

# Other Considerations in Organic Certification

The preceding discussion focused mainly on certification of crop production. Many producers are also interested in livestock production and processing. While most of the principles and procedures governing crop production apply, this chapter describes each of these topics in more detail.

## ORGANIC LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION

As with organic crops, organic livestock must also be certified to verify the authenticity of the organic livestock operation. Organic livestock standards have been developed for meat, dairy, and egg production. As with crop production, individual certification agencies may differ in some procedures, but all must comply with the National Organic Program Standards. Review a number of agencies before you choose a certification agency.

In general, organic livestock standards require the following:

- Access to fresh air, natural daylight, and freedom of movement.
- Feeding of 100 percent certified organic feed. Mineral/vitamin supplements are treated separately from feed sources, and must be FDA-approved. No poultry or mammalian slaughter byproducts are allowed in feed supplements for poultry or mammals.
- Sourcing slaughter stock from certified animals or from breeding stock under organic management from the last third of gestation.
- Poultry for either meat or eggs must be fed and managed organically from the second day after hatching.
- A health management program that emphasizes prevention of problems through environmental factors (ventilation, sanitation, pasture rotation, feed quality, stress prevention, etc.) and selection of species and genotypes of animals that are adapted to the environment and resistant to prevalent diseases and parasites. Vaccines, homeopathy, and biotherapies are allowed. If animals require antibiotics or other active intervention with a prohibited substance, they cannot be sold as organic but can be sold on the conventional market.
- Humane and sanitary slaughter conditions. Physical alterations (debeaking, tail docking, etc.) must be performed humanely and only for reasons related to animal welfare. For example, tail docking of sheep or pigs is allowed, since there can be humane reasons for the practice. Tail docking of cattle is not allowed, since it is only done for the farmers' convenience.
- Proper handling of manure and recycling of nutrients.

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**Note: The use of growth hormones, embryo transfer techniques, cloning, and genetically engineered substances is prohibited.**  
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Audit trail requirements include herd health records, an animal identification system, identifying sources of feed and feed supplements, and records of the purchase and sale of all animals and animal products.

Dairy livestock have additional requirements. Existing dairy herds can be converted to organic production by feeding and managing the animals organically for one year prior to the production of organic milk. Operators may feed farm-raised, third year transitional feed (harvested between 24 and 36 months after application of a prohibited substance) to the animals during the final year, when the herd is being converted to organic production. (Third year transitional feed must be grown on your own farm, it can not be purchased). Pasture land must meet the same standard as crop land to be certified organic (36 months with no prohibited inputs) prior to use for organic grazing. Once converted, all dairy animals must be fed and managed organically (certified organic feed), and cannot be rotated between organic and nonorganic management. Read the NOP Rule and contact certifiers for more information.

## ORGANIC CERTIFICATION OF ON-FARM PROCESSING

On-farm processing includes cleaning, packaging, blending, milling, dehydrating, pressing, cooking, juicing, and extracting of grains, vegetables, fruits, herbs, honey, maple syrup, and other products at the farm level. Many organic farmers have an on-farm processing operation to add value to their organic products. Washing and packing fresh fruits or vegetables, small scale grain cleaning, or herb drying are examples of on-farm processing in Minnesota. In addition, if any organic crops are custom cleaned, hulled, bagged, or further processed, information about the custom cleaning or processing operation should be included in the Organic System Plan.

The size and complexity of the processing operation may necessitate the use of a separate processor/handler questionnaire. Contact your certification agency for guidance on what form applies to your situation.

Develop and submit a facility map and product flow chart with the questionnaire. Certification agencies have slightly different paperwork and fees for processing. Be clear on the requirements of the certification agency. There may be additional audit trail requirements as well. The inspector must inspect this area of the operation if organic products are processed or handled.

When you initially contact a certification agency, be sure to let them know that you have an on-farm processing operation so that the appropriate paperwork can be completed and sufficient time allowed for the inspection.

## ORGANIC CERTIFICATION OF OFF-FARM PROCESSING

As long as products are under your ownership and further processing is necessary, it is your responsibility to ensure that your organic products are cleaned, bagged, slaughtered, or further processed at a certified organic facility. Otherwise, your products will lose their organic certification. The audit trail is broken whenever certified organic products are cleaned, processed, repackaged (or if the label is changed in any way), blended, stored, or handled by a non-certified party, unless the product is already packaged for final sale to the consumer.

Any place the organic product is physically moved to is a part of the audit trail, and accurate records must be kept—including information on product movement, storage, processing, packaging, and sales. Farmers should always keep copies of current organic certificates for all processors who handle their products, and Transaction Certificates, if those are issued.

Your certification agency may allow a contract processor to be certified under your certification if the processor is only handling organic products for you. If the processor is handling organic products for several organic farmers, the processor must either be certified as a contract processor under each farmers' certification, or obtain its own certificate.

