



The National Organic Program

The National Organic Program (NOP), part of USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), has regulatory oversight responsibilities over the USDA organic standards and the accreditation of organic certifying agents. The NOP also has authority to take appropriate legal action to enforce the organic standards and thus protect the integrity of the USDA organic standards, from farm to market, around the world.

What Is Organic?

Organic is a labeling term for food or other agricultural products that have been produced using cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that support the cycling of on-farm resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity in accordance with the USDA organic regulations. This means that organic operations must maintain or enhance soil and water quality, while also conserving wetlands, woodlands, and wildlife. Synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, irradiation, and genetic engineering may not be used.

Only products that have been certified as meeting the USDA's requirements for organic production and handling may carry the USDA Organic Seal.

How Does NOP Support Organic Integrity?

The NOP is organized into four key groups: the Office of the Deputy Administrator, the Standards Division, the Accreditation and International Activities Division, and the Compliance and Enforcement Division.

Based in Washington DC, the NOP has diverse expertise in organic agriculture, policy analysis and development, accreditation management, materials, compliance and enforcement, auditing, and public sector management.

The NOP is responsible for overseeing approximately 80 certifying agents and more than 33,300 certified organic operations around the world.

To meet this responsibility, the NOP team conducts the following activities:

- Supports the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), a Federal advisory committee.
- Sets standards for organically-produced agricultural products. The NOP develops and updates regulations and policies; and facilitates the review of materials for use in organic agriculture.
- Accredits and oversees a network of third-party certifiers, who certify organic farms and businesses.
- Investigates complaints alleging violations of USDA organic regulations and enforces organic production, handling, and labeling standards; administers the NOP appeals program.
- Facilitates open markets for US organic products by working with other USDA agencies and foreign governments to establish and maintain organic equivalency arrangements.
- Administers organic certification cost share grant programs.
- Engages stakeholders through communication, outreach, and training programs.

Contact Us

Visit the Agricultural Marketing Service National Organic Program homepage at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop> or contact:

**USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
National Organic Program**
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Room 2646; Stop 0268
Washington, DC 20250
Phone: 202-720-3252