Miguel Caceres, Onsite Auditors Mike Lopez, Grower Group Review Auditor
Program	USDA National Organic Program (NOP)
Review & Audit Dates	NOP assessment review: December 23, 2014 Onsite audit: August 18-19, 2014 Grower group review audit: October 30-31, 2014
Audit Identifier	NP4230LCA
Action Required	None
Audit & Review Type	Mid-Term Assessment
Audit Objective	To evaluate the conformance to the audit criteria; and to verify the implementation and effectiveness of QCS' certification system.
Audit & Determination Criteria	7 CFR Part 205, National Organic Program as amended
Audit & Review Scope	QCS' certification services in carrying out the audit criteria during the period: April 25, 2013 through August 19, 2014.

Quality Certification Services (QCS) is the Certification Program of Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc., a non-profit organization. QCS has been accredited as a certifying agent since April 29, 2002, to the National Organic Program (NOP) for crops, wild crops,

livestock, and handling scopes. QCS is currently certifying operations in the United States, China, Bahamas, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, Malaysia, Sweden, Peru, and South Africa. The QCS client list (at the time of this assessment) included a total of 727 certified operations, of which there were 569 crop, three wild crop, 156 livestock, and 212 handling operations certified to the NOP. In addition, QCS currently certifies five grower groups.

QCS has four offices, located in Gainesville, FL; Columbia, MO; Louisa, VA; and Quito, Ecuador. The main office is located in Gainesville and all certification activities are finalized in this office.

NOP DETERMINATION:

NOP reviewed the onsite audit results to determine whether QCS' corrective actions adequately addressed previous noncompliances. NOP also reviewed any corrective actions submitted as a result of noncompliances issued from Findings identified during the onsite audit.

Non-compliances from Prior Assessments

Any noncompliance labeled as “**Cleared**,” indicates that the corrective actions for the noncompliance are determined to be implemented and working effectively. Any noncompliance labeled as “**Outstanding**” indicates that either the auditor could not verify implementation of the corrective actions or that records reviewed and audit observations did not demonstrate compliance.

NP2155OOA.NC1 – Cleared

NP2155OOA.NC2 – Cleared

AIA4086MMK.NC1 – Cleared

AIA4086MMK.NC2 – Cleared

Non-compliances Identified during the Current Assessment

Any noncompliance labeled as “**Accepted**,” indicates that the corrective actions for the noncompliance are accepted by the NOP and will be verified for implementation and effectiveness during the next onsite audit.

NP4230LCA.NC1 – Accepted - 7 CFR §205.501(a)(3) states, “Carry out the provisions of the Act and the regulations in this part, including the provision of §§205.402 through 205.406 and §205.670.” Furthermore, 7 CFR §205.404(c) states, “Once certified, a production or handling operation’s organic certification continues in effect until surrendered by the organic operation...”

Comments: *The Notices of Proposed Suspension and Notices of Suspension state that QCS does not accept the surrender of certification under these circumstances. USDA organic regulations do not permit certifying agents to deny an operation the ability to surrender their organic certification in response to an adverse action.*

Corrective Actions: QCS' current policy is that the operator is provided the option of surrendering their certificate at any time. To improve compliance, QCS updated its process for accepting a surrender at any time. When a client requests to surrender their certification during adverse actions proceedings, a Surrender Form, along with the adverse action, is issued to the operator. The method for handling surrenders has been updated in the *QCS Certification Review*

Standard Operating Procedures, Section VII. Adverse action letters have been updated to remove any statements that would imply that surrender is denied based on any circumstances. The Organic System Plan template was also updated to remove similar statements. QCS reviewed the surrender policy with staff during its November 2014 staff meeting. A Training Memo regarding this change was also issued to staff. QCS provided the NOP with copies of the corrected and updated documents.

NP4230LCA.NC2 – Accepted - 7 CFR §205.662(c)(3) states, “The notification of proposed suspension shall state... The impact of a suspension or revocation on future eligibility for certification...”

