

Organic Certification Checklist for Transitioning to Organic Grain Producers

Assessment of land requirements for organic certification	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Land has not had any synthetic pesticides, herbicides or fertility inputs used (including no synthetics on seed or GMO) for at least 36 months prior to your first organic harvest. Document the last prohibited input date for each field, types of seeds planted etc. or that the land had been fallow. Your word or a signed document from the previous operator/landowner is acceptable.
<input type="checkbox"/>	If no prohibited inputs had been used for the required time, you can apply for organic certification in the spring of the year when you wish to sell a crop. There is no need to obtain organic certification until the year you wish to sell an organic crop.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Each field will need to be assessed for possible pesticide drift or runoff from neighboring farms. Buffer zones (typically 30 feet when tractor driven equipment used in the adjoining field, or more if aerial applications), are needed in organic fields where adjoining fields have prohibited materials used. You can use buffer zones for field roads or for nonorganic hay or other crops, best if that buffer crop is not the same crop as being grown for organic in the adjoining field.
Assessing your plan for transition to organic	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Review recent soil tests and consider how to improve soil nutrients over time, using the slower release, organically approved, naturally occurring soil amendments.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Consider transitioning a percentage of your fields over 3-5 years, starting out with fields that are average quality to learn organic rotations and weed management typical for your farm.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Talk to organic farmers in your area and call a few different certifiers to help you decide which one you wish to use. You can change certifiers if you are unhappy with their service, but it is best to stay with the same certifier for efficiency, understanding of their paperwork and cost.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Attend field days, conferences, webinars and talk with other organic farmers to discuss their rotations, seed varieties, fertility or pest challenges, markets and more. Each region may have its own issues, so learning successes and problems faced by farmers in your region is invaluable.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Consider what type of crops you want to grow, where you are going to purchase inputs and organic seed, as well as where you are going to sell your crops.
<input type="checkbox"/>	If you will be using your own or custom equipment for your organic production, plan for how you will clean and document the equipment between nonorganic and organic use.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Consider transitioning some of your fields in hay for 2-3 years and having corn or soybeans as your first crop. This is a cost-effective way to organic transition.
<input type="checkbox"/>	You cannot grow the same crop in the same field in a subsequent year, and need a soil building rotation which include hay crops, small grains and/or cover crops. You may need to develop a new crop rotation, or different crop rotations to suit each field's topography and soil type.
Organic certification paperwork	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Decide on your organic certification agency and obtain their organic system plan application. Many certifiers offer discounts for early spring applications, or charge fees for "late" mid-summer applications. Be prepared to complete and submit your application by March/April.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Obtain aerial photos of your farm from the Farm Service Agency or the internet, note your field boundaries on the map, include your own farm and all rental land. Assign unique field numbers to each field.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Be prepared to document the previous 3-year history of each of the unique fields with crops grown, seed planted, inputs used. Use the certifier 3-year field history form.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Be prepared to clearly list what you are planting in the current crop year, including seed, inputs etc. If there are changes between spring when you submit your application and your summer inspection, that is acceptable and your organic system plan will be updated then.

<input type="checkbox"/>	When completing your organic system plan application do not leave questions blank, either write “not applicable” or describe your pest management, weed management, marketing etc. The certifier needs to know that you saw the question and have attempted to answer it.
<input type="checkbox"/>	If your crop could cross pollinate with nearby GMO crops consider planting later to lessen GMO contamination of your organic crop, or plant crops that are of a different species than the adjoining GMO crop fields. You do not lose organic certification if your crop is tested to have GMO contamination, but your buyer might reject it if it is “too high” to meet their specification.
Getting ready for your organic inspection	
<input type="checkbox"/>	If you have fields that are more than a 5-minute drive from your home tell the inspector so they can plan the inspection time accordingly. Every field and crop storage location will need to be visited. All equipment used on your fields must be reviewed unless you are using custom fertilizer applicators, combines etc. If that is the case, you will need documentation from them on how they will clean the equipment before they use it on your organic crop.
	Prepare a table to sit where you and the inspector can review your paperwork during the 3 to 5 hour inspection which includes review of your plan and visually observing aspects of the farm.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have all of your input and seed receipts, information on how you searched for organic seed if you are using nonorganic seed, what you project your yields to be for each crop, where you will store your crop and where you anticipate you will sell it.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Be prepared to discuss your crop rotation plans and manure use (dates and rates on each field. If you are using soil micronutrients you will need a soil test illustrating the need for these.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Remember that organic crop cannot be contaminated by prohibited substances. Clean your planter’s seed boxes if treated seed has been used before you plant your organic fields. Sprayers used for organically approved materials can be cleaned before use, but once used for organic, it is a best practice to keep using it only for organic approved products. Be aware of any possible drift or runoff incidents from an adjoining field that might have contained prohibited substances, report this to your certifier and your state’s pesticide enforcement division to document the incident in case you seek a liability payment from your neighbor for your loss.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The organic inspector will be verifying what you have written in your organic system plan application. Review your plan before the inspection and be prepared to show documentation or answer questions that might come up relating to what you have in your plan.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Remember that organic crop cannot be commingled with non-organic crop. Have all organic crop storage clearly separate and labeled from nonorganic crop. Organic hay bales cannot be stacked touching non-organic hay bales, for instance. All grain handling equipment, augers, wagons, bins, dryers – must be documented as clean before use with organic.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Be aware that treated lumber cannot be in contact with organic crops in storage, nor where organic livestock can touch it, or eat crops adjoining it.
After your first organic inspection	
<input type="checkbox"/>	It may take 4-6 weeks until you hear if your crop is certified, although the inspector will tell you at the end of the inspection if there are any issues of concern. You cannot sell your first organic crop until you receive your organic certificate. Once you are certified, you can continue selling organic crops and do not need to wait until you get your updated organic certificate after your annual inspection.
<input type="checkbox"/>	If the inspector states you need to send in a soil test, seed tag or any other documentation, the sooner you get that to the certifier the sooner you will get your certificate. If you wait to get a letter from the certifier requesting that information, your certificate will be delayed until you send in the information.
<input type="checkbox"/>	All records relating to organic certification must be kept for five years.