

Dear Certification Specialist...

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Associate Director of Crops

Dear Certification Specialist,

A few weeks ago, I was washing carrots and one of your inspectors stopped by for an unannounced inspection. I stayed as cool as a cucumber and showed her the things she asked for. But I now want to get this hot potato off my chest. Can you please spill the beans about unannounced inspections? Should I be feeling in a pickle about this unannounced inspection? Or was this just small potatoes?

Thanks,

A Bit Corny

Dear A Bit Corny,

Thanks for this question! MOFGA Certification Services (MCS) has been conducting unannounced inspections for a long time. MCS authority to conduct unannounced inspections can be found in the NOP regulation, Section 205.400(c). An unannounced inspection occurs when an inspector examines the production or handling activities of a certified operation to verify compliance with the organic standards without advanced notice.

MCS conducts unannounced inspections for at least 5% of MOFGA-certified operations each year. It sounds like you got selected this year. Sometimes operations get an unannounced inspection to follow up with issues discussed previously, sometimes it is part of an investigation or a complaint, and sometimes it is based on random selection. Please know that you are not being "singled out" or "picked on," but rather were selected as part of our requirement by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in that given year.

As you know, your inspector provided you with an unannounced inspection letter to explain the regulations. This letter also verifies that they have been authorized to inspect your operation. Unlike with a regular inspection, the inspector will not call you ahead of time to do the unannounced inspection. On rare occasions an inspector may call an operation to conduct an unannounced inspection, but the inspector is not allowed to give more than a four-hour notice.

During the unannounced inspection, the inspector will start with an explanation of the intent of the inspection. The inspector then conducts a partial inspection of your operation to examine one or a few specific areas of the NOP regulations that have been determined ahead of time by MCS. Please note that some unannounced inspections are done on-site, while others are done remotely. After the unannounced inspection, the inspector will write an inspection report that is reviewed by your specialist. After this review you will receive an inspection letter with the results of the inspection and the inspection report.

Please do not refuse an unannounced inspection as this may result in a non-compliance. The regulations require that all certified organic operations participate in unannounced inspections. Certain exceptions may apply, including death in the family, religious reasons or illness.

The unannounced inspection requirement helps to ensure consumer confidence in the certified organic seal. The USDA organic brand is heavily reliant on the ability to trust an operation, from both the certifier and the consumer. To that end, the option of unannounced inspections is a way of keeping everyone "honest" in complying with the regulations. If you have additional questions about unannounced inspections, please contact your specialist.

Sincerely,
Certification Specialist

MOFGA Events and Trainings

Throughout the year, MOFGA hosts hundreds of events, meetings, workshops, conferences, dinners and festive gatherings.

Check the MOFGA Events calendar often for updates including farmer training programs, livestock management, organic pest management, orcharding and community events as well as MOFGA's signature annual events including the Common Ground Country Fair to be held September 20, 21 and 22, 2024. <https://www.mofga.org/trainings>.