Comments: *One Notice of Proposed Suspension that was issued stated a six month suspension period, while the subsequent Notice of Suspension that was issued indicated a suspension period of one year.*

Corrective Actions: QCS updated its *Certification Policies* to include a timetable guideline for suspensions and revocations. These guidelines state the recommended time periods and reiterate that when drafting the notice of suspension or revocation, the staff member must refer back to the stated timeframe in the proposed suspension or proposed revocation letter. Additionally, all variations of the notice of proposed suspension/revocation letters have been revised, with options to select for the specific periods of suspension/revocation. QCS provided the NOP with copies of the corrected and updated documents. QCS concluded that this was an isolated clerical error. The situation was discussed with the staff member that drafted the letter and their correspondence is currently being monitored for consistency. However, QCS also reviewed the suspension and revocation time period policy with staff during a November 2014 staff meeting. A Training Memo regarding this change was also issued to staff.

NP4230LCA.NC3 – Accepted - 7 CFR §205.501 (a)(21) states, “A private or governmental entity accredited as a certifying agent under this subpart must: Comply with, implement, and carry out any other terms and conditions determined by the Administrator to be necessary.” NOP PM 11-10, Grower Group Certification, states in the 2008 NOSB Recommendation that as criteria for group certification, “The certification is owned by the group, not any individual member or subunit, which may not represent itself as certified other than through the group.”

Comments: *One reviewed file indicated that QCS granted organic certification to a Grower Group owned by one entity, but this entity (an individual producer/processor) does not meet the requirements as a Grower Group and they contract with other producers to obtain additional product. Furthermore, QCS’ Certification Manual, Section 2.6, does not describe criteria in accordance with the USDA NOP policy for certification of a Grower Group.*

Corrective Actions: QCS’ criteria in its *QCS Certification Manual* are identical to the 2008 NOSB recommendations. QCS reviewed the grower group policy with staff during its November 2014 staff meeting. To date, QCS only certifies five grower groups, all of whose members are owned by the group, versus individual ownership. The operation reviewed by the USDA NOP has since been suspended from QCS; it was the only certified grower group with an individual owner. A Training Memo regarding NOP PM 11-10, Grower Group Certification was also issued to staff.

NP4230LCA.NC4 - Accepted - 7 CFR §205.670(d) states, “A certifying agent must, on an annual basis, sample and test from a minimum of five percent of the operations it certifies, rounded to the nearest whole number.”

Comments: *QCS’ January 2, 2013 submitted List of Certified Operations indicates 661 total operations and a minimum of 33 operations are required to be sampled for 2013. During 2013, QCS conducted residue testing sampling of 29 operations.*

Corrective Actions: At the beginning of 2014 the *QCS Certification Policy Manual* and *QCS Certification Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)* were both amended to reflect the five percent residue sampling requirement. The QCS Administrative Manager was also tasked with meeting this regulatory requirement. QCS has 835 total operations based on the January 2, 2014 list sent to the NOP; a minimum of 41 operations were required to have samples taken in 2014. QCS took a total of 44 samples by the end of 2014. The *2014 QCS Unannounced Inspection List, Policy Manual and Standard Operating Procedures* were provided to the NOP. QCS reviewed and discussed the progress of the five percent sampling requirement with staff during its November 2014 staff meeting. A Training Memo regarding this change was also issued to staff. The minimum requirement will also be addressed as an agenda item during a January 2015 staff meeting.

NP4230LCA.NC5 – Accepted - 7 CFR §205.403(a)(2)(ii) and NOP 2609, Unannounced Inspections states that, “... certifying agents conduct unannounced inspections of 5 percent of their total certified operations per year...”

Comments: *QCS’ January 2, 2013 submitted List of Certified Operations indicates 661 total operations and a minimum of 33 operations are expected to receive unannounced inspections for 2013. During 2013, QCS conducted unannounced inspections of 29 operations.*

Corrective Actions: At the beginning of 2014 the *QCS Certification Policy Manual* and *QCS Certification Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)* were both amended to reflect the five percent unannounced inspection requirement. The QCS Administrative Manager was also tasked with meeting this regulatory requirement. QCS has 835 total operations based on the January 2, 2014 list sent to the NOP; a minimum of 41 operations were required to have an unannounced inspection in 2014. QCS conducted a total of 42 unannounced inspections by the end of 2014. The *2014 QCS Unannounced Inspection List, Policy Manual and Standard Operating Procedures* were provided to the NOP. QCS reviewed and discussed the progress of the five percent unannounced inspections for operations with staff during its November 2014 staff meeting. A Training Memo regarding this change was also issued to staff. The minimum requirement will also be addressed as an agenda item during a January 2015 staff meeting.

