

# 10 steps to organic certification

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4/26/25



**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**  
Agriculture and Natural Resources

■ UC Organic Agriculture Institute

# What is organic agriculture?



# What is organic agriculture?

# NOP

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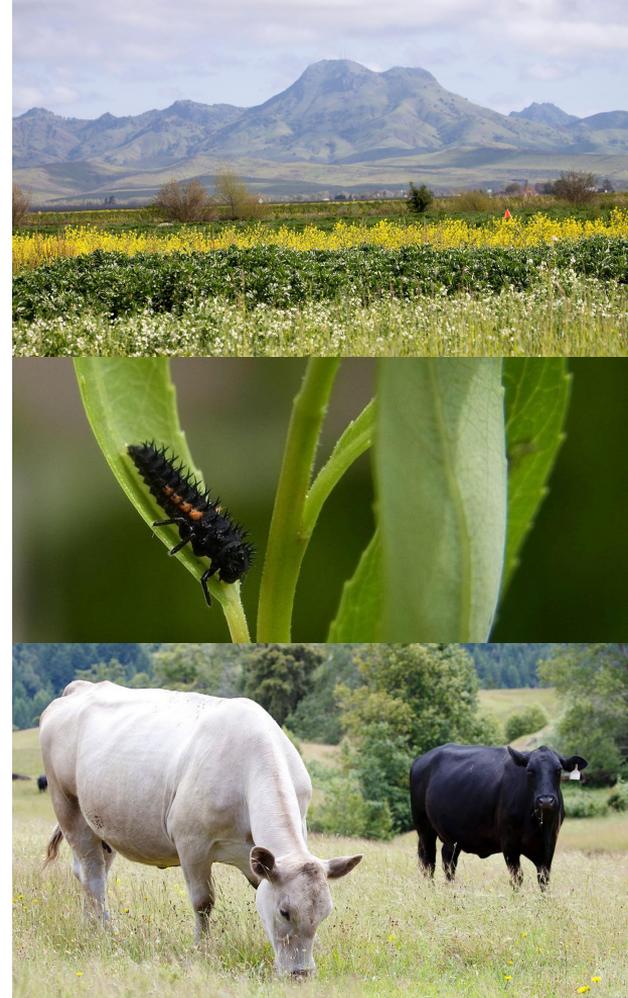
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# What is organic agriculture?

Organic production:

- integrates cultural, biological, and mechanical practices
- fosters cycling of resources
- promote ecological balance
- conserves biodiversity



7 CFS § 205.2 Subpart A — definitions.



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# Who is involved in CA?

US Organic Foods  
Production Act of 1990

CA Organic Food  
and Farming Act

**USDA National Organic Program (NOP)**

**Organic Certifiers**

Oregon Tilth  
CCOF

Organic Certifiers  
Ag Services Cert. Organic  
Quality Assurance Int'l  
etc.

