



Cheryl Wixson photo

Producing & Selling Organic Food

Organic agriculture is based on growing crops and live-stock through the use of soil-enriching systems.

Organic farmers maintain soil fertility with practices such as cover crops and compost and they control pests with crop rotation and other natural methods. Organic farmers are not allowed to use synthetic fertilizers or pesticides. Organic livestock are raised on organic feed, given outdoor access appropriate to their species, and can be treated with a very narrow range of permitted medicines when they are sick.

In order to sell foods labeled as organic, you must raise and handle the food in compliance with the National Organic Standards, administered by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's National Organic Program (www.ams.usda.gov/nop/indexNet.htm). In general, this means that crops are grown on land that has not had prohibited materials applied to it for at least 36 months prior to harvest. Organic livestock is raised in an organic system from at least the last third of gestation (day-old for poultry), using 100% organic feed. Processed foods have three organic label options, each with requirements about the total percentage of organic ingredients and restrictions about non-organic and non-agricultural ingredients that the finished product may contain.

Whether certified or not, organic producers are expected to be in compliance with the National Organic Standards. Producers with gross organic sales in excess of \$5,000 per year are required to have third-party certification from an USDA-accredited certifier.

7 Reasons to Become CERTIFIED ORGANIC

Organic farming produces healthful food in a manner that improves farmland and protects the environment.

These are the underlying principles of the organic standards. If you believe in these principles, put your beliefs into practice and then let consumers know. Get certified.

Certification is a service to consumers

Certification assures compliance with organic standards. Help consumers choose foods that are organically produced. Become certified and use the organic label.

Organic can have political clout

There is strength in numbers. Help Maine become the state with the largest percentage of organic farms and processors. Make government officials pay attention to the issues that are important to a sustainable Maine farm economy and a clean and healthy Maine environment.

Organic is good for the planet

With an emphasis on building healthy soils and recycling farm nutrients, organics aims to protect soil, water and other natural resources from degradation and pollution.

Organic may be good to you

Organic food sales grew over 16% in 2005 and organic foods represent the fastest growing sector in U.S. food sales. Many people tell us that they look for the MOFGA certified label, which has been in Maine's marketplace for over 30 years.

Supply an organic food processor or handler with organic product from your farm

Any processor making certified organic product must buy organic ingredients that are certified.

Comply with the law

Federal law requires producers who market organic goods to become certified if they gross over \$5K per year from sales of those goods. You may find that regardless of your income, some outlets for organic products (see above) may be closed to you without certification.

Melissa White Pillsbury photo



Why Become Certified ORGANIC?

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Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association

MOFGA Certification Services, LLC

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Currently, there are 55 domestic certifying agents that are accredited by the USDA. MOFGA Certification Services, LLC is one of them. Although we currently certify the

majority of farms in Maine, MOFGA Certification Services is not the only option for Maine producers. To find out more about certifiers, you can go to the USDA NOP website and view the entire list.



MOFGA Certification Services

MOFGA has operated an organic certification program since 1972 and was the first state level certification program in the country. In 2002, MOFGA Certification Services, LLC was set up by MOFGA and accredited by the USDA to certify crops, livestock, processing and handling operations according to the National Organic Standards. MOFGA Certification Services will certify over 400 Maine farms and processors by 2012.

Thanks to support from the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, our fees have remained extremely reasonable compared to other certifiers, and include the cost of the annual inspection. A farm with an income from organic vegetables of \$25K per year can expect to pay around \$700 for certification. There is currently a cost-sharing program from USDA that rebates 75% (up to \$750) of certification fees for farms at the end of the calendar year. After the rebate, that farm will pay about \$175 for certification for the year, including inspection.

USDA Organic Certification

On October 22, 2002, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) enacted a set of **national standards for food labeled "organic."** This new law created the National Organic Program (NOP), which in turn accredits certifying agents at home and abroad to certify growers and processors according to these new national standards. Regardless of where it was grown or who certified it, U.S. consumers can feel confident that organic food is produced and handled according to the same high standards.

Certification is the process of securing third-party verification of organic production practices. It involves submitting an organic system plan that explains how you farm and/or how you handle and label the finished product to an accredited certifying agent. Fees charged by certifiers are typically based on the producer's gross annual income from sales of organic product.

An organic system plan (application) must be submitted for initial review and then updated each year in order to remain certified. In addition to a technical review of your application, an organic inspector inspects your farm or facilities and audits your records. To maintain certification, an inspection must happen every year. The producer is expected to keep the certifier informed of changes to the organic system plan and to use only materials and inputs that are listed on the plan and that have been approved by the certifier.



MOFGA CERTIFICATION SERVICES DEADLINES FOR APPLICANTS*

SUGARBUSH & MAPLE SYRUP **14 FEBRUARY**

CROPS **18 APRIL**
(e.g., vegetables, fruits, hay)
Thereafter applications will be accepted with a late fee through 30 June.

PROCESSOR/HANDLER **ANYTIME**

WINTER GREENHOUSE PRODUCTION **30 OCTOBER**

LIVESTOCK **DEADLINES VARY**
Talk to an MCS representative. Dairies transitioning to organic must register with MCS at the start of the 12-month process; full application due by the sixth month. Other livestock operations based upon on-farm feed production must meet deadline for CROPS.

The amount of time required for the certification process varies. Incomplete applications will take longer to process. Crop applications received in April are typically inspected in June, when the growing season in Maine is underway, and certificates are usually granted soon thereafter. Dairies require a year to transition and dairy farmers should talk to MCS staff before they begin the process. Processor/handlers should allow themselves a few months to complete the process.

** Dates remain the same every year.*



To Learn More...

Visit **MOFGA Certification**

Services online at www.mofga.org

The Practice Manual and Application Forms can be downloaded for free. We also encourage you to contact the office and get on the mailing list for the coming year:

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