



### **Core Functions and Services**

- The Washington State Department of Agriculture Organic Food Program protects consumers and supports the organic food industry by ensuring the integrity of organic food products. The program certifies organic producers and handlers in Washington State in accordance with US National Organic Standards and international market requirements. In addition to organic certification, the Organic Food Program reviews and registers input materials for use in organic production. The WSDA program remains the largest state run organic certification agency in the country in terms of customer and acreage numbers. The Organic Program is accredited by USDA National Organic Program (NOP) to perform certification in accordance with 7CFR Part 205. No general funds are received to operate the program.



## ORGANIC PROGRAM

Brenda Book, Program Manager

### Key Accomplishments for 2014

- Organic certification gives access to the organic label and market. Certification is provided through professional evaluations of applications, rigorous onsite inspections, and objective reviews. Key accomplishments in 2014 include:
  - In 2014 the Organic Program certified 1,090 organic operations in accordance with USDA National Organic Regulations.
    - ✓ 717 - Producers (crop and livestock farms)
    - ✓ 210 - Processors (manufacturers organic products)
    - ✓ 149 - Handlers (packers, warehouses, distributors, brokers)
    - ✓ 14 – Retailers (grocery stores, restaurants)
  - Over 90% of the organic businesses in Washington State are certified by WSDA Organic Program. Less than 5% of WSDA's clients reside outside of the state where services are provided to ancillary facilities and under cooperative agreements with other state department partners.
  - The Organic Program reviewed and registered 795 organic compliant input materials. The online published list of materials is referenced by organic farms and agriculture professionals nationally and continues to be the most accessed webpage with the Food Safety and Consumer Services Division.
  - Technical specialists evaluated 1,092 initial and renewal organic certification applications and 1,166 inspection reports for organic compliance in 2014.
  - Field inspectors conducted 1,086 annual organic inspections and 89 additional inspections in order to ensure organic integrity.
  - The program developed personal service contracts with three qualified independent organic inspectors, who conducted over 90 annual inspections in outlying areas that are not readily accessible to in-house inspectors.
  - Staff worked quickly to respond to complaints about mislabeling organic products. 19 out of the 20 complaints received in 2014 have been closed. The program worked in partnership with agency colleagues to provide technical assistance and bring the companies into compliance.
  - Organic Program staff collected samples from 62 certified operations of 19 different crops. These samples were sent to accredited labs to be tested for prohibited pesticide residues in order to ensure organic integrity and to evaluate organic compliance.
  - The quality of the program's certification services was highlighted after the mid-term accreditation audit by USDA National Organic Program resulted in zero non-compliance.



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### Key Accomplishments for 2014

- Funded through the farm bill, the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program helps farmers, handlers and processors afford the expense of organic certification by reimbursing them for up to 75% of their certification costs, with a maximum of \$750 per scope of operation. As a participating agency in this federal program, WSDA Organic Program issued \$466,461.92 in reimbursements to 789 organic operations.
- The program supports the development of organic agriculture through education, outreach and technical assistance. The program strives to communicate effectively and ensure organic requirements are easily understood. Key accomplishments in 2014 include:
  - The Organic Program received a contract from USDA to provide outreach and education to small diversified organic farmers about the organic certification process. The four areas of the project, to be completed in 2015, include – videos, web applications, classroom curriculum, and peer to peer farm walk education programs.
  - An Outreach and Education Specialist position was created and successfully filled. The new position coordinates the education needs of organic stakeholders so that technical assistance needs are effectively addressed.
  - In partnership with Tilth Producers of Washington, the WSDA Organic Program co-hosted and sponsored a first-of-its-kind Technical Assistance Fair at the Tilth annual conference in Vancouver, WA. The Organic Program recruited multiple WSDA programs, partner agencies and non-profit organizations for one-on-one conversations with farmers about available resources and regulatory requirements.
  - New organic certification fact sheets were published in 2014 to increase public awareness of organic standards and provide assistance with navigating the organic certification process. *Selling Organic Slaughter Stock* provides assistance to livestock operations. The *Organic and Good Agriculture Practices* factsheet explains the differences in the two standards as it compares organic and GAP requirements.
  - An Organic System Plan is required of each certified client. 2014 marked the completion of a three year project to update all Organic System Plans to a more dynamic system. The “Living Organic System Plan” reduces the demand on the certified operation, allows clients to easily communicate changes and improves the accuracy of the agreed plan.
  - Spanish speaking specialists were available to provide technical assistance for callers and during annual inspections as part of a new service to clients.
  - Technical specialists returned as speakers for numerous Washington State Cultivating Success courses across the state, providing valuable information to potential new organic farmers and businesses.



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### Key Accomplishments for 2014

- Technical specialists attended and provided outreach and education about organic certification at numerous industry events in 2014, including, but not limited to:
  - ✓ WSU-Tilth Producer Farm Walks
  - ✓ Young Farmers Coalition Meeting
  - ✓ Washington Organic Dairy Producers Association
  - ✓ Tilth Producers of Washington Annual Conference
  - ✓ Pacific Northwest Vegetable Association Conference
  - ✓ Washington Organic Recycling Council Meeting
  - ✓ Focus on Farming
  - ✓ Washington Small Fruit Conference
  - ✓ Cascadia Grain Conference
  - ✓ Washington State Farmers Market Association Meeting
  - ✓ Organicology

### Future changes in the internal or external environment that could impact customers and program services

- The program is dependent on an Access database system developed in 1998 that is largely unsupported by the agency's Information Technology Program. This outdated system for tracking clients and certification work is not automated and requires accurate manual data entry for consistent tracking and reporting. Client forms, agency communication and inspection reports cannot be linked to the database system and requires maintenance of a hard copy file for all certified clients and material registrants. In 2015, Organic Program staff will be working to implement a new data system specifically created for third party organic certification agencies.
- The assessment of certification fees based on the gross annual income of product, rather than the amount of work involved in providing the service, creates challenges in adequately funding program work. The program aims to work with stakeholders and to submit a proposal in 2015 to restructure and/or increase the current fee schedule in order to provide adequate funding to support certification and material review services.

### Future changes in the internal or external environment that could impact customers and program services

- Internally, adequate staff to complete annual certification is an ongoing concern. In 2015, the filling of vacant staff positions and contractors will be critical to the program's ability to provide program services. Training of new staff will also continue to be a major priority over the next year, and a major demand on senior staff resources.



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### Partnerships and Linkages that shape the program

- In addition to working closely with the state's Organic Advisory Board (a representation of organic customers across Washington), the program engages the industry and participates as an active member through several organizations and boards, including: Washington Organic Recycling Council, WSU Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resources and Tilth Producers of Washington.
- The WSDA Organic Program works closely with USDA National Organic Program and all other USDA accredited certifiers, both private and government agencies. We operate in a spirit of cooperation which allows us to share resources and focus on the shared mission of organic integrity.
- The Organic Program has a long history of forging partnerships and links within the organic industry. As we look to the future, program staffs are eager to advance services to shared customers and coordinate efforts in licensing through improved internal partnerships.

### LEAN Update

- The program continues to embrace a culture built on visual management, focuses on value added work, and eliminates waste in the form of hidden workloads and delayed customer response. In 2015, client surveys will be conducted to help analyze the program's success on improving customer service and the efficiency of our processes.



**Certified Organic Operations by County**

