

# FAQ: WHAT IS ORGANIC?



## What is organic?

An organic production system is managed in accordance with the Organic Foods Production Act and the National Organic Program to respond to site specific conditions by integrating cultural, biological and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance and conserve biodiversity.

Source: *USDA National Organic Program 2001.*

## What does “certified organic” mean?

“Certified organic” means that a nonprofit, state or private certification organization, accredited by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), has verified that products labeled as “organic” meet strictly defined organic standards.

## Why is certification important?

The National Organic Program requires certification of agricultural products making an organic label claim. In addition, certification:

- > Provides product differentiation
- > Enhances product’s value
- > Protects consumers from fraud
- > Boosts consumer confidence
- > Assures organic integrity from seed to shelf

## What is the National Organic Program (NOP)?

The National Organic Program (NOP) is a federal regulation created by the USDA to:

- > Develop and implement national standards governing the marketing of agricultural products as organically produced
- > Facilitate commerce in fresh and processed food that is organically produced
- > Ensure consumers that such products meet consistent standards

## Who sets the guidelines that govern Quality Assurance International (QAI) as an accredited organization of the United States Department of Agriculture?

QAI certifies to the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) guidelines. QAI does not develop the guidelines.

QAI strictly follows guidelines established by the NOP, the federal regulation that ensures all USDA requirements are met. As part of its accreditation, QAI updates programs and policies as needed to ensure ongoing compliance with NOP guidelines. Guidelines are available on the [NOP website](#).

More information on the role of accredited organizations is available on the [NOP website](#).



### What are some of QAI's accreditations?

QAI is committed to the highest quality standards for organic certification and has demonstrated this by achieving the following accreditations:

- > United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
  - National Organic Program (NOP)
- > International Organic Accreditation Service (IOAS)
  - European Recognition Programme (EU)
  - ISO Guide 65
  - Canadian Organic Regime (COR)
- > Conseil des appellations réservées et des termes valorisants (CARTV, Canada)
- > DEKRA
  - ISO 14001
- > JAS through our Japan based, MAFF accredited partner EcoCert

### What types of operations does QAI certify?

- > Producers, growers, greenhouses and bioponics facilities
- > Processors and manufacturers
- > Retailers and restaurants
- > Traders and distributors

### What types of products does QAI certify?

- > Private label
- > Personal care products
- > Dietary supplements
- > Processed products
- > Agricultural commodities
- > Livestock and livestock products
- > Honey
- > Maple syrup
- > Poultry and eggs
- > Sea vegetables
- > Dairy
- > Mushrooms

### Who has received QAI certification?

A list of QAI certified clients can be found in the online directory of certified clients and products.

### To what international markets does QAI certify?

QAI is organized to serve clients worldwide through its affiliation with global strategic partners and offices throughout the world. Our staff specialists have expertise in organic regulations established in the EU, Japan, Canada, Korea and Latin America.

### Does QAI offer organic consultation?

Under the USDA organic regulations, certifiers are not able to be consultants. A list of organic consulting firms is available from QAI upon request, or you can view the current QAI Organic Consultant List online.



## What does QAI's certification process entail?

Obtaining organic certification through QAI is a five step process:



### 1. Application

To kick off the process, complete the application forms and submit supporting documentation. This helps us understand your products, organic practices and operation scope. Let us know if you want other certifications such as gluten free or non GMO.



### 2. Inspection

QAI verifies the information on your application and conducts an onsite inspection to confirm your practices are consistent with organic regulations. When you are certified, annual onsite inspections will continue to be required.



### 3. Review

A QAI technical reviewer evaluates the inspection report. If deviations or inconsistencies are noted, non compliances are issued.



### 4. Resolution

QAI will notify you of noncompliances and your company will have the opportunity to provide a timely resolution.



### 5. Certification

After successfully completing your inspection and technical review, you will receive an official, numbered certificate and will be able to use the organic mark!

## How much does it cost to be certified?

The fee for QAI's organic certification depends on various factors (e.g. size of operation, location, etc.). A fee schedule is provided with the QAI application for organic certification. The actual single fixed fee is determined upon review of each application.

## How long does the certification process take?

Generally, the process takes about eight to ten weeks from receipt of payment and all data required for review. QAI also offers various levels of rush services.

## How often do inspections occur?

The USDA National Organic Program (NOP) regulation requires annual inspections.

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