

QAI's Organic Certification Program

A Five-Step Process:

Application



Inspection



Review



Resolution



Certification



CERTIFIED ORGANIC

2006

Welcome

We are pleased to offer the following information to give you an understanding of QAI and our organic certification process. We have broken the process down into 5 distinct steps. Each step is explained in simple language.

First, we would like to give you some information on QAI.

Since 1989, we at QAI have been providing the highest level of organic certification service. We have enjoyed a healthy growth that extends worldwide. With a reputation for professionalism and integrity, QAI is positioned as the top U.S. organic certification agency, with two out of three certified organic packaged products in the U.S. choosing QAI. We pride ourselves as an innovative organization that has set the high standard for certification organizations.

In an international market of evolving regulations, QAI is committed to active participation in the industry. As your accredited certifying agent, QAI interfaces with national and international regulatory bodies, plus industry organizations and committees, to obtain clarification and ensure consistency of the organic label's integrity. This allows us to continue to assist you, the client, with tough regulatory interpretations.

The QAI organization is distinguished by our professional Client Service Representatives, here to assist you with any questions on your certification.

1. Application

The first step in the certification process is "application". This step allows for you to provide QAI with details about your organic operation. By using QAI's innovative forms and attached "Companion Guide" documents, we guide you through the requirements for a compliant certification program. As a compliment to these forms, the "Companion Guides" will explain each of the items in plain English terms with helpful examples. Of course if you still have questions after reading the "Companion Guide", QAI has talented staff ready to assist you with further clarification.

Upon receipt of the application, a qualified QAI professional may contact you for more information if needed. Should we encounter information in your application that could halt your certification at this step, we will notify you immediately to make appropriate adjustments to your application, thus keeping your certification process on track.

Once we have the completed application forms, QAI will promptly forward a contract for services called a Service Agreement. You will also receive an invoice for your single, fixed fee, certification cost (no additional percentage of sales will be assessed). The total fee amount includes, among others, costs associated with inspection and administration of the certification. Certification cost is calculated based on the specific details of your operation. In the appendix to this document, you will find quick reference tables for each type of operation and their approximate associated cost assessments. If at any time, you determine that your operation is not a good fit for organic certification, you may withdraw your application. QAI will refund a portion of the fees paid depending on which certification steps have been completed.

Application is open to all qualified operations whose activities fall within QAI's scope of accreditation. Of course, QAI will not exclude from participation in its program any person due to discrimination because of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status.

2. Inspection

The next step in the process is "inspection". A qualified inspector will arrange the on-site inspection with you. The inspection will be scheduled at a mutually convenient time when the appropriate manager (or others) responsible for the organic program is available. Your annual on-site inspection consists of a physical evaluation of the areas. During this visit, the inspector will verify the information you provided during the application process. For this reason, it is important that the inspection occur at a time when your operation is in production.

In cases where more information or detail is needed, the inspector may gather data through interviews and documentation on-site. This will prevent unnecessary delays in the certification process.

At times it may be necessary for the inspector to gather samples. The inspector may take samples of product, ingredients, soil, or other materials for laboratory analysis to support your organic plan. Samples will be collected according to the protocols provided by the qualified analytical laboratory contracted to perform the analysis. A receipt for the samples will be provided. The inspector will only take what is required of these free samples.

At the end of your inspection, the inspector will conduct an "exit interview". This will give you a chance to confirm the accuracy of the information collected. A copy of this "exit interview" as well other documents verified during the inspection constitute the "inspection report". For your records, the inspector will leave copies of this report.

For the ongoing maintenance of your certification, on-site monitoring is done annually. You will be given a reminder of your upcoming monitoring approximately three months prior to this date. This will give you plenty of time to provide us with any updates to your program. You should send in any updates to your organic program throughout the year.

3. Review

Once the inspector has forwarded the inspection report to QAI, the third step of the certification process - "review" is initiated. During review, a technical staff member is assigned to evaluate the file. All of the documents submitted are gone over to ensure that the information necessary to show your compliance to the regulation is in order. The reviewer may call you during this process to clarify any information. Such a call is, at worst, informal.

After the file is evaluated, the reviewer forwards the file, with recommendation, to QAI certification management for the certification decision.

4. Resolution

Certification may be granted with or without conditions. You will have an opportunity to provide "resolution" to these issues. This is the fourth step of the certification process.

If conditions are stated, these are considered minor non-compliances. In these cases, you are asked to make corrections or improvements prior to the next inspection year. For clients with minor non-compliances, a certificate will be provided.

On occasion, more severe issues are sited. For those situations where the organic integrity of the product is at risk, you will be asked to make corrections or improvements before certification is granted. These are considered major non-compliances. As soon as QAI has evidence that the issue has been corrected, certification may be granted.

If a major non-compliance is sited during a subsequent annual monitoring, you will be given a period of time to correct the problem. Your certification will remain in good standing as long as your corrective action is received during this time frame.

If you disagree with any certification decision of QAI, you have the right to appeal that decision to the National Organic Program or State Organic Program (if available). QAI will honor the decision of these authorities regarding your appeal.

5. Certification

The final step in the process is "certification". All QAI Certified Entities receive an official numbered certificate. This document will remain in good standing as long as you remain in good standing with the certification program. You may withdraw from the program and surrender your certificate at any time. If your compliance status changes due to issues that you cannot resolve, the certificate may be revoked by QAI.

Certification allows you the right to use the prestigious QAI seal on certified product labels as well as promotions information, literature, and web sites. Your QAI Client Service Representative can provide you with digital forms of the QAI seal in .bmp, .tif, .jpg, and .eps formats.

Certificate Alternatives

For operations that participate in the production of an organic product, but do not market the product, a "Limited Letter of Compliance" is offered. This document confirms compliance in a distinct portion of a certification program. This is available to contractors and companies that fulfill only a step in the total production of the QAI certified organic product. Please contact the QAI San Diego office for further information.

For operations that meet all the system requirements for organic certification, but do not have specific organic products yet, QAI offers a "Facility Certification". This document shows that the client has the capacity to produce organic products, but as of this time, no products are included in the organic plan. Companies that would like to offer private label production find this program helpful in the marketing of their services.

In Closing....

As you can see from the information provided, QAI takes pride in providing clear guidance to our applicants giving you the greatest opportunity for success. We have taken every measure possible to create a system that provides prompt certification in a fair and consistent manner.

If at any time, you need any clarification of the material presented here, please do not hesitate to contact us at:

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