



The Organic Sprout

MOFGA's Newsletter for Organic Producers

Your 2021 Inspection: What to Expect and How You Can Prepare

by MCS Staff

In 2020, MCS successfully adapted inspection methods to support the health and safety of organic operations and inspectors by introducing new options for annual inspections. Our thanks go to you, our certified clients, for doing your part to support the inspection process during such a difficult year. Given the successes of 2020, MCS plans to follow the same approach to inspections for the 2021 season.

For most inspections, MCS is offering clients and inspectors a choice of inspection methods. The selected method must be agreed upon by all parties involved in the process.

A 'traditional' inspection where all records and facilities are viewed onsite. Safety precautions must be upheld to prioritize the health and safety of everyone involved in the inspection process.

Option 2: Combined Remote Records Audit and Limited On-Site Inspection

Part 1: Remote Records Audit

- Your inspector will contact you and request your records.
- You will submit records in the form and time frame agreed upon with your inspector.
- The inspector reviews your records.
- Follow up questions and additional requests are made, as necessary.

Part 2: On-Site Inspection

- Your inspector will arrange a time to conduct a shortened onsite inspection.
- The inspector will focus on aspects of the operation that may be difficult to verify remotely, including:
 1. Fields or facilities, buffers, storage areas, warehouses, or other buildings.
 2. Equipment, pest control, or sanitizers.
 3. Other issues of concern identified at prior inspections.

In select cases, MCS may allow a fully-virtual inspection. This option is reserved for:

- Operations impacted by recent Covid-19 outbreaks or other limitations.
- Certified operations that are in good standing with MCS. Operations must not have received Non-Compliances in the prior year's certification cycle or be deemed to have elevated risk.

Clear communication with your inspector is essential, especially during the pandemic. Talk with your inspector if you have particular requirements at your farm or facility during the pandemic, and share your plans to minimize the spread of the Covid-19 virus. If you or anyone at your certified operation is unwell, be sure to tell your inspector immediately and make plans to reschedule.

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FEDERAL ORGANIC COST SHARE UPDATE

On August 10, 2020, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), announced the opening of the application period for requesting cost share reimbursement through the Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP), which helps defray the certification costs for organic producers. This is a normal annual process which allows state agencies and FSA offices to request funds to reimburse producers directly.

In addition to the normal notice, however, FSA also stated in their announcement *"Due to expected participation levels and the limited funds available, FSA revised the reimbursement amount available through fiscal year 2023. Certified producers and handlers are now eligible to receive reimbursement for up to 50 percent of the certified organic operation's eligible expenses, up to a maximum of \$500 per scope. This change will allow a larger number of certified organic operations to receive assistance. If Congress authorizes additional funding, FSA may provide additional assistance to certified operations that have applied for OCCSP, not to exceed 75 percent of their eligible costs, up to \$750 per scope."*

This reduction, which now appears to have been based on an accounting error at FSA, has had direct and negative impacts on small-scale producers who rely on the 75% reimbursement due to the low annual gross income numbers of their production. MOFGA, along

with industry partners like the National Organic Coalition and the Organic Farmers Association, have been calling on legislators in Congress to investigate this and to immediately appropriate funds to restore the cost share. It is our hope that this will happen this year ahead of the next round of funds that will be distributed in the summer months. In addition, Representative Pingree hopes to increase the maximum reimbursement amount from \$750 to \$1000, which is included in her *Agriculture Resilience Act*.

We encourage farmers and producers to contact your legislative delegation to let them know about any negative impacts this FSA decision has had on your operation. The more vocal farmers and producers are about this change the better chance we have of re-appropriating the additional funds for the 2021 cycle.

The Maine Delegation:

Senator Angus King: <https://www.king.senate.gov/contact-home>

Senator Susan Collins: <https://www.collins.senate.gov/contact>

U.S. Representative Chellie Pingree (ME 1st District): <https://pingree.house.gov/contact/>

U.S. Representative Jared Golden (ME 2nd District): <https://golden.house.gov/contact>

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Basic Safety During Onsite Inspections For Certified Operations and Inspectors

- Follow local CDC requirements
- Wear a mask and any other required safety equipment.
- Maintain at minimum 6 feet of distance.

How to Prepare for Your 2021 Inspection

- Respond to your Inspector's request for an inspection. Inspection planning may take longer than usual, so your prompt attention is greatly appreciated!
- Consider setting up a table outside for the records review.
- Prepare your records for easy review.
- Notify your inspector or the MCS office if you or any employees or family members are sick.
- Contact the MCS office if you have any questions.

For Remote Records Audits:

- Scan or photograph hard copies so they can be sent electronically to your inspector.
- If you can only send records by mail, make copies. *Do not send original records.*

Wishing everyone a safe and abundant summer season!

