

INTRODUCTION TO ORGANIC CERTIFICATION

RESOURCE GUIDE



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This is a resource guide created by FARRMS for farmers and ranchers who are interested in learning more about the organic certification process. This guide covers the basics of organic certification, helps determine if organic certification is right for you, shows how to start your certification process, and provides resources to help you through the process, including organic farmer contact information, along with much more. Updated 3.2026.

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What does it mean to be a certified organic producer?

- [USDA Certified Organic: Understanding the Basics](#) – Understand the basics of organic: definitions, labels, the USDA organic seal, farming practices, and more. A great resource to share with consumers.
- [Rodale Institute](#): A massive resource for organic information, news, training, and much more. A great resource to share with consumers.
 - They provide technical assistance and consulting services to any type of organic grower free of charge. They will also help connect you with a certifier.
- [North Dakota Dept. of Ag Organic information](#) – The ND Department of Agriculture has gathered many resources to spread information about being certified organic and what the steps are to become certified.
- [What is “Organic” Definitions of Organic](#): Video Snippet from Derek Lowstuter of Black Bison Organics on soil health
- [Session 6 Organic Production](#): Class Recording of the Sustainable Ag Internship Program (6/13/23). An introduction to Organics presentation and conversation with Glen Philbrick.
- [Intro to Organic #1: The Real Dirt on Organic Agriculture](#) Presentation from Ryan Slabaugh with Think Regeneration on the Realities of Change into Organic Farming.

What is the TOPP Program and how is FARRMS involved?

- Through the [Transition to Organic Partnership Program \(TOPP\)](#) the USDA is investing up to \$100 million over five years in cooperative agreements with non-profit organizations to increase the number of farmers transitioning to certified organic production.
- FARRMS is part of the [Plains Transition to Organic Partnership Program \(Plains TOPP\)](#). Led by [OCIA International](#), Plains TOPP is a coalition of organizations providing technical assistance and wrap-around support for transitioning and existing organic farmers. Plains TOPP serves operators in Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, and Oklahoma.
- [TOPP Map of Partners in each State](#): Where to find organizations and their contact information that work with TOPP from around the country.

Where can I find certified organic producers or processors?

- [Rodale Institute](#) Organic Farm Search Tool. To help you find other certified organic farmers, ranchers, and processors around the country.
- [USDA Organic Integrity Database](#) – A searchable database where people can find specific certified organic farms, ranches, processors, handlers, or search for an operation with specific characteristics.
- [Intro to Organic #3: ND Farmer Chat](#) Community introduction & Farmer Panel with Marvin Baker, Glen Philbrick, Paul Lepp, Jonathan Moser

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I'm thinking about transitioning to organic certification. Where do I start?

- [SARE Organic Transition Planner](#). This planner will help you explore organic transition strategies and decide whether going organic makes sense for your farm or business. This will guide you through the development of an actionable business transition plan that is suitable for your operation.
- [Guide for Organic Crop Producers](#): An in-depth, helpful guide for crop producers who are certified organic or transitioning to organic certification.
- [Transitioning to Organic Production](#). This publication introduces the requirements of the USDA NOP and outlines many key strategies producers use to make their 36-month transition.
- [Organic System Plan Template](#). The organic system plan is the cornerstone of any application for certification. This streamlined template provides a guide for highly diversified farms to develop organic system plans
- [Organic Transition - Rodale Institute](#). This is a virtual course that guides and helps producers go through the basics of becoming certified organic.
- [Session 9 Organic Certification and USDA FSA](#) Class recording of the Farm Beginnings Program (4/8/21). "Is organic certification right for you?" presentation by Clair Keene. And presentation by Leeann Heisler on USDA FSA Loan programs.
- [Intro to Organic #2: The Path to Certification](#) Presentation from Nic Podoll on "The Path to Certification" a Transition to Organic
- [Navigating the Organic Transition: Key Decisions for Farmers](#): Join Sam Oschwald and Kevin Mahalko for practical strategies and a discussion on how to make informed, cost-effective decisions during your organic transition. Whether you're just starting or already in the process, this session will provide valuable guidance to support your farm's success. Hosted by Marble Seed.