NATIONAL ORGANIC PROGRAM: CORRECTIVE ACTION REPORT

Applicant Name	Quality Certification Services (QCS)
Physical Address	214 W. University, Suite A, Gainesville, FL 32601
Mailing Address	PO Box 12311, Gainesville, FL 32604
Contact & Title	Ramkrishnan Balasubramanian, Chief Executive Officer
E-mail Address	ram@qcsinfo.org
Phone Number	352-377-0133
Reviewer(s) & Auditor(s)	Renée Gebault King, NOP Reviewer; Miles McEvoy and Renee Mann, On-site Auditors.
Program	USDA National Organic Program (NOP)
Review & Audit Date(s)	NOP Review: November 19, 2014 On-site audit: July 7-11, 2014
Audit Identifier	NP4188MVA
Action Required	Yes, response to noncompliances
Audit & Review Type	Compliance Assessment
Audit Objective	To evaluate the conformance to the settlement agreement and to verify the implementation and effectiveness of QCS's corrective actions in response to the settlement agreement.
Audit & Determination Criteria	7 CFR Part 205, National Organic Program as amended
Audit & Review Scope	QCS's certification services in carrying out the audit criteria during the period: July 24, 2012 – July 11, 2014

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Quality Certification Services (QCS) is the Certification Program of Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc., which is a non-profit organization. QCS was accredited as a certifying agent on April 29, 2002 to the National Organic Program (NOP) for crops, wild crops, livestock, and handling operations. QCS also offers certification to the following international standards: Global Gap; European Union (EC 834/2007 and EC 889/2008), Canadian Organic Regime (COR), and Taiwan Export Standards.

QCS has two offices which are located in Gainesville, FL and Quito, Ecuador. The QCS main office is located in Gainesville, FL and all certification activities are finalized in this office. QCS has an Executive Director, a Chief Operating Officer, Certification Coordinators (CC), and administrative personnel. Some of the CC's can and do act as staff inspectors. QCS also uses contracted inspectors. Records reviewed verified that QCS was meeting the requirements for annual performance evaluations, confidentiality, and conflicts of interest disclosure reports for all personnel. In the spring of 2014, QCS reevaluated the livestock inspection staff and found two staff members who were not qualified to conduct ruminant livestock inspections. These staff members are no longer conducting ruminant inspections.

As part of the on-site assessment, two witness inspections and six review audits were conducted on certified operations (dairy livestock, crops), which were located in Northern Indiana. This compliance audit focused on activities at the Gainesville office.

Non-Compliances – Certifier Response Accepted

The NOP has reviewed the corrective actions submitted by the certifying agent and determined that they demonstrate sufficient compliance.

NP4188MVA.NC1 – Accepted – 7 CFR §205.403(c) states, “Verification of information. The on-site inspection of an operation must verify: (1) The operation’s compliance or capability to comply with the Act and the regulations in this part; (2) That the information, including the organic production or handling system plan, provided in accordance with §§205.401, 205.406, and 205.200, accurately reflects the practices used or to be used by the applicant for certification or by the certified operation; (3) That prohibited substances have not been and are not being applied to the operation through means which, at the discretion of the certifying agent, may include the collection and testing of soil; water; waste; seeds; plants tissue; and plant, animal, and processed product samples.” *Overall, during the witness inspections and review audits it was found that the OSPs were not complete regarding the list of inputs used. The QCS process for updating the OSP at the time of inspection is not standardized.*

