

How long does it take to become certified?

The process may take several weeks to several months, depending on the complexity of your operation and initial completeness of your application. Because the inspection must take place prior to production, there are times of the year when an inspection of a seasonal operation is not possible. The process may also take longer if questions or compliance issues have to be addressed. An application (including fees) must be complete before certification can be granted. Because every operation is different, it is not possible to guarantee certification within a certain time frame. We advise submitting a complete application several months before you want to be certified.

What kind of records do I have to keep?

A sample of records that will be viewed during your inspection may be, depending on your scope of production:

- Seed, grain or ingredient purchase records
- Field activity records (amendments, pesticides, planting dates, manure applications, crop rotation, field histories, etc.)
- Clean out log for equipment used on non-certified land
- Receipts and labels for purchased inputs and sanitizers
- Harvest/production sales records.

For a comprehensive listing of records required by scope, please visit the Resource menu on our website:

www.mofgacertification.org/record-keeping-for-organic-producers.

All records must be available at the time of inspection and saved for five years.

How does the inspection process work?

Once an application has been reviewed, an inspector will be assigned. This person will contact you to set up a date and time for the visit. The inspector will observe your organic production practices, for example: visit harvest and post-harvest areas, all facilities that handle organic products, and check all applicable records. The inspector will then send a report to MCS.

How do I prepare for an inspection?

1. Review the MCS Practice Manual sections relevant to your operation.
2. Review your certification paperwork.
3. Gather records that will be needed at the inspection.
4. Make arrangements for an authorized representative with knowledge of the operation to be present at the time of the inspection.

Where can I find more information about organic production and certification?

- The National Organic Program (NOP) website (www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/nop) has the full

NOP Rule and the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances.

- The MCS website (www.mofgacertification.org) has lots of information and downloadable forms. The Resources tab is especially helpful for those considering organic certification.
- The Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) (www.omri.org) lists products approved for use in certified organic production, handling, and processing.
- The MOFGA website (www.mofga.org) is informative and provides access to lots of technical assistance and publications.
- The National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) (www.attra.ncat.org/organic.html) resources offer guidance in preparing for certification, as well as production and marketing methods for a range of organic crops and livestock.



Becoming Certified Organic by MOFGA



MOFGA Certification Services, LLC

PO Box 170, Unity, ME 04988

Location: 210 Crosby Brook Rd, Thorndike

(207) 568-6030 Fax: (866) 344-0991

certification@mofga.org

Thank you for your interest in organic certification! MOFGA Certification Services (MCS) is a USDA accredited certification agency established in 2002 by the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA).

We currently certify over 500 clients throughout Maine and New England. Our staff is always available to answer questions or address concerns. Please don't hesitate to call, write, e-mail, or stop by our office for a visit (M-Th / 9 am - 4 pm) or Fridays by appointment.

The 5 Steps to Organic Certification

- 1 Contact MCS** to apply online or to request an application packet. Read the Practice Manual for information on organic standards, the certification process, and requirements specific to your operation.
- 2 Complete the application** online or send in your packet. Fees can be paid through our secure online portal at mofgacertification.org or you may mail in a check. We will review your application and contact you if any information is missing or if we have questions. You will receive a confirmation letter when the review is complete.
- 3 Organic inspection** - An inspector will contact you to schedule an on-site visit. The inspector will observe your operation and examine your records, and send a written report back to MCS (you will get a copy as well). If additional information is needed before a certification decision can be made, you will be given time to provide it.
- 4 Certification** - The MCS Director makes the certification decision. The decision letter may include conditions for changes that you need to implement. If the decision is favorable we will issue you a copy of your organic certificate, and you are officially certified!
- 5 Continuing certification** - Though your certificate does not expire, you must submit fees, update your organic system plan documents, and be inspected annually. You can surrender your certificate (in writing) at any time.

How much will certification cost?

The annual certification fee is based on your gross annual income from all certified organic products. The fee schedule can be found on the MCS website: www.mofgacertification.org/mofga-certification-fees.

Certified producers are eligible for two annual federal reimbursement programs which total up to 75% of their certification fees, or a \$750 maximum per scope. Annual fees must be paid in full to be eligible. In addition, operations making less than \$10,000 gross income can choose to receive a Small Producer Rebate from MOFGA.

What are the application deadlines?

For most crop farms, the application deadline is June 1st. We accept processor/handler applications year round, and applications for maple syrup are due mid- February. For livestock and other types of operations, please contact us.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the \$5,000 exemption?

Producers whose gross annual income from organic sales is \$5,000 or less are not required to be certified (exempt). However, exempt producers must still comply with all applicable organic production and handling requirements. Products from exempt operations may not be used in certified processed products.

What is the USDA's role?

The USDA oversees the National Organic Program (NOP) and the National Organic Program Standards. The NOP accredits certifying agencies, such as MCS, thereby ensuring that certifiers are following the National Organic Standard.

What is the role of MOFGA Certification Services?

MCS guides producers through the certification process, keeps documentation of each client's organic system plan, and conducts annual reviews of each client's operation. We support our clients throughout the year, answering questions about the organic standards and referring them to resources for further assistance.

How is MOFGA Certification Services different from MOFGA?

MCS is a subsidiary of MOFGA. MOFGA works to promote local, organic and sustainable food systems.

What are the benefits of being certified with MOFGA Certification Services?

- The MOFGA Certification logo is recognized and trusted by consumers, and can provide access to more markets.
- Discounted booth fees for the Common Ground Country Fair farmers markets.
- Listing and updates in the MCS searchable marketing database.
- Free technical and marketing advice from MOFGA's Farmer Programs specialists.
- Complimentary MOFGA membership at the \$20 level, including a membership vote and subscription to The Maine Organic Farmer & Gardener.

Are there resources available to help me transition to organic?

Yes - MOFGA's Agricultural Services team is available to help answer any questions about organic certification. In many cases, a site visit can be arranged and you can receive help to complete your application paperwork. Contact Ag Services at 207-568-6000 or visit them at <http://mofga.org/Programs/Agricultural-Services>. There is also an organic transition planning program through NRCS; please contact your local NRCS office for more information.

Is MCS the only certification option in Maine?

No - you can use another USDA accredited certifier. A list of accredited certifiers can be found at: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/organic-certification/certifying-agents>

What if my farm or processing facility is not in Maine; can I still be certified by MCS?

Although MCS primarily certifies Maine producers, we do accept applications from operations in other New England states. Additional fees may apply to cover the cost of inspector travel.

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