

# Organic Inspection Process for Crop and Livestock Operations: What to Expect from the Organic Inspection

## BEFORE the Inspection

### You will need to:

- Choose a certification agency- the agency chooses the inspector
- Study the regulations
  - Land must be free of prohibited materials and under organic management for 3 years prior to harvest of the certifiable crop.
  - Inspection must occur annually to maintain certification.
- Develop an Organic System Plan (OSP), including good maps and field history
  - Decide whether you are certifying the whole operation or part
  - Include good directions to the farm
  - Pay particular attention to the borders – describe in your OSP or on your maps.
- Set up the record keeping system to make it possible for someone who arrives once a year for part of a day to audit it and assess whether it is compliant.

### The inspector will:

- Review the inspection file that they receive from the certifier
- Schedule the Inspection - must occur when practices can be verified, typically that means while the crop is growing.
  - Role of the Inspector is to
    - Understand your OSP and your operation.
    - Confirm the accuracy and completeness of your OSP
    - Verify compliance to the regulations you are to be certified to
    - Maintain confidentiality and professionalism
  - Role of the Inspector is NOT
    - To be the certifier or make a decision on whether you will be certified
    - To get you certifiable
    - To enter into consulting about how you should run your operation
    - The inspector may take samples for residue testing, but not usually

## DURING the Inspection

### Opening Meeting (less than 1 hour, usually less than ½ hour)

The inspector will:

- Explain the certification and inspection process
- Review the OSP with you to be sure it is complete and accurate.
- Ask clarifying questions and ask you to make changes to the OSP if needed
- Get oriented to the layout of what will be inspected and where things are

### Physical Inspection (about ½ of the inspection -2 to 5 hrs, depends on the size/complexity)

The inspector will:

- Look for physical evidence that supports your OSP
  - Look at the soil, crops, equipment, storage, livestock pasture and handling facilities
  - Look at buffer zones and evaluate any drainage from non-organic neighbors or other contamination problems from outside the operation

- Look at storage facilities, look for bin numbers, assess pest management
- Assess the soil management program
- Verify labels and input records for all input materials used (date, rate, product)
  - Seed labels, receipts, seed search documentation that organic seed was not available if you've used non-organic seed. Feed labels and records of organic feed for livestock.
- Look for evidence that supports the claim of 3 years of organic management
- Look for discrepancies, ask you to explain them
- Take a lot of notes
- The inspector may also collect samples for residue testing.

### **Review of the Records (about ½ of the inspection, typically not more than 2 hours)**

The inspector will:

- Look for written records that supports your OSP
  - Ask you to explain your system
  - Review your lot numbering system
  - Check for storage records that track back to the field
  - Test the traceability of the system (i.e. ear tag numbers for livestock)
  - Do at least one in/out audit balance
- Look for discrepancies, ask you to explain them
- Take a lot of notes
- Look for evidence that supports the claim of 3 years of organic management

What you can do to make this more efficient:

- Organize your records
- Keep all documents for each transaction together
- Keep inputs or a copy of the label in an organized manner. Do not throw away an input container without keeping a label.
- If you use lot numbers, put them on each corresponding document (weight ticket, Bill of Lading, assembly sheet, etc)
- Do a self-audit to make sure everything matches up before the inspector arrives.

### **Closing Meeting**

The inspector will:

- Address any further information needed
- Review all issues of concern
- Give you a chance to ask questions
- Leave contact information and explain what comes next

You will need to:

- READ carefully any on-site inspection checklists or exit interview forms that the inspector completes BEFORE signing them.
- Update with the inspector any crop or livestock summary and inventory documents

## **AFTER the Inspection**

### **What you need to do:**

- Promptly send any follow-up information to the inspector or the certifier, as requested

### **What the Inspector will do:**

- Submit to the certification agency a completed report, any documents co-signed during inspection, and the updated OSP if changes were made (usually about 14 days)
- Might send a follow-up letter to you

**What the Certifier will do:**

- Review the report, make a decision on your certification status, and hopefully send you a certificate showing the crops that are certified and a certification letter.
- If anything needs corrected, it will be described in the letter, with a timeline.
- Send you a copy of the inspection report

**What you need to do:**

- Review the report, but remember the inspector's role. What you need to respond to is not the report, but the letter from the certification agency.

**Organic Resources from ATTRA Sustainable Agriculture**

Visit [attra.ncat.org](http://attra.ncat.org) or call 800-346-9140 to have a hard copy mailed to you

[Documentation Forms for Organic Crop and Livestock Producers, ATTRA](#)

[Guide for Organic Crop Producers](#)

[Nutrient Management Plan \(590\) for Organic Systems](#)

[Cover Crop \(340\) in Organic Systems](#)

[Conservation Buffers in Organic Systems](#)

[Protecting Organic Crops from the Impacts of Genetic Modification Technology](#)