- A) *During the review audits it was found that inspectors had not verified all of the operation’s compliance or capability to comply with the regulations. One inspector indicated that the producer had a closed herd with no purchased replacement animals. However, the producer indicated that two replacement heifers were purchased. One inspector did not indicate any health care practices or inputs used for pink eye or milk fever, nor were the products on the OSP or previous inspection report, yet the producer used products for both of these health issues. Some additional health inputs were not listed on the plan, including bolus products, but the inspector reported that the health product input list in the plan was complete.*
- B) *During one review audit the auditor discovered that the operator had 14 inputs onsite that were not described in the OSP or in the input list verified by QCS. One review audit found 27 inputs onsite that were not in the OSP or noted in the inspection report. This issue had been mentioned as a minor noncompliance in 2012 or addressed in 2013. The operation did not seem to maintain a complete record of the inputs it used. The operation used a product containing zinc sulfate, which is not allowed as a foot bath, but the operator stated that a previous inspector had approved the product.*

Corrective Actions: QCS revised the Input Review Procedure, which requires that all clients receive written confirmation of the approval status of each new input, in addition to sending a full list of approved inputs when client organic certificates are issued. QCS also revised the Combined Certification Docs template to incorporate a check-box to remind staff to send the full list of approved inputs when client certificates are issued. QCS issued guidance to inspectors to standardize the process for inspectors regarding OSP updates at the time of inspection. QCS conducted inspector training in early October 2014 to explain updated policies and procedures, with refresher training planned for early 2015. QCS will issue Notices of Noncompliance to each of the four operations for use of inputs that were not pre-approved by QCS or included on the operations’ OSPs. QCS plans to conduct witness or review audits on four operations during the

grazing season in 2015 in order to verify that client OSPs are accurate and being followed, and inspectors are properly reviewing or updating the OSP per QCS procedures. Furthermore, QCS is no longer using two of the three inspectors associated with the inspection issues identified as a result of the recent audit.

NP4188MVA.NC2 – Accepted – 7 CFR §205.403(d) states, “Exit Interview. The inspector must conduct an exit interview with an authorized representative of the operation who is knowledgeable about the inspected operation to confirm the accuracy and completeness of inspection observations and information gathered during the on-site inspection. The inspector must also address the need for any additional information as well as any issues of concern.” *Overall, the exit interviews did not clearly summarize the findings, issues of concern, or clearly indicate the status of materials. The body of the inspection report specifies the materials used or requested for use but not in the OSP.*

- A) During one of the witness inspections, the inspector did not observe records for: 1) feed fed (corn silage) to dry cows in separate pasture down the road; 2) which animal(s) received an immune-booster and the reasons for treatment; and 3) a record of the search for organic seeds. The inspector noted in the exit interview that any calves treated with the immune booster were not identified (ear tag), and stated this would be reviewed by QCS for compliance to §205.103. Also, the exit interview did not include reference to other missing records and did not clearly indicate that the incomplete records were an issue of concern.*
- B) During one of the review audits it was noted that the dairy operation had requested certification on a neighbor’s adjoining four acre parcel. The operation had requested certification for the crop that was harvested in the previous year. There was no mention of the four acre parcel in the inspector’s exit interview, which should have been noted as an issue of concern.*
- C) During the review audit it was noted that the inspector’s exit interview contained five findings, including that the producer would send certain items to QCS and record some practices. The exit interview included an inconsistent and unclear explanation of what was needed from the operation and what would occur between inspection and certification. The operation did not complete all the activities outlined in exit interview, including documenting temporary confinement, adjoining land use agreements, equipment cleaning, and livestock housing.*

Corrective Actions: QCS addressed this noncompliance with inspectors and staff via an annual conference call, through two reminder memos, and with scheduled training sessions. QCS reminded staff and inspectors that the exit interview must clearly indicate the following items: use of any materials not approved by QCS, issues of concern, all potential noncompliances, and any issues found that were not consistent with the QCS approved OSP. Inspectors and their inspection reports are evaluated by a reviewer for each inspection conducted. Annual evaluations of inspectors are conducted and QCS will not continue using an inspector whose exit interviews are found inadequate. QCS plans to conduct witness or review audit of four inspectors in 2015 to verify that procedures from the training are being implemented. QCS will continue to evaluate inspectors and inspection reports on an annual basis to ensure exit interviews are adequate. In addition, QCS issued Notices of Noncompliance to noncompliant operations identified through this assessment. QCS plans an additional evaluation by mid-December 2014 of the four-acre parcel associated with one of the operations noted in the audit to determine if comingling

occurred or non-certified product was marketed as organic.