The USDA has established organic standards for the processing/handling of organic products. In addition, processed products must be labeled according to NOP labeling requirements. If you plan to have your organic products processed, be sure you inform the certification agency so that the appropriate paperwork is completed and an inspection is scheduled.

# Conclusion

## CERTIFICATION: PRIVILEGES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Certification has rewards. The obvious reward is the validation of an organic product that offers entry to niche markets and potential for price premiums. But there are more subtle rewards that stem from the certification process and certificate. Many producers express a newfound understanding of their land and operation that results from the certification process and the analysis of the farm operation accompanying that process. Also, producers enjoy the sense of land stewardship, improvements to soil quality and wildlife habitat, commitment to rural community, and promotion of diversified farms--all supported by the organic philosophy.

Certification also comes with responsibilities. A certified organic producer is entrusted with the use of logos or seals designed by the certification agency that distinguish the certified organic product from other products. Misuse of the seal, logo, or the word "organic" on an uncertified product or misrepresentation of a non-organic product as organic will result in certification being revoked and possible fines, up to \$10,000 per violation. Remember, an organic producer has committed to manage the land in accordance with the organic practices and standards as outlined by federal law. That producer also has the responsibility to act as a watchdog, contributing to and upholding organic integrity in the industry.

## WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

Now that you have been introduced to the organic certification process, where do you go from here? You probably have additional questions about certification, and a host of questions concerning organic production. Most organic producers say that the real challenge for producers interested in organic production is not certification, but rather managing an organic system. Switching from a conventional to an organic system is complicated and does not happen overnight. It is a long-term process of learning what works best for you and your farm conditions.

With that in mind, here are some tips on where to go next.

### **CERTIFICATION PACKAGES:**

Call the certification agencies and request their certification packages. Besides containing everything you need to know about certification with that agency, they may also have information that can help with production-related questions. Many agencies have web sites which provide information. See Table I for web site addresses.

### **OTHER FARMERS:**

Networking with other organic producers is the most valuable tool a new organic producer has available to him or her. Ask the certification agencies or MDA for names of organic producers in your area. Call a MOFIE mentor. Talk to these experienced producers about how they handle the certification process and how they manage their farms using organic practices. Attend organic farm tours and research field days.

**PUBLICATIONS:**

Ask experienced organic producers for the names of publications they have found helpful. Contact organizations such as MOSES or ATTRA, ask your University of Minnesota Extension Agent, and visit your local library to gather information on organic production methods. See Resources for more information on publications and organizations.

**CONFERENCES:**

Organic conferences are a great place to learn from experienced organic farmers and other experts. Most have trade shows where you can find approved inputs, talk with certification agency representatives, and connect with buyers for certified products. They are also the best place to network with other, more experienced producers.

Two especially good conferences to attend in our area are the Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference (late February) and the Minnesota Organic Conference (mid-January). See “Conferences” under Resources below for more information.

## RESOURCES

# Publications

**ATTRA's Guide to Organic Publications.** 2006. George Kuepper. ATTRA has over 100 online or print bulletins pertaining to organic certification, production, marketing and business. This publication helps you sort through where to start reading by providing brief summaries of what you'll find in each publication. This publication lists bulletins covering everything from certification and organic production enterprise budgets to organic compliant production practices for field crops, fruit and nut trees, livestock, vineyards and horticultural crops. Available from ATTRA, PO Box 3657, Fayetteville, AR 72702. (800) 346-9140 (English), (800) 411-3222 (Español). Full text available online: [www.attra.org/attra-pub/PDF/organicpubslist.pdf](http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/PDF/organicpubslist.pdf).

**Future Harvest.** 1994 Jim Bender. From his own farming experience in Nebraska, the author addresses the crucial issues involved in developing a viable commercial pesticide-free farm with emphasis upon soil and water conservation. He examines the context of contemporary alternative agriculture, provides a rationale for the goal of complete freedom from pesticides, and offers a detailed description of practical steps for farmers wishing to do the same. Available from University of Nebraska Press, 1111 Lincoln Mall, Lincoln, NE 68588-0630. (800) 755-1105. [pressmail@unl.edu](mailto:pressmail@unl.edu).

