A lot number is a unique code of numbers and/or letters that represent specific pieces of information connected to a specific batch of product. It is the endpoint of a tracking system mandated by the National Organic Program (NOP) for the purpose of tracing organic agricultural products back to the farm or field or animal of origin, thus ensuring a high level of consumer confidence. Both unprocessed and processed farm products may be required to have lot numbers. Lot numbers are good for your business. They can limit the scope of a recall. They can aid farmers in disputes with buyers about product quality.

**Which products DO NOT need a lot number?**
- Unprocessed or minimally processed farm products (fruits, vegetables, eggs, maple syrup) sold directly to consumers or to local markets, co-ops or buying clubs

**Which products DO need a lot number?**
- Unprocessed farm products (fruits, vegetables, eggs) sold to third party buyers (processors, wholesalers, distributors)
- Processed farm products (cheese, milk, jam, pickles, meat) sold retail or wholesale
- All incoming ingredients and all products shipping from a processing/handling facility

What information might a lot number contain?
- The date of harvest or production or processing
- Type of crop
- A “best by” date
- A field or storage unit number
- A batch number for processed products

As an example, a lot number for organic Yukon Gold potatoes harvested in 2011 and stored in a farm storage bin could read “YG119”. The YG stands for Yukon Gold, 11 represents the year, and 9 is the storage bin number. The farm storage records for bin #9 should show the date of harvest, the amount harvested, and the fields of origin of the potatoes. Thus the lot number plus the farm’s storage records allow the potatoes to be tracked back to a field(s) of origin. For all sales of these potatoes the invoices and the shipping containers would contain this lot number.

Whenever two or more products are combined, assign a new lot number. Record the new lot number on a production log and be sure to include the lot numbers of the incoming organic products that you combined. Otherwise, you will lose the audit trail.

Here is a more complex lot number system example:

**Slaughter and Cut Log for 123 Farm’s Beef Cattle**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species or Product</th>
<th>Quantity (head)</th>
<th>Slaughter Date</th>
<th>Slaughter Lot Number</th>
<th>Cut Date</th>
<th>Cutting Lot Number</th>
<th>Cut Lot Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10/10/11</td>
<td>101011</td>
<td>10/11/11</td>
<td>C1-101111</td>
<td>900 lbs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Production Log for 123 Farm’s Beef Products**
123 Farm bought in another farm’s beef trim and ground it in two batches, AM and PM, on October 20, 2011, before making the patties on the 21st.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Process Lot Number</th>
<th>Process Date</th>
<th>Sub-Lot Examples</th>
<th>Component Lots</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Ground Beef Patties  | 200 lbs. | 29311* (Julian date) | 10/21/11     | 102011A, 102011P | Beef trim: 150 lbs., C1-101111
|                      |          |                    |              |                  | Beef trim: 55 lbs., C91611A (XYZ Farms) |

(Continued on Pg 10)
Lot Number Primer - (Continued)

Sales Log for 123 Farm’s Beef Products

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sales Date</th>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Costumer</th>
<th>Lot Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/25/11</td>
<td>Ground Beef Patties</td>
<td>Cross Trax</td>
<td>100 lbs., 29311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/26/11</td>
<td>Ground Beef Patties</td>
<td>MOFGA</td>
<td>100 lbs., 29311</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We recommend testing your system. Pretend you are an organic inspector and do a mass balance (pounds of production should equal pounds of sales). Next, pretend there is a safety concern with a product (or ingredient) you used. Do a mock recall. How easily were you able to find affected products? Was your system able to minimize the amount of product you would have to recall? Please contact MCS if you have any questions.

*Julian date website: http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/partners/fepp/juliandate.htm*