What are the guidelines you must follow to be certified organic?

- [OMRI](#) (Organic Materials Review Institute) provides a seal on products that are acceptable to use within a certified organic farm.
- [National Organic Program](#) (NOP) is a federal regulatory program that develops and enforces consistent national standards. This site is a resource guide to the USDA National Organic Program.
- [The National List](#) of Allowed and Prohibited Substances from the USDA "Code of Federal Regulations".
- [Organic Regulation](#) The USDA regulatory body develops the rules & regulations for the production, handling, labeling, and enforcement of all USDA organic products.
- [Organic Practices Fact Sheet](#). This resource provides an overview of some common practices that organic producers and handlers use to ensure integrity and sustainability.

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- [USDA Organic Inspection Series](#): Learn about the inspection process for organic certification through an inspector's lens, presented by Iowa Organic Association.

Where can I get help with implementing organic certification on my farm?

- [NRCS Resources](#) for Organic Producers. NRCS can help producers develop a conservation plan to meet their goals, provide financial assistance to work with your goals, along with a wide variety of resources and materials.
- [Ask an Expert](#): This group is managed by eOrganic, the organic agriculture Community of Practice. Get answers to questions about commercial certified organic farming.
- [FARRMS Inquiry Form](#) offers technical assistance to producers who have questions or need help going through or maintaining organic certification. Free of charge to get assistance, just fill out the form and have someone get in contact with you.
- [Rodale Institute](#) offers consulting to producers on organic farming.
- The Contact Info list at the end of this guide are resources within the Organic's space that are here to help you.

Where can I find accredited certifying agents?

- [Organic Certifier Locator](#)
- [USDA Organic Integrity Database](#) – A searchable database to find accredited organic certifying bodies from around the world.
- [Organic Certifiers List](#) - Compiled by FARRMS

Where can I get help with the costs of organic certification?

- [Organic Management Practice Standard 823](#): Contact your local NRCS office for payments per acre for transition and certified organic producers
- [Rodale Institute](#): An extensive list of different options for Organic Farm Funding
- Find a Program: <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/resources/programs>
- [NC-SARE](#): North Central Sustainable Ag Research and Education (NC-SARE) offers competitive grants to fund research and education projects that advance sustainable agricultural practices.

What paperwork and records does an organic producer need?

- [Organic Systems Plan Templates \(OSP\)](#) is the cornerstone of any application for certification and the jumping-off point for transitioning to organic practices.
- [Organic Production OSP Template](#)
- [Crop Production OSP Template](#)
- [Livestock Production OSP Template](#)

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- [Diving Deeper Into Organic Webinar](#): Learn more about the steps and requirements associated with organic record keeping and creating organic systems plans.
- [Recordkeeping Workbook - Marbleseed](#): Use this workbook to help you with organic certification requirements, along with crop insurance reporting.
- [Organic Crop Documentation Form](#): Take a look at the required documentation for crop production
- [Organic Livestock Documentation Forms](#): Take a look at the required documentation for livestock production
- [Organic Record Keeping - With a Farmer & Inspector - OATS](#) - How to make your paperwork work for you with organic farmer Matthew Fitzgerald, who built an app to make paperwork easier, and inspector Mallory Krieger, who shares tips straight from the field.