NP4188MVA.NC3 – Accepted – 7 CFR §205.501(a)(2) states, “Demonstrate the ability to fully comply with the requirements for accreditation set forth in this subpart.”

- A) *During various review and witness audits, livestock supplements containing nonorganic agricultural ingredients were observed and not identified as issues of concern by the inspector. Many of these products are specific to one manufacturer; products have been reviewed by QCS and found to contain organic ingredients even though these are not listed on the label. The labels provided to QCS by the manufacturer were sometimes inconsistent with labels found onsite at the farms: some labels identified organic ingredients while others did not. Feed supplement products from a different manufacturer that contain nonorganic molasses, apple cider vinegar, yucca, garlic, and aloe vera are being allowed by QCS because another certifier also allows the product. This product was not listed on the client’s input list nor was not identified as an issue by the previous inspector. It is unclear when the operation started using the product or if QCS has ever reviewed the product label.*
- B) *QCS Input Review procedure (QCS-08-01) does not require a written response to the applicant confirming the materials approved for use in response to changes to the OSP during inspection or in response to changes submitted throughout the year. It requires that the client be notified, but this can be via phone with a note to QCS’s internal file. As a result, it is not clear if QCS’s clients know, or have record of, which inputs have been approved for use.*
- C) *An operation in Indiana was inspected in 2012 and issued a minor noncompliance on December 10, 2012. The noncompliance was to §205.201, indicating that the OSP did not include a list of each livestock health care product in use or planned for use. On January 22, 2013, QCS received a hand written update from the client indicating the materials he currently used. On January 24, 2013, QCS issued a letter to the client indicating that the issue was resolved and the materials or actions were sufficient to resolve the noncompliance. However, QCS did not explicitly confirm which materials had been added to the OSP and the farmer did not appear to keep a record. During the NOP’s review audit of this operation in July 2014, several products not on the OSP or approved input list were discovered onsite. One product discovered to be currently in use by the operation contains zinc sulfate, which is prohibited for use in organic livestock production as a foot bath, but the operator stated that he was told the product was acceptable for use by a QCS inspector during a training held in the region in 2013. During the June 2014 inspection, which had not yet been submitted to QCS, the inspector documented the product as a new product found during the inspection, but did not identify that the material contained zinc sulfate. The inspector also documented 27 other products onsite that were not documented on the client’s input list.*
- D) *During another review audit, 14 products were found to be present at the farm (some in use) that were not identified on the current OSP or input list approved by QCS.*

Corrective Actions: QCS has reviewed many of the livestock feed or feed supplement products from the manufacturer identified during the witness and review audits to verify their compliance with the USDA organic regulations. QCS provided documentation to the manufacturer regarding the status of the approved products. During a conference call with the NOP on October 9, 2014, QCS explained that the livestock feed/feed supplement labeling issue stems from a state

livestock product labeling law, which prohibits the use of the term “organic” on the label for any ingredients. Feed supplement products from the other manufacturer in question are currently being reviewed for compatibility with the USDA organic regulations. Operators with incomplete OSPs or input lists will receive Notices of Noncompliance from QCS. QCS addressed this noncompliance with inspectors and staff via an annual conference call, through two reminder memos, and with scheduled training sessions. QCS reminded staff and inspectors that the exit interview must clearly indicate the following items: use of any materials not approved by QCS, issues of concern, all potential noncompliances, and any issues found that were not consistent with the QCS approved OSP. QCS plans to conduct witness or review audit of four inspectors in 2015 to verify that procedures from the training are being implemented. QCS will continue to evaluate inspectors and inspection reports on an annual basis to ensure exit interviews are adequate. The specific inspector associated with the issues identified in NC3 is no longer employed by QCS.