**CDFA State Organic  
Program (SOP)**

**County Ag  
Commissioner**

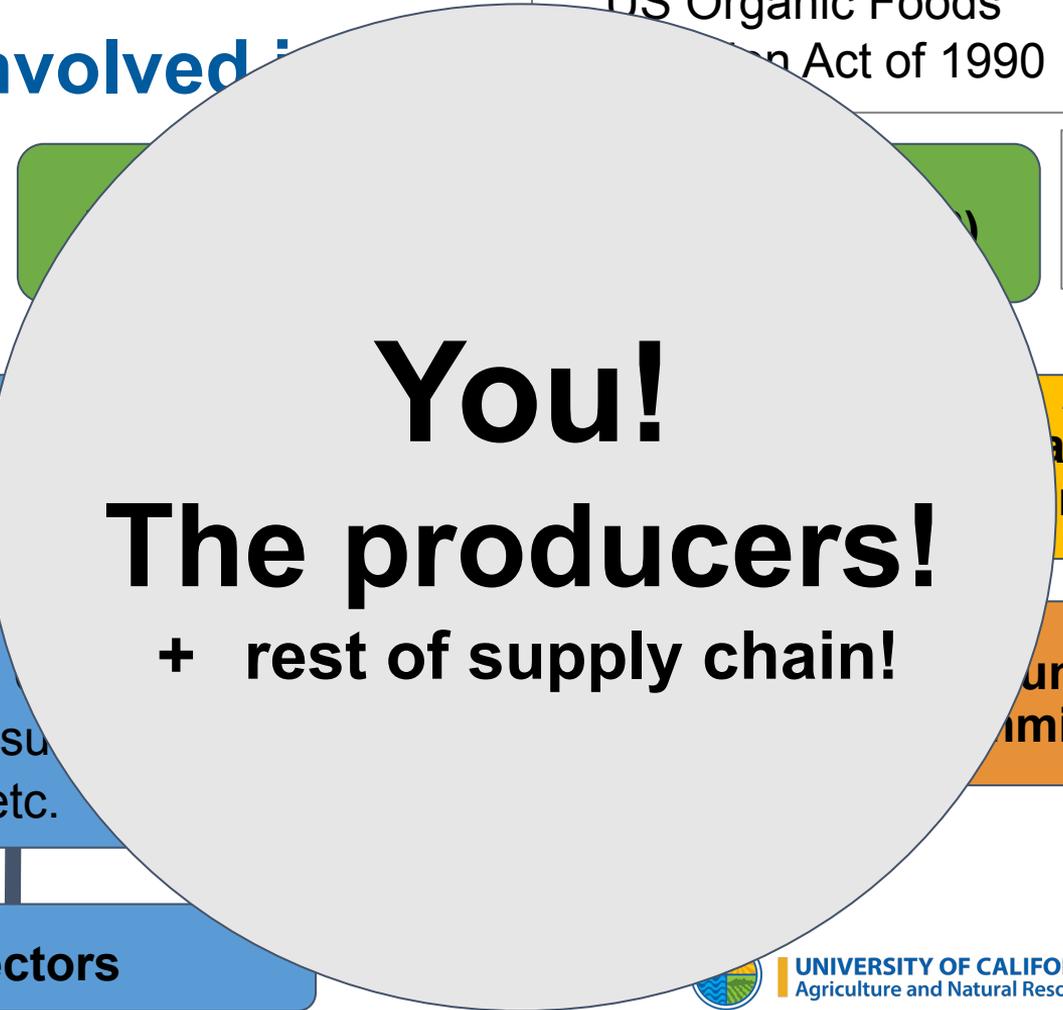
**Inspectors**



# Who is involved:

US Organic Foods  
and Farming Act of 1990

CA Organic Food  
and Farming Act



Organic  
Oreg  
C  
Organic  
Ag Services  
Quality Assu  
etc.

**Inspectors**

ate Organic  
m (SOP)

County Ag  
Commissioner



# Organic labels tell your customers you're certified



# To summarize ...



- All organic farms and ranches in California need to register with the CDFA State Organic Program.
- If you sell more than \$5,000 in organic products -> must get certified to use the word organic.
- If you sell \$5,000 or less in organic products -> exempt from certification

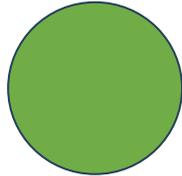


# To summarize ...

## Farm and ranch operations can be:

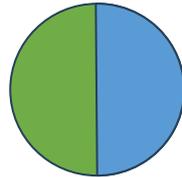
All organic

-> sell only org. products



Split operation

-> sell org. & non-org. products



- All organic farms and ranches in California need to register with the CA State Organic Program.
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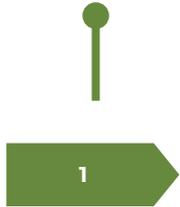


# Organic in practice ... crops, livestock, processing, and/or wild crops



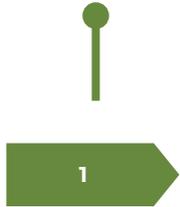
# 10 steps to organic certification

Get prepared  
and contact a  
certifier



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← → ↻ <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/organic-certification/farms-operations> ☆

ANR Admin links OAI Admin Links UCANR Network Organic Regulations CA Organic Certifiers Organic TA Statistics Organic Funding Spanish resources Research papers

## National Organic Program: Farms & Operations

HOME SERVICES ORGANIC CERTIFICATION AND ACCREDITATION NATIONAL ORGANIC PROGRAM: FARMS & OPERATIONS

### Organic Resources for Farms, Ranches, & Businesses

NOP supports farmers, ranchers, and businesses, whether you're an established organic operation or thinking about transitioning to organic.

