



MOFGA Certification Services

Guidance on Commercial Compost Approval

Overview:

The USDA National Organic Program (NOP) requires that compost used on certified organic farms has been produced and managed to meet criteria defined in the USDA NOP rule (see below). MOFGA Certification Services (MCS), a USDA-accredited certification agency, offers a review and approval program for commercial composters to verify that their products meet these standards. Once approved, compost producers are permitted to advertise their products as approved for use on certified organic farms.

§205.2 Terms defined.

Compost -- The product of a managed process through which microorganisms break down plant and animal materials into more available forms suitable for application to the soil. Compost must be produced through a process that combines plant and animal materials with an initial C:N ratio of between 25:1 and 40:1. Producers using an in-vessel or static aerated pile system must maintain the composting materials at a temperature between 131 °F and 170 °F for 3 days. Producers using a windrow system must maintain the composting materials at a temperature between 131 °F and 170 °F for 15 days, during which time, the materials must be turned a minimum of five times.

Manure -- Feces, urine, other excrement, and bedding produced by livestock that has not been composted.

§205.203(c) Soil fertility and crop nutrient management practice standard.

The producer must manage plant and animal materials to maintain or improve soil organic matter content in a manner that does not contribute to contamination of crops, soil, or water by plant nutrients, pathogenic organisms, heavy metals, or residues of prohibited substances.

Composted plant and animal materials must be produced through a process that:

- Established an initial C:N ratio of between 25:1 and 40:1; and
- Maintained a temperature of between 131 °F and 170 °F for 3 days using an in-vessel or static aerated pile system; or
- Maintained a temperature of between 131 °F and 170 °F for 15 days using a windrow composting system, during which period, the materials must be turned a minimum of five times.

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Other examples of acceptable composting methods include:

- Compost that is made from allowed feedstock materials (either nonsynthetic substances not prohibited at §205.602, or synthetics approved for use as plant or soil amendments), and
- The compost pile is mixed or managed to ensure that all of the feedstock heats to the minimum of 131 °F (55 °C) for a minimum of three days. The monitoring of the above parameters must be documented in the OSP [or commercial composter's application] in accordance with §205.203(c) and verified during the site visit.

Recordkeeping

Records must be maintained to track the feedstocks and production of approved compost. Records must verify that the production of each pile, temperature readings, and turning processes are in compliance with the NOP rule.

The following are prohibited for use in approved compost:

- Sewage sludge
- Any fertilizer or plant and animal material, composted or uncomposted, that contains a synthetic substance not included in [§205.601](#) of the National List - Synthetic substances allowed for use in organic crop production.

Prohibited synthetic materials mixed in with compost feedstock, such as plastics, produce stickers, or rubber bands in lobster shell waste, must be removed before composting. [§205.601\(c\)](#) of the National List allows as compost feedstocks, “newspapers or other recycled paper, without glossy or colored inks”. Please note that coated and/or compostable foodware, including but not limited to, pizza boxes, take-out clamshell containers, paper coffee cups, disposable cutlery, etc., are not allowed for use as feedstocks in MOFGA Approved Compost, per NOP regulation [205.203\(c\)](#).

- [§205.602](#) **Nonsynthetic substances prohibited for use in organic crop production.**

The following nonsynthetic substances may not be used in organic crop production:

- (a) Ash from manure burning.
- (b) Arsenic.
- (c) Calcium chloride, brine process is natural and prohibited for use except as a foliar spray to treat a physiological disorder associated with calcium uptake.
- (d) Lead salts.
- (e) Potassium chloride—unless derived from a mined source and applied in a manner that minimizes chloride accumulation in the soil.
- (f) Rotenone (CAS # 83-79-4).
- (g) Sodium fluoaluminatate (mined).
- (h) Sodium nitrate—unless use is restricted to no more than 20% of the crop's total nitrogen requirement; use in spirulina production is unrestricted until October 21, 2005.
- (i) Strychnine.
- (j) Tobacco dust (nicotine sulfate).

MCS Testing requirements:

MCS may request lab analyses for fecal coliform and salmonella for compost that contains manure, animal by-product, and/or food collection feedstocks. All approved composts will be required to submit at least a Basic Compost analysis (bulk density, pH, nutrients, etc.).

**Please note - all lab analysis fees are the responsibility of the producer and/or applicant.*

Product claims:

MOFGA Approved Compost producers may advertise their products as “Approved for Use” on certified organic farms. Approved compost is not a certified organic product, and must not be advertised as such.

Approved Compost Logo and Packaging:

Once approved, the MOFGA Approved Compost logo may be used on product packaging and marketing materials.

The logo must exactly replicate one of the versions seen here:



Digital copies of the logo can be found on the [MCS website](#), and are only for the sole use of current MOFGA approved compost companies.

- The use of other logos to advertise compost approval status is prohibited.
- Alteration of the MOFGA Approved Compost logo is prohibited.

**Please submit examples of all product packages and marketing materials to the MCS office prior to printing and publication.*

For further guidance, please see:

NOP Guidance 5021: Compost and Vermicompost in Organic Crop Production

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/5021.pdf>

§ 205.601 Synthetic substances allowed for use in organic crop production.

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-I/subchapter-M/part-205/subpart-G/subject-group-ECFR0ebc5d139b750cd/section-205.601>

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<https://mofgacertification.org/mofga-approved-compost/>