NP4188MVA.NC4 – Accepted – 7 CFR §205.501(a)(3) states, “Carry out the provisions of the Act and the regulations in this part, including the provisions of §205.402 through §205.406 and §205.670.” Specifically, §205.200 General that states, “The producer or handler of a production or handling operation intending to sell, label, or represent agricultural products as “100 percent organic,” “organic,” or “made with organic (specified ingredients or food group(s))” must comply with the applicable provisions of this subpart...” *QCS certified a beef operation that stated that it does not slaughter its animals in a certified organic slaughter facility. However, the operation provided a brochure to QCS that identifies the slaughtered cows (whole or half) as “organically raised” and the operation’s promotional brochure uses the USDA organic seal. The company is representing processed beef as certified organic when it has been processed in a noncertified facility.*

Corrective Actions: QCS spoke with the client on October 17, 2014 and was informed by the client that they had already discontinued use of the brochure six months ago. QCS issued a Notice of Noncompliance to the operator on October 28, 2014, and the client responded with corrective actions that are currently under review by QCS. In addition, QCS is planning to conduct an unannounced inspection of this operation during November 2014, and a surveillance audit of the operation’s website and point-of-sale marketing materials. On October 28, 2014, QCS conducted staff training about product labeling and marketing materials, which included a review of guidance document NOP 4012 *Use of Brand or Company Names Containing the Word “Organic.”*

Applicant Name:	Quality Certification Services (QCS)
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Mailing Address:	Same
Contact & Title:	Denise Aguero, Operations Officer
E-mail Address:	denise@qcsinfo.org
Phone Number:	352-377-0133
Auditor(s):	Meg Kuhn, NOP Reviewer
Program:	USDA National Organic Program (NOP)
Audit Date(s):	May 29, 2014
Audit Identifier:	AIA4086MMK
Action Required:	None
Audit Type:	Corrective Action Audit
Audit Objective:	To evaluate the corrective actions submitted by the certifying agent in response to the non-compliances identified during review of the Tim Smith/Organic Creekside reinstatement request
Audit Criteria:	7 CFR Part 205, National Organic Program; Final Rule, dated December 21, 2000
Audit Scope:	QCS's April 30, 2014 corrective action plan, in response to the Notice of Noncompliance issued on March 28, 2014
Location(s) Audited:	Desk

GENERAL INFORMATION

Quality Certification Services (QCS) is the Certification Program of Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc., which is a non-profit organization. QCS was accredited as a certifying agent on April 29, 2002 to the National Organic Program (NOP) for crops, wild crops, livestock, and handling operations. QCS is currently certifying operations in the U.S., Canada, China, Bahamas, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, Puerto Rico, South Africa, and Taiwan. The QCS client list had 621 certified operations which included 410 crop, 1 wild crop, 50 livestock, and 206 handling (186 processors, 15 distributors & 5 retailers) operations certified to the NOP standards. QCS also certifies grower groups and currently has 7 Grower Groups certified to the NOP.

QCS also offers certification to the following international standards: European Union (EC 834/2007 and EC 889/2008), US-EU Equivalency Arrangement, Canadian Organic Regime (COR), US-Canada Equivalency Arrangement, US-Japan Export Arrangement, and Taiwan Export Standards. A USDA ISO Guide 65 Program Surveillance Assessment was conducted concurrently with the NOP Renewal Assessment.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On March 28, 2014, the NOP sent a Notice of Noncompliance to Quality Certification Services (QCS) for issuing an organic certificate to a suspended operation without first seeking

reinstatement through the NOP, as well as not meeting requirements of reinstatement as set forth in the NOP Instruction 2605, Reinstating Organic Operations.

FINDINGS

The findings below describe the NOP's issues of concern and identify the relevant section of the regulation for each issue. We also outline the certifying agent's response to these issues, which describe how they will correct the problem and prevent it from recurring in the future. During the next on-site assessment, the NOP will review the corrective actions below to verify that the certifying agent has effectively addressed all concerns.

Non-Compliances – Certifier Response Accepted

The NOP has reviewed the corrective actions submitted by the certifying agent and determined that they demonstrates sufficient compliance.