### You are considering transitioning to organic or becoming certified:

[How to Transition to Organic](#) – includes information on:

- Organic definition, practices, and labeling
- Eligibility for organic certification
- How to get organic certification for your farm, ranch, or business
- Available support and resources

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## Guide for Organic Crop Producers

By Pamela Coleman  
National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT)  
Agriculture Specialist  
November 2012

### CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

New farmers, and farmers experienced in conventional agriculture, often find that obtaining organic certification for their crops is quite challenging. This guide is intended to help lead farmers through the organic certification process. Chapters 1 through 4 explain the National Organic Program (NOP) and describe the process of organic certification. Later chapters explain specific USDA organic regulations that apply to planting, soil fertility, pest management, and other farm practices. In addition to interpreting the regulations, this guide explains the practices and materials that are allowed for organic production.

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## Guide for Organic Livestock Producers

By Linda Colley and  
Ann H. Sims, National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) Agriculture Specialists  
November 2012

### Section 1: Overview of organic certification and production

### CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

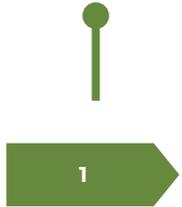
This guide is an overview of the process of becoming certified organic. It is designed to explain the USDA organic regulations as they apply to livestock producers. If you are also producing crops, you will need the "Guide for Organic Producers" to understand the regulations pertaining to the land and to crop production. In addition to explaining the regulations, both guides give examples of the practices that are allowed for organic production.

The first four chapters of the crops guide are essentially the same as the first four of this guide; they give an introduction to the National Organic Program (NOP), the organic...

#### Contents

Section 1	
Overview of Organic Certification and Production Chapter 1.1.....	1
Section 2	
Producers and Hay Crops.....	

Get prepared  
and contact a  
certifier



## Some organic rules\*

### All producers

- Land must be free of prohibited substances 3 yrs prior to harvest
- Establish buffer zones
- Maintain or improve natural resources & biodiversity
- Only use allowed inputs
- Keep records of materials and practices from seed to sale
- Fill out an Organic System Plan (OSP) + update regularly
- Use certifier approved organic labels for products
- Register with CDFA State Organic Program annually
- Get inspected by certifier annually

### Crop

- Use organic seeds and planting stock when commercially available
  - Transplants and microgreen seeds need to be organic
- Use crop rotations
- Soil health & fertility management
  - Use composting, cover cropping, etc. and allowed inputs
- Pest, weed, and disease management
  - Preventative -> use allowed “----icides” as last resource

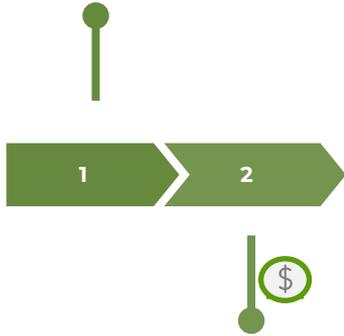
### Livestock

- Animal origin -> must be organic, but some exceptions
- Use organic livestock feed + ruminant pasture rule
- Animal health:
  - Preventative - only use allowed treatments
- Living conditions and facilities -> access to outdoors, water, bedding, space, etc.
- Transport and slaughter requirements

\*refer to the full [NOP regulations](#) and talk with [your certifier](#) to understand the rules

# 10 steps to organic certification

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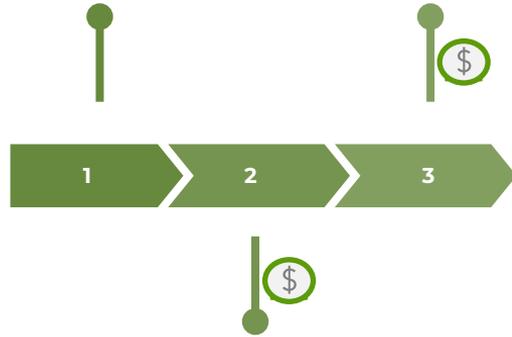