**Managing Cover Crops Profitably.** 2001. 2nd edition. Christopher Shirley, Greg Bowman, Craig Cramer. A user-friendly reference tool to help select cover crops for your farm's unique conditions and manage them to reap multiple benefits. Good descriptions of cultural traits and management requirements of each species and great cross-references. Available from Sustainable Agriculture Publications, PO Box 753, Waldorf, MD 20604-0753. (301) 374-9696. [sanpubs@sare.org](mailto:sanpubs@sare.org). Full text available online: [www.sare.org/publications/covercrops/covercrops.pdf](http://www.sare.org/publications/covercrops/covercrops.pdf)

**The Organic Broadcaster Newspaper.** This bimonthly publication from Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) has practical information for producers as well as national news, marketing information and ideas, organic field days/tours calendar, and resources. Available through MOSES, PO Box 339, Spring Valley, WI 54767. (715) 772-3153. [broadcaster@mosesorganic.org](mailto:broadcaster@mosesorganic.org). Online articles (accessed January 2007): [www.mosesorganic.org/broadcaster/introob.htm](http://www.mosesorganic.org/broadcaster/introob.htm)

**Organic Farm Certification & The National Organic Program.** 2002. George Kuepper. This guide outlines the considerations involved in "going organic" and the basic steps to organic certification. Available from ATTRA, PO Box 3657, Fayetteville, AR 72702. (800) 346-9140 (English), (800) 411-3222 (Español). Full text available online: [www.attra.org/attra-pub/PDF/organcert.pdf](http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/PDF/organcert.pdf).

**Organic Dairy Farming.** 2005. Jody Padgham, ed. This is a resource book for all organic dairy farmers. It is filled with practical information on preventing health problems in dairy cows as well as using organic methods for specific health problems. Available from MOSES, PO Box 339, Spring Valley, WI 54767. (715) 772-3153. [cathy@mosesorganic.org](mailto:cathy@mosesorganic.org). [www.mosesorganic.org](http://www.mosesorganic.org)

**The Organic Field Crop Handbook.** 2001. 2nd edition. This reference book describes organic principles, crop rotations, green manure and cover crops, and specific grain groups. This is an excellent book for the grain farmer in transition, as it gives a step-by-step guide to design a crop rotation. Available from Canadian Organic Growers, National Office, 323 Chapel Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 7Z2 Canada. (888) 375-7383. (613) 236-0743. [office@cog.ca](mailto:office@cog.ca). [www.cog.ca](http://www.cog.ca).

**The Organic Livestock Handbook.** 2004. 2nd edition. Ann Macey, ed. A comprehensive guide covering a wide array of management tools, the role of livestock in an organic farm, marketing, recordkeeping, and sections focusing on dairy cows, beef cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, poultry, rabbits, work horses, and honeybees. Available from Canadian Organic Growers, National Office, 323 Chapel Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 7Z2 Canada. (888) 375-7383. (613) 236-0743. office@cog.ca. www.cog.ca.

**The Soul of Soil.** 1999. 4th edition. Joseph Smillie and Grace Gershuny. This reference handbook shows you how to observe and evaluate your soil, interpret soil tests, and design the best program to improve your soil with a variety of techniques. Includes many tables and illustrations. Available from Chelsea Green Publishing, P.O. Box 428, 85 N. Main Street, Suite 120, White River Jct., VT 05001. 802 295-6300. chelseagreen.com.

**Steel in the Field: A Farmer's Guide to Weed Management Tools.** 2001. Greg Bowman, ed. A practical guide to weed-control tools, this book combines university research, engineering expertise, and farmer experience to analyze the usefulness of 37 implements and 18 accessories for a wide range of applications. Available from Sustainable Agriculture Publications, PO Box 753, Waldorf, MD 20604-0753. (301) 374-9696. sanpubs@sare.org. Full text available online: [www.sare.org/publications/steel/steel.pdf](http://www.sare.org/publications/steel/steel.pdf).

**Transitioning to Organic Production.** 2003. Lays out conversion strategies covering typical organic farming production practices, innovative marketing ideas and federal standards for certified organic crop production. With special sections on livestock production and profiles of four organic producers. Available free from USDA/SARE, 10300 Baltimore Avenue, Building 046 BARC West, Beltsville, Maryland, 20705. (301) 504-5411. san\_assoc@sare.org. Full text available online: [www.sare.org/publications/organic/organic.pdf](http://www.sare.org/publications/organic/organic.pdf).

**Upper Midwest Organic Resource Directory.** Updated annually. This conveniently sized reference handbook provides quick access to information about organic agriculture in the Upper Midwest. It includes contact information for organic farmer networks, certification agencies, buyers, processors, consultants, suppliers, websites, publications, and events. Available online: [www.mosesorganic.org/umord/directory.htm](http://www.mosesorganic.org/umord/directory.htm). Request a print copy from MOSES, PO Box 339, Spring Valley, WI 54767. (715) 772-3153.

**Weeds and Why They Grow.** 1994. Jay McCann. This farmer combines a knowledge of soil nutrient balance with his observations of weeds, and asserts that each weed species prefers certain soil conditions and mineral balance, thus weeds can be controlled by adding mineral inputs and/or changing soil condition. Many charts providing information on over 800 weed species. Available from MOSES, PO Box 339, Spring Valley, WI 54767. (715) 772-3153. cathy@mosesorganic.org.

