

Dear Certification Specialist...

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Associate Director of Crops

Dear Certification Specialist,

I am getting more seed catalogs sent to my house than junk mail. Can you please remind me what the requirements are regarding seed purchases?

Thanks,

Overwhelmed with mail

I hear you! I love poring through all those seed catalogs and dreaming about next spring.

The National Organic Program regulations require the use of organic seeds and planting stock, *unless not commercially available* in the form, quantity or quality required by the grower. If not commercially available then non-organically produced untreated seeds and planting stock may be used to produce an organic crop. **Annual seedlings and seeds used for edible sprout production must be certified organic.**

MOFGA Certification services requires that you conduct a reasonable search for organic seed. Those seed catalogs come in handy when looking for certified organic seeds and are cozy to look at in front of the fire. However, there are some very good search engines online, such as pickacarrot.com, organicseedfinder.org or the OMRI seed search that can do this work for you with the press of a button. MCS would like to see that you have searched at least three seed companies likely to carry organic seed and doing so during the time of year when there is likely to be inventory.

Keep records of your seed search efforts. Examples of records include: lists showing which seed companies were

researched for organic seed before purchasing conventional seeds, printing dated inventory announcements, print outs of search results from online search engines or email correspondences with companies. Please note that cost cannot be a factor when determining commercial availability.

When you have searched through your catalogs and online and still cannot find organic seed commercially available in the form, quantity or quality required you can then purchase conventional seed. Note, however, that conventional seeds treated or coated with prohibited materials (e.g., fungicides, synthetic fertilizers), genetically engineered seed varieties, and GE legume inoculants are prohibited. If you buy conventional planting stock (such as onion sets, seed potatoes, sweet potato slips, garlic bulbs, strawberry/asparagus crowns, raspberry canes, tree and shrub seedlings) you must verify that planting stock has not been treated with prohibited materials for post-harvest transport and storage. **Important:** Conventional perennial planting stock must be managed organically for at least 12 months prior to being sold, labeled or represented as organic. Records must be kept to document the transition date. All planting stock is subject to the commercial availability requirement.

As noted, annual seedlings must be certified organic. The use of non-organic annual seedlings can only be allowed with a temporary variance granted by the USDA NOP AMS administrator. These variances are seldom granted and generally only in the case of extreme weather or a business disruption beyond the control of the producer. Onion seedlings are considered annual seedlings and therefore must be organic. Onion sets (dormant little bulbs) are planting stock and are subject to the commercial availability requirement.

If you have any questions regarding your seed search don't hesitate to email or call your specialist. We hope you enjoy your search through the seed catalogs and dreaming about the new growing season to come!

Mary Belding Joins MCS Management Committee

At the August 2020 MOFGA Board of Directors meeting, Mary Belding was nominated and appointed as the newest member of the MCS Management Committee. The committee is a five-person group charged with overseeing MOFGA Certification Services activities and accreditation, approving and monitoring the budget, and evaluating the certification director.

Mary owns and operates Little Falls Farm, a goat dairy farm in Harrison, Maine, along with her husband John. Together they are Common Ground Country Fair farmers' market coordinators. Little Falls Farm was MOFGA-certified organic for fourteen years, and raises goats and produces award-winning cheese. We are thrilled that Mary has joined the MCS management committee, bringing direct dairy farming expertise and experience to the group. Welcome Mary!



Photo credit: John Williams