Register with  
CDFA SOP

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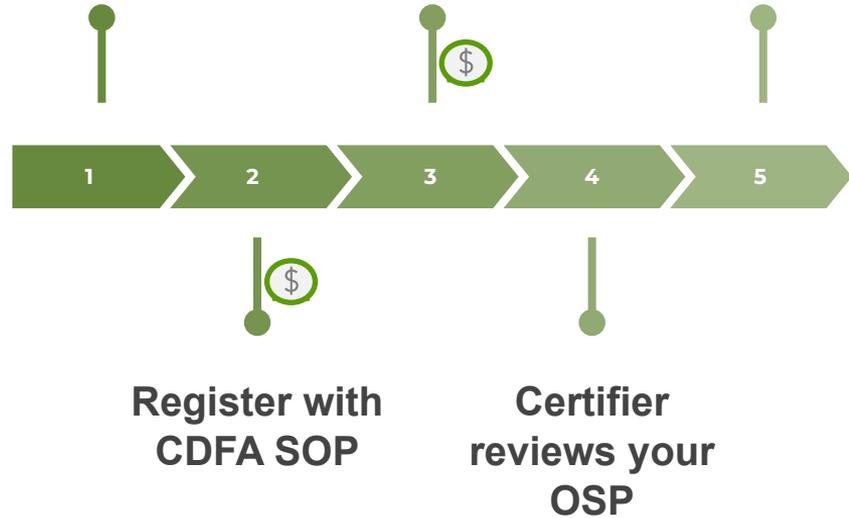
Certifier  
reviews your  
OSP

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Run your  
operation,  
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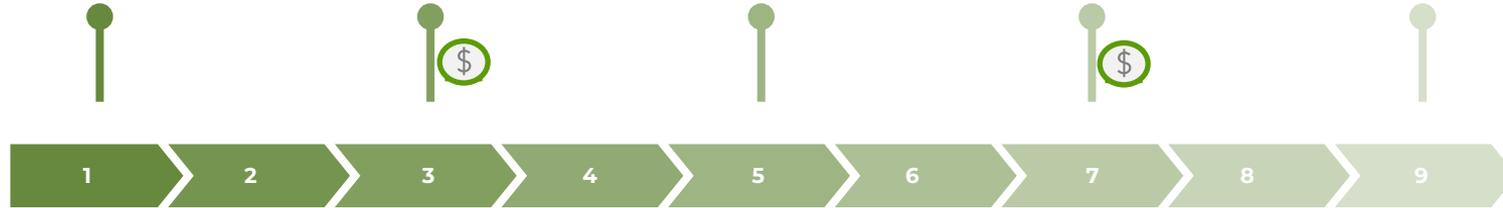
Get prepared and contact a certifier

Choose a certifier, submit your application and Organic System Plan (OSP)

Get inspected

Certifier grants certification

Prepare for annual inspection



Register with CDFA SOP

Certifier reviews your OSP

Certifier reviews inspector's report

Run your operation, keep records, update your OSP



# 10 steps to organic certification

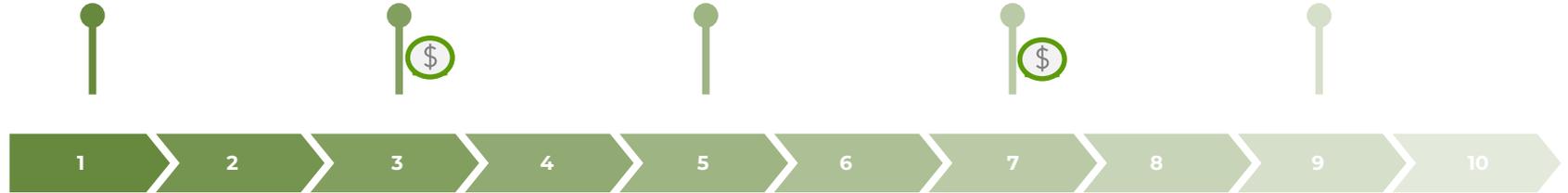
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Complete annual inspection and CDFA SOP registration