# Organizations

## **Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA)**

P.O. Box 3657  
Fayetteville, AR 72702  
(800) 346-9140  
[www.attra.org](http://www.attra.org)

ATTRA is a public information service and offers many free booklets about organic production systems. Besides requesting ATTRA publications, producers may also call with specific production questions. If the answer is not immediately available, staff will research it for the producer and mail out the information.

## **Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (MFAI)**

W2493 Cty. Rd. ES  
East Troy, WI 53120  
(262) 642-3303  
[www.mfai.org](http://www.mfai.org)

Michael Fields Agricultural Institute is a public nonprofit education and research organization committed to promoting resource-conserving, ecologically sustainable, and economically viable food and farming systems. MFAI has programs in education, research, food systems, international support, and farm policy. They offer various workshops, conferences, and field days that focus on training beginning and current farmers in sustainable, organic, and biodynamic practices.

## **Minnesota Department of Agriculture**

625 Robert Street North  
St. Paul, MN 55155  
(651) 201-6012  
[www.mda.state.mn.us/esap/organic](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/esap/organic)

MDA offers organic information (including directories and fact sheets), a comprehensive organic web site, educational events, speakers, and other assistance and resources for many areas of organic agriculture including: production methods, transition, certification, processing, marketing, and special projects. MDA administers organic certification cost share funds and an on-farm demonstration grant program.

## **Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA)**

1991 Buford Circle  
St. Paul, MN 55108-1013  
(800) 909-6472 or (612) 625-8235  
[misamail@umn.edu](mailto:misamail@umn.edu)  
[www.misa.umn.edu](http://www.misa.umn.edu)

MISA is located at the University of Minnesota and is a partnership between the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences, the Sustainers' Coalition, and University of Minnesota Extension. MISA will answer individual requests for information, including helping connect farmers, researchers, and other specialists who can help answer questions.

## **Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Services (MOSES)**

P.O. Box 339  
Spring Valley, WI 54767  
(715) 772-3153  
Fax: (715) 772-3162  
[www.mosesorganic.org](http://www.mosesorganic.org)

MOSES is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to help agriculture make the transition to a sustainable organic system of farming. MOSES disseminates organic farming information via a website, publications and fact sheets, and the Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference and the Organic University, a series of in-depth, full-day courses on production and marketing of organic crops and livestock.

## **Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society**

PO Box 194, 100 1 Ave. SW  
LaMoure, ND 58458  
(701) 883-4304  
[www.npsas.org](http://www.npsas.org)

The Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society is a grassroots educational organization committed to the development of a sustainable society through the promotion of ecologically and socially sound food production and distribution systems in the Northern Plains. It focuses on organic production methods and philosophy, and started an organic marketing cooperative to help experienced and new organic growers access markets for their products.

## **Organic Ecology Program - Southwest Research and Outreach Center, University of Minnesota**

Jim Riddle, Organic Outreach Coordinator  
PO Box 428  
Lamberton, MN 56152  
(507) 752-7372  
[www.organicecology.umn.edu](http://www.organicecology.umn.edu)

The University of Minnesota's Organic Ecology program is based at the Southwest Research and Outreach Center in Lamberton, MN. Organic agriculture research takes place at the SWROC's Elwell Agroecology Farm. The website provides research results, event announcements and other information pertaining to organic agriculture. The website is also the portal to contact members of the Minnesota Organic Farmers Information Exchange (MOFIE).

## **Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota**

Mary Jo Forbord, Executive Director  
29731 302 St.  
Starbuck, MN 56381  
(866) 760-8732  
[www.sfa-mn.org](http://www.sfa-mn.org)

The Sustainable Farming Association (SFA) of Minnesota is a farmer-run nonprofit organization that serves as an information-sharing network about sustainable farming practices. There are currently 12 chapters throughout the state. Contact the SFA to find out about the chapter nearest your area.

# Conferences

## **MINNESOTA ORGANIC CONFERENCE**

Held each January, this two-day event offers dozens of workshops about organic production and marketing; many of them led by experienced organic farmers. The conference offers sessions for both new and experienced growers, along with a trade show attended by buyers, input suppliers, consultants, educational organizations and public agencies. For more information, call the Minnesota Department of Agriculture at (651) 201-6012.

## **UPPER MIDWEST ORGANIC FARMING CONFERENCE**

This is the largest organic farming conference in the United States and draws more than 2000 attendees. It is held in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, during the last weekend in February. The Organic University occurs the day before the conference. It is a full day of in-depth learning on a specific topic, and is presented by farmers and professionals in the field. The two-day conference offers 50 to 60 workshops with five to six concurrent sessions on a variety of organic topics, including crop production for row crops, vegetables, and fruits; livestock (slaughter and dairy); marketing; and updates on national issues. There is a trade show with exhibits by supporting businesses and buyers of organic products. For information, contact Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Services (MOSES), (715) 772-3153.