1. **AIA4086MMK.NC1 – Accepted** - §205.501(a)(2) states, “A *private or governmental entity accredited as a certifying agent under this subpart must: (2) Demonstrate the ability to fully comply with the requirements for accreditation set forth in this part.*” The “Policy and Procedure” section of the NOP 2605 Instruction, as well as section 3.4(c), requires that the certifier submit the reinstatement request to the NOP within a three (3) month period following the reinstatement inspection. In the case of this operation, the inspection was conducted August 30, 2013, however the reinstatement request was not sent to the NOP until February 26, 2014, six (6) months after the inspection. QCS did not request a deviation to the NOP 2605 Instruction requirements in its request.
Corrective Action: QCS' corrective action response indicates that the delay in sending the reinstatement request to the NOP was due to an exchange of requests for information from the operation that took place over a 4-month period. QCS admits it did not follow NOP 2605 Instruction procedures in requesting a deviation from the NOP when the reinstatement process took longer than the three (3) months allowed. QCS has revised its review SOP, within the Certification Standard Operating Procedures, section V. F. 5., to include the requirement that a deviation must be requested from the NOP if the reinstatement process may take longer than three months to complete. QCS conducted training with staff members on April 28, 2014, specifically noting the three month reinstatement and deviation requirements in the NOP 2605 Instruction. QCS has also added a static agenda item to weekly staff meetings to review any Instruction or Guidance updates released by the NOP, as well as any NOP Insider messages, to ensure staff is up-to-date and understanding of current requirements.
2. **AIA4086MMK.NC2 – Accepted** - §205.662(f)(1) states, “A *certified operation whose certification has been suspended under this section may at any time... submit a request to the Secretary for reinstatement of its certification....*” The NOP suspended Tim Smith/Organic Creekside Farm for a 6-month period as of September 17, 2012, which was made public in the List of Suspended/Revoked Operations on the NOP website. On October 24, 2012, QCS received and accepted an application for certification from this

operation; conducted an organic inspection on February 5, 2013; and issued an organic certificate on February 21, 2013, before the operation was eligible for reinstatement and without first requesting reinstatement to the NOP. Accredited Certifying Agents do not have the authority to certify or reinstate suspended operations.

Corrective Action: QCS indicates that standard operating procedure for review of new client applications includes checking the NOP's Suspended/Revoked Operations list, on the NOP website, to ensure the operation is eligible for certification. QCS staff checked this list when the application for Tim Smith/Organic Creekside Farm was received, on October 24, 2012, and notes that it did not find the operation listed at that time.

Additionally, the operation did not indicate on the application that it was in suspension status. When QCS was informed of the operation's suspended status in July 2013, QCS began the reinstatement process. To ensure this type of noncompliance does not occur in the future, QCS has revised its Incoming Application Checklist to include a record verifying that the operation's suspended/revoked status was checked on the NOP website and/or with the previous certifier, if the applicant has provided information regarding prior certification. The Administrative SOP was also revised to note this change to the form and procedure. QCS also added a second check of the operation's suspended/revoked status, to be verified by the final reviewer, as documented in the revised Certification Standard Operating Procedure, section IX. On April 28, 2014, QCS conducted training with staff members, covering this topic and new procedures/forms that were implemented to prevent reoccurrence.

Applicant Name:	Quality Certification Services (QCS)
Est. Number:	N/A
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Mailing Address:	P.O. Box 12311, Gainesville, FL 32604
Contact & Title:	Ramkrishnan Balasubramanian, Certification Program Director
E-mail Address:	ram@qcsinfo.org
Phone Number:	352-377-0133
Auditor(s):	Meg Kuhn, Accreditation Manager
Program:	USDA National Organic Program (NOP)
Audit Date(s):	January 28 - June 13, 2013
Audit Identifier:	NP2155OOA
Action Required:	No
Audit Type:	Corrective Action
Audit Objective:	To verify review and approve corrective actions addressing the non-compliances identified during the Renewal Assessment.
Audit Criteria:	7 CFR Part 205, National Organic Program; Final Rule, dated December 21, 2000; revised March 15, 2012.
Audit Scope:	QCS's January 28, 2013 response letter to the Renewal Assessment non-compliance report
Location(s) Audited:	Desk

The USDA National Organic Program (NOP) conducted a Renewal of Accreditation Assessment of QCS from June 3 to October 4, 2012. The NOP issued QCS a Notice of Noncompliance based on the findings from this assessment on January 10, 2013. On January 28, 2013, QCS submitted proposed corrective actions for review. The NOP Accreditation Committee considered these corrective actions on June 13, 2013, and recommended that the NOP renew QCS's accreditation as a USDA organic certifying agent.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Quality Certification Services (QCS) is the Certification Program of Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc., which is a non-profit organization. QCS was accredited as a certifying agent on April 29, 2002 to the National Organic Program (NOP) for crops, wild crops, livestock, and handling operations. QCS is currently certifying operations in the U.S., Canada, China, Bahamas, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, Puerto Rico, South Africa, and Taiwan. The QCS client list had 621 certified operations which included 410 crop, 1 wild crop, 50 livestock, and 206 handling (186 processors, 15 distributors & 5 retailers) operations certified to the NOP standards. QCS also certifies grower groups and currently has 7 Grower Groups certified to the NOP.