Record Keeping Resources

- [OCIA Record Keeping Template](#): Take a look at this list of resources that can help better understand organic regulation and organic record keeping.
- [Organic Crop Record Keeping Requirements](#): Oregon Tilth created a detailed guide on the specific organic record-keeping requirements.
- [The Trail of Records - Recordkeeping for Organic Crop Certification](#): A detailed manual for all of the recordkeeping practices organic farmers must follow to ensure compliance with their certification, created by Oregon Tilth.
- [Overview of Record Keeping Goals and Process](#): A webinar recording of Julia Shanks providing an overview of recordkeeping goals and processes for farmers to use successfully. Produced by NCAT - ATTRA
- [The SUCCESS of Organic: Record Keeping & Business Planning](#): Learn from farmers who are demonstrating best practices for farm record keeping and how this information leads you into helping with business planning.
- [Recordkeeping Strategies for Organic Farmers](#): Produced by the National Organic Coalition, in this webinar, hear from experienced organic farmers about the tools and practices that have worked for them.
- [Recordkeeping for Diversified Produce Growers](#): Webinar hosted by Oregon Tilth and NW TOPP. Mark Green, a certified organic vegetable, berry, and egg producer near Tacoma, WA, describes his eclectic recordkeeping system. He provides insight into how his recordkeeping system was developed in order to meet the needs of organic regulations while minimizing interruptions to farm workflow.
- [Record Keeping Systems for Organic Certification](#) - This Fact sheet, video breakdown, and article are produced by OATS and is to help farmers understand the specifications of record keeping on organic certified farms

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Additional Resources

- [Think Regeneration](#) is a coalition of organizations, farmers, ranchers, scientists, researchers, and philanthropists who want to accelerate on-the-ground regenerative food supply projects. Our programs support projects that repair food-growing ecosystems, reverse trends in chronic disease rates, elevate the voices of regenerative growers, and build more community resilience
- [OCIA](#): A nonprofit, member-owned, agricultural organization, OCIA is dedicated to providing the highest quality organic certification services and access to global organic markets.
- [eOrganic](#): Science, experience, and regulation-based information on organic farming and research. A resource guide that covers a host of topics from introduction to organics to plant breeding in organics.
- [The ATTRA Forum](#): Chat with farmers, ranchers, and sustainable agriculture specialists on everything from whole-farm planning and specialty crops to soil health and grazing.
- [NCAT - ATTRA Sustainable Agriculture](#): These resources were developed in response to producer questions, and they deal with issues like production methods, marketing, and organic certification requirements.
- [OATS](#), The Organic Agronomy Training Service, Is a training program for agricultural professionals working with organic or transitioning farmers in the United States. They offer webinars, courses, podcasts, and more resources about Organic farming and transitioning.
- [NPSAS Resources](#): Information on topics like What is Organic Farming, Transition to Organic Production, and ancient grains.
- [OGRain](#): Organic Grain Resource and Information Network provides resources, research, events & community for organic grain production to support farms in the upper Midwest.
- [Let's Talk Organic - FARRMS YouTube Playlist](#): Watch all of the webinars, clips, and interviews FARRMS has compiled about the world of Organic agriculture.

Continued Education Opportunities

- [Plains TOPP](#): Plains Transition to Organic Partnership Program: The goal of TOPP is to make the transition from conventional farming to organic farming easier and more accessible. This is achieved through providing a mentorship program.
- [ATTRA Sustainable Agriculture Internship Hub](#): If you are a farmer looking to post an internship opportunity, or an individual interested in working and interning with an experienced farmer.
- [NPSAS Food and Farming Conference](#): January 23-25, 2025, at the Ramkota Inn in Aberdeen, South Dakota.
- [Marbleseed's Organic Farming Conference](#): February 20-22nd, 2025, in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The largest organic farming conference in the Midwest. Farmers from a wide range of farm sizes, experiences, and backgrounds gather to learn the latest in organic farming methods, build community, and shape the future of the organic farming movement.

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- [OGRain Conference](#): January 22-24, 2026, in Madison, Wisconsin. Learn from local organic grain growers, hear about the latest research, and connect with other organic producers.

FARRMS Intro to Organic Lunch-n-Learn: Online Webinar 2023

- [Intro to Organic #1: The Real Dirt on Organic Agriculture](#) Presentation from Ryan Slabaugh with Think Regeneration on the Realities of Change into Organic Farming.
- [Intro to Organic #2: The Path to Certification](#) Presentation from Nic Podoll on "The Path to Certification" a Transition to Organic
- [Intro to Organic #3: ND Farmer Chat](#) Community introduction & Farmer Panel with Marvin Baker, Glen Philbrick, Paul Lepp, Jonathan Moser
- [Intro to Organic #4: Empowering Your Organic Transition](#) Presentation from Nic Podoll on resources that Rodale Institute provides. Along with resource sharing and Q&A with Nic Podoll and Glen Philbrick.