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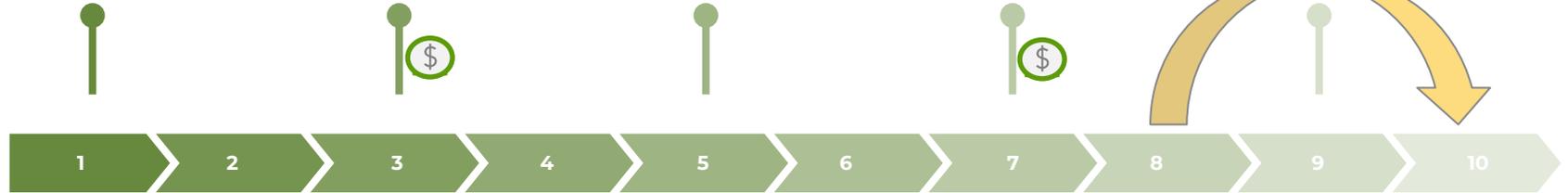
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# Resources to help:

+ UCCE & Siskiyou EDC

- Technical assistance
- Financial assistance\*
- Mentorship network
- Organic farm demonstration network

➔ see 10 steps + Some Organic Rules handouts

\*pending federal funding

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### Ten Steps to Organic Crop Certification in California

Organic farms in California must comply with USDA National Organic Program (NOP) regulations and register with the CDFSA State Organic Program (SOP). Here are ten steps needed for certification and registration.

- Get prepared and apply for certification** (<https://www.ams.usda.gov/organic/certification>)  
Organic certifiers to find any associated fees (if any).
- Register with CDFSA** with the CDFSA State Office. Pay an application fee.
- Submit your application**. This will require you to play an application fee.
- Certifier reviews your application**. This will require you to play an application fee.
- Inspector visits your operation** and ensures that you are compliant with USDA but not always a back check.
- Certifier reviews inspection** and addresses any concerns.
- Certifier grants certification** label. *Pay the certifier.*
- Run your operation**, practices described in your certification are especially important.
- Prepare for annual compliance** with USDA stock receipts, etc. and address any concerns.
- Complete annual inspection**. Address any concerns operation annually with your certifier on this is especially important.

**\*Farms that sell \$5,000 register with the CDFSA State Organic Program.**

Funded in part by the CDFSA State Organic Program in Transition to Organic Partnership

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#### Ten Steps to Organic Crop Certification in California

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#### How Much Does Organic Certification Cost?

- Certifier Fees:** Certifiers charge an initial application fee, annual certification fee, and annual inspector fee. Fee structure varies between certifiers. For example, some certifiers charge fees based on gross sales or acreage while others charge a flat fee. Small, simple operations may cost as little as \$700 to get certified while larger, complex operations can cost more than \$20,000. For an accurate estimate of fees talk with your certifier.
- CDFSA SOP Fees:** Registration with the CDFSA SOP requires payment of an annual registration fee. These fees are determined by your operation's gross sales and can range from \$25 to \$3,000. For an accurate estimate of CDFSA fees visit [https://organic.cdfa.ca.gov/OrganicFeesRegistration\\_Fee\\_2017.aspx](https://organic.cdfa.ca.gov/OrganicFeesRegistration_Fee_2017.aspx).

#### Financial Assistance for Certification – Cost Share and Grant Programs

- USDA:** offers cost-share programs that reimburse up to 75% or \$750 of eligible certification costs each year. Both CDFSA and your county USDA Farm Service Agency administer these funds. See here for more details: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/organic/certification/cost-share>.
- Financial Assistance for Transitioning to Organic – Cost Share and Grant Programs**
  - The National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) has an Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) Organic Initiative to provide technical and financial assistance to producers who are transitioning to organic, certified organic, or exempt from certification of the National Organic Program. They also have cost share programs for practices that benefit natural resources and wildlife habitat. Reach out to your local NRCS office to learn more: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/> (scroll to the middle of the website page).
  - California Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) Organic Transition funds will be open for applications in February 2025. Producers can apply for up to \$30,000 in direct funding to support the transition process. There may be an opportunity for assisted farmers to qualify for an additional \$1,000/acre up to 30 acres for field preparation practices. Watch for an announcement on their website: <https://caff.org/>
  - California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) Organic Transition grant program offers \$10,000 per year for 3 years to offset the cost of transitioning. There may be the opportunity for eligible transitioning farmers to qualify for an additional \$1,000/acre/transition up to 30 acres for soil building practices. Details here: <https://www.ccof.org/resources/organic-transition>
  - Ventura County Resource Conservation District offers up to \$60,000 in financial assistance and technical assistance for producers transitioning to organic in Kern, Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties. To apply and learn more visit their website: <https://vccrd.org/>