QCS also offers certification to the following international standards: European Union (EC 834/2007 and EC 889/2008), US-EU Equivalency Arrangement, Canadian Organic Regime

(COR), US-Canada Equivalency Arrangement, US-Japan Export Arrangement, and Taiwan Export Standards. A USDA ISO Guide 65 Program Surveillance Assessment was conducted concurrently with the NOP Renewal Assessment.

AUDIT INFORMATION

During the Renewal Assessment, there were 2 non-compliances identified during this audit. The NOP notified QCS of these finding(s) in writing on January 10, 2013. QCS submitted a response to the NOP on January 28, 2013.

FINDINGS

NP215500A.NC1 – Accepted – NOP §205.404(b) states, “The certifying agent must issue a certificate of organic operation which specifies the: (2) Effective date of certification; (3) Categories of organic operation, including crops, wild crops, livestock, or processed products produced by the certified operation.”

- *During the review of 10 certification files it was found that 1 of the 10 files reviewed was for a client that was previously certified by another ACA. The effective date on the certificate did not represent the effective date when the operation was initially certified to the NOP regulations instead it represented the initial date for which the operation was certified under the QCS certification program. In this case certification was maintained by the previous ACA until certification was granted by QCS. **Corrective Action:** QCS provided a correction to the specific issue and included a copy of the revised certificate as objective evidence. For preventive action, QCS included a revised policy from the QCS Certification Policy Manual detailing how effective dates are determined for long-time QCS clients (i.e., certified prior to the NOP taking effect) or for clients transferring from a previous certifier. QCS intends to use 10/21/02 as the effective date for clients certified prior to the NOP coming into effect; or, the initial effective date from the first certification. QCS conducted staff training on this issue on January 9, 2013; a copy of the training agenda and meeting minutes were provided as objective evidence. If effectively implemented, QCS’ response demonstrates capability to comply with NOP accreditation requirements.*
- *Also during the review of the certification files, 2 of the 10 files for clients certified for both crop and livestock found that the certificates did not include livestock as part of the scope of certification. **Corrective Action:** QCS provided a correction to the specific issue and included copies of the revised certificates (2) as objective evidence. For preventive action, QCS included a revised policy from the QCS Certification Policy Manual detailing how the scope must be verified and documented on the certificate before printing and issuing to the operation. QCS conducted staff training on this issue on January 9, 2013; a copy of the training agenda and meeting minutes were provided as objective evidence. If effectively implemented, QCS’ response demonstrates capability to comply with NOP accreditation requirements.*

NP215500A.NC2 – Accepted - NOP §205.662(c)(3) states, “*Proposed suspension or revocation.* When rebuttal is unsuccessful or correction of the noncompliance is not completed within the prescribed time period, the certifying agent or State organic program's governing State

official shall send the certified operation a written notification of proposed suspension or revocation of certification of the entire operation or a portion of the operation, as applicable to the noncompliance. When correction of a noncompliance is not possible, the notification of noncompliance and the proposed suspension or revocation of certification may be combined in one notification. The notification of proposed suspension or revocation of certification shall state: The impact of a suspension or revocation on future eligibility for certification.” *A review of 2 proposed suspension notifications revealed that the impact of the suspension was not included in the notices.* **Corrective Action:** QCS submitted new templates for all proposed suspension letters on file. The templates now adequately explain the impact of the suspension on future eligibility for certification. As a preventive measure, QCS aligned letters with the NOP templates presented at the 2011 NOP ACA training. QCS also conducted an audit of all proposed suspension letters to ensure that all templates have been revised. If effectively implemented, QCS’ response demonstrates capability to comply with NOP accreditation requirements.