FARRMS Going Organic Online Webinar Series Spring 2025

- [The SUCCESS of Organic: Record Keeping & Business Planning](#) Learn from farmers who are demonstrating best practices for farm record keeping and how this information leads you into helping with business planning.
- [The HOW of Organic: Steps to Certification & OSP Tips](#) Learn from three farmers about their experience going through the certification process and understand what is and how important an Organic Systems Plan is to your operation.
- [Exploring the Organic Movement: Intro & Farmer Experiences](#) Learn how the Organic certification movement got started and hear from some of our local farmers who were a part of and at the front of this movement.

FARRMS Navigating Organic Innovation Webinar Series Fall 2025

- [Session 1 - Research, Collaboration & Resources](#): Farmers will gain insights into how research can strengthen their organic operations. Participants will learn about the most recent applied organic research from NDSU's CREC and other programs, gain guidance on starting independent research trials, understand best practices for collaborating with researchers, and explore current grant opportunities and funding resources.
- [Session 2 - The OSP and Farmers Insights](#): This session bridges the gap between wanting to certify and being certified. Through a practical walkthrough of the Organic Systems Plan, participants will gain confidence in navigating certification paperwork and learn about free resources, educational tools, and the OFRF Farmer-Led Trial Program

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Contact Info

Have a question and looking for an answer? Here is a list of resources within the organics space that are here to help you.

Farmers

Paul Lepp <i>Beagle Hill Permaculture Farm</i> Minot, ND (701) 721-8501 pwlepp@gmail.com	Marvin Baker <i>North Star Farms</i> Carpio, ND (701) 720-2635 mbaker@northstarorganic.com	Jonathan Moser <i>Forager Farm</i> Mandan, ND (701) 880-8223 jonathon@foragerfarm.com
Glen Philbrick <i>Hiddendale Farm</i> Turtle Lake, ND (701) 214-8958 glen.philbrick@gmail.com	Zachary Paige <i>North Circle Seeds</i> Vergas, MN (631) 807-5163 zachary@northcircleseeds.com	Terry Jacobsen <i>The North Outback</i> Wales, ND (701) 283-5195 noutback@utma.com
David Podoll <i>Prairie Road Organic Seeds</i> Fullerton, ND (701) 883-4429 dpodoll@drtel.net	Ryan Pesch <i>Lida Farm</i> Pelican Rapids, MN (218) 342-2619 lidafarmer@gmail.com	Carmen Fernholtz <i>A Frame Organic Farms</i> Madison, MN (320) 212-3008 fernholz001@gmail.com

TA Providers

Nic Podoll <i>Organic Consultant in Northern Plains Regional Manager for Rodale Institute</i> North-Central MN (218) 789-1044 nic.podoll@rodaleinstitute.org	Deanna Gierszewski <i>Specialty Crop Block Grant Program Administrator (ND Dept. of Ag)</i> Bismarck, ND (701) 328-2191 & (701)-328-4567 degierszewski@nd.gov
Brad Brummond <i>"Retired" NDSU Extension</i> Walsh County (701) 284-6248 bradley.brummond@ndsu.edu	FARRMS <i>Foundation for Agricultural and Rural Resources Management and Sustainability</i> North Dakota (701) 877-1794 info@farrms.org

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<u>Jeff Gale</u> <i>NDSU Extension Agent</i> Foster County (701) 652-2581 jeff.gale@ndsu.edu	<u>Lindy Berg</u> <i>NDSU Extension Program Coordinator</i> Conservation Leadership & Planning (701) 968-4362 lindy.l.berg@ndsu.edu
<u>Ann Baier</u> National Center for Appropriate Technology Program Specialist annb@ncat.org	<u>Andrew Coggins</u> National Center for Appropriate Technology Sustainable Agriculture Specialist andrewc@ncat.org
<u>Maia Garby</u> Organic Farming Research Foundation Research & Education Junior Fellow research@ofrrf.org	

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