#### Technical Assistance

There are multiple public agencies, university extension programs, private consultants and non-profit groups that offer organic agriculture technical assistance:

- UC Cooperative Extension Farm Advisor: [https://ucanr.edu/sites/ucanr/County\\_Offices/](https://ucanr.edu/sites/ucanr/County_Offices/)
- UC Organic Agriculture Institute: <https://organic.ucanr.edu/>
- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/> (scroll to middle of page)
- California Resource Conservation Districts (CRD): <https://cafed.org/regions>
- Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF): <https://caff.org/organic-certification/>
- California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF): navigate to resources <https://www.ccof.org/>
- NCAATTS Sustainable Agriculture Program: <https://ncaatts.org/learn-more-about-us>
- Rockwell Institute Organic Consulting: <https://rockwellinstitute.org/transition/>

Last updated: January 2025

Last updated: UC 04/04/2025

### Some organic rules to consider as you transition

In order to be certified organic, producers must comply with National Organic Program (NOP) regulations. Crop, wild crop, and livestock producers and handlers can become certified organic. The table below summarizes some of the main points to consider when transitioning to organic: crop or livestock production. Speak with a certifier to ensure the details of your operation and to access the latest information.

NOP rule: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/organic-certification/transitioning-to-organic>

Category	Rules
All producers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Land must be free of prohibited substances 3 yrs prior to harvest</li><li>Establish buffer zones around land</li><li>Maintain or improve natural resources &amp; biodiversity</li><li>Only use allowed inputs</li><li>Keep records of materials and practices from seed to sale</li><li>Fill out Organic System Plan (OSP) and update regularly<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Check with certifier before using new products or practices</li><li>Use approved labels</li></ul></li></ul>
Crop	
Livestock	
Definitions	
Organic label	
Labels	
Labels	
Labels	

#### Want to learn more?

- Talk with certified organic farmers and ranchers in your region.
- Sign up for the organic mentorship program and learn from another producer
  - <https://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/organic-certification/transitioning-to-organic-mentorship-and-demandable-assistance>
- Call your local UC Cooperative Extension Office, Siskiyou County Office: 530-842-2711, 1655 S. Main St., Yreka, CA 96097
  - <https://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/organic-certification/transitioning-to-organic>
- Call a certifier and ask them your questions
  - <https://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/organic-certification/transitioning-to-organic>
- Read this 2-page USDA handout "Introduction to organic practices"
  - <https://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/organic-certification/transitioning-to-organic>
- If you are a crop producer
  - Use the CCOF "Go Organic" Self-Assessment to see how your farm practices currently fit into the regulation
    - [https://www.ccof.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Go-Organic-Assessment\\_Webinar.pdf](https://www.ccof.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Go-Organic-Assessment_Webinar.pdf)
  - Watch this e-Organic video on organic crop regulations - start at 2:27
    - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34U9PFI8k-358>
  - Look over these record keeping templates to learn what crop records you'll need to keep:
    - <https://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/organic-certification/transitioning-to-organic>
- If you are a livestock producer
  - Read this 2-page CCOF handout on organic livestock production
    - [https://www.ccof.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Livestock-Introduction\\_3.pdf](https://www.ccof.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Livestock-Introduction_3.pdf)
  - How does "sleep or gook"? Watch videos in the Oregon YouTube playlist - videos are 5-20 minutes long
    - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34U9PFI8k-358>
  - Look over these record keeping templates to learn what livestock records you'll need to keep:
    - <https://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/organic-certification/transitioning-to-organic>
- Want to know what an organic inspection is like?
  - Watch these USDA videos on what to expect during a livestock and crop inspection.
    - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34U9PFI8k-358>
- Visit the UC Organic Agriculture Institute's "Transition to Organic" resources page:
  - <https://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/organic-certification/transitioning-to-organic>

Funded in part by the CDFSA State Organic Program, CDFSA Office of Environmental Farming and Innovation and the USDA Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP).



# Thank you!

## Contact info:

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(530) 490-3606

Thank you to our funders! Funded in part by the CDFA State Organic Program, CDFA Office of Environmental Farming and Innovation and the USDA Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP).



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