

## THE ORGANIC SEED SEARCH

By Jacomijn Schravessande-Gardei, Associate Director of Crops

One of the most frequently cited rules in crop scope inspection review letters is about organic seeds and, more specifically, a producer's lack of organic seed search records and their decision to not use organic seeds when organic seeds are available. The National Organic Program (NOP) rule states "the producer must use organically grown seeds, annual seedlings, and planting stock; except non-organically produced untreated seeds and planting stock may be used to produce an organic crop when the equivalent organically produced variety is not commercially available." The MOFGA Certification Services (MCS) practice manual states the following regarding the organic seed search: "You must conduct a reasonable search for organic seed. This means contacting 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 in stock. Keep records of your efforts. Examples of records include: lists showing which seed companies were researched for organic seed before purchasing conventional seeds, printing dated inventory announcements or email correspondences with companies. Cost cannot be a factor when determining commercial availability."

### Exceptions to the use of organic seeds

There are only three exceptions to the rule stipulating the use of organic seeds:

First, the equivalent variety. The variety refers not to generic broccoli, but to a specific variety of broccoli you might use. If you have been using a variety that is unavailable in certified organic seed, or you choose to use a variety that has properties that fit your growing situation but is unavailable as organic seed, then non-organic seed may be used.

Second, there is a lack of commercial availability. If the organic seed variety you want is only available in a small quantity and you require a larger amount than is "commercially available" you may purchase non-organic, untreated seed.

10 Third, if you feel that the quality (let's say germination or vigor) of an organic seed

variety is inferior to the conventional seeds available for that variety then you may use non-organic, untreated seeds.

### Sources of organic seeds

Please note that the practice manual states that at least three seed companies need to be searched as sources for organic seed. MOFGA has a handy resource on its website listing seed companies that sell organic seeds. It can be found here: [mofga.org/resources/uncategorized/organic-seed-sources](https://mofga.org/resources/uncategorized/organic-seed-sources). Organic seed search engines (such as [paorganic.org/resources/organic-seed-finder](https://paorganic.org/resources/organic-seed-finder)) and Google can also help you in your search.

### Organic seed search records

A lot of growers use spreadsheets to track search records. They add the seed companies they searched for organic varieties and the seeds they had to source conventionally. If you choose to use conventional seeds because of quality issues, adding notes on why you decided to use that seed when organic seed was available will be necessary. Some growers print out (or save a PDF of) Google searches or organic seed search engine results. Hopefully these records will benefit you in the long run when you are doing cost-benefit evaluations for your farm!

For more information, please see: [seedalliance.org/publications/organic-seed-search-annotated-resources-guide](https://seedalliance.org/publications/organic-seed-search-annotated-resources-guide).

**Producer Survey  
Coming Soon!**

As part of MOFGA's Strategic Impact Plan (<https://www.mofga.org/our-community/our-impact/>), we are working to support MOFGA-certified organic producers as well as ensure that the MOFGA certified organic brand is trusted, synonymous with local and organic, and consumers are regularly seeking out MOFGA-certified organic products throughout the region.

We would like your input to help us advance these goals, support existing certified organic producers, and encourage non-certified producers to get certified. Later this fall, there will be a survey sent around to all MOFGA-certified producers asking questions about how you use, if at all, the MOFGA brand to promote your products. Please be sure to fill out the survey so that MOFGA can understand how to best meet the marketing needs of certified producers.



**CERTIFIED ORGANIC BY MOFGA**

**MOFGA Certified Organic**  
Maine's USDA Accredited Organic Certifier

**The Gold Standard in Organic Certification**

- ★ Upholding the soil health requirements for crop production and the original intent of the organic farming regulations.
- ★ No certification of factory farms or operations that don't allow true outdoor access for livestock.

*Certifying in Maine, New Hampshire and Northeastern MA to all NOP Scopes - Crops, Handler, Livestock and Wild Crop*

[mofgacertification.org](https://mofgacertification.org)   [certification@mofga.org](mailto:certification@mofga.org)   207-568-6030