



Washington State Dept. of Agriculture Organic Food Program

Certification Fact Sheet

Seed, Annual Seedling and Planting Stock Guidelines

USDA Organic Regulations §205.204 and National Organic Program Guidance 5029
Organic standards require the use of organic seeds, seedlings, and planting stock. This guidance assists organic producers on those standards and the records needed to demonstrate their proactive efforts to procure all organic seeds, annual seedlings, and planting stock.

Terms Defined

Annual seedling. A plant grown from seed that will complete its life cycle or produce a harvestable yield within the same crop year or season in which it was planted.

Commercial availability. The ability to obtain a production input in an appropriate form, quality, or quantity to fulfill an essential function in a system of organic production or handling, as determined by the certifying agent in the course of reviewing the organic plan.

Planting stock. Any plant or plant tissue other than annual seedlings but including rhizomes, shoots, leaf or stem cuttings, roots, or tubers, used in plant production or propagation.

Certification Criteria

- Organic seeds must be used unless a seed is not available in an organic form. This requirement includes cover crops and forages. Sprouts *must* be produced with organic seed.
- Organic annual seedlings *must* be used to produce an organic crop. Temporary variances to this requirement may be granted in the event of a natural disaster.
- Organic planting stock must be used unless the planting stock is not available in an organic form. Organically produced crops from non-organic planting stock may be sold with an organic claim. However, the planting stock may not be represented as “organic” until 1 full year of organic management.
- Seed and planting stock treatments are only permitted if all ingredients comply with the USDA organic regulation. Non-compliant seed treatments are a prohibited material.

The search for organic seeds and planting stock

If organic seed or planting stock are not available, non-organic forms may be used. A search for organic seeds and planting stock is required:



1. Contact three or more suppliers. Sources should include companies that offer organic seeds and planting stock.
2. If the supplier does not have the appropriate form, quality or quantity you require, document your attempt and the reason the organic seed or planting stock is not being used. See recordkeeping strategies section for ideas on how to record your search.
3. After an unsuccessful search of at least three sources, you may decide to use a non-organic version of the seed or planting stock. Provided, the non-organic version is not treated with a prohibited material and is not genetically engineered.

Accepted reasons for choosing a non-organic seed or planting stock

The following considerations could be acceptable to justify use of non-organic seeds and planting stock:

1. Inappropriate form or variety for your operation or market. Examples of forms may include, but are not limited to, disease resistance, fruit size, treated or non-treated seeds or planting stock, use of pelleted seed, or use of bare root nursery stock or container plants.
2. Insufficient Quantity. Producers may provide evidence that seed or planting stock is not available in sufficiently large or small amounts given the scale of the operation.
3. Quality concerns. Examples may include, but are not limited to, germination rate of the seed; presence of weed seeds in the seed mix; shelf life and stability of the seeds; and disease and pest resistance.

Cost of is not valid justification for the use of non-organic seed or planting stock.

Recordkeeping Strategies

Certified organic producers must maintain records to verify all seeds, annual seedlings, and planting stock comply with the USDA organic regulation. The following records should be kept and made available at inspections:

- Seed invoices, seed packages, and labels.
- Organic certificates from the supplier of the seeds and transplants.
- Attempts to obtain organic seeds or perennial planting stock before sourcing nonorganic. Records may include, but are not limited to: letters, faxes, email correspondence, and phone logs from seed suppliers and companies; seed catalogs; searches of organic seed databases; receipts; receiving documents, invoices, and inventory control documents. Records describing on-farm trials of organic seed and planting stock can be used to demonstrate lack of equivalent varieties for site specific conditions.
- Disclosure of all ingredients in seed coatings and inoculants, or verification that they have been reviewed by WSDA Organic Program or OMRI (Organic Material Review Institute) and approved as an allowed input in organic production. Verification that inoculants have not been produced with GMOs.
- Verification non-organic seeds and planting stock have not been treated with prohibited materials and have not been genetically modified (for crops also available in a GMO form).

Genetically Modified Organisms

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) are not allowed in organic production per §205.105 of the USDA organic regulations. See the USDA's list of "Determinations of Nonregulated Status" for a complete list of GMO crops that may be commercially available in the US.

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/biotechnology/petitions_table_pending.shtml

Commercially available GMO crops and seed materials

As of the printing of this publication, the following crops may be commercially available in a genetically modified form. Using a non-organic version of a crop that is also produced in a GMO form will require you to obtain verification that your source is not genetically engineered.

- Alfalfa, Apple - Golden Delicious, Apple - Granny Smith, Canola, Chicory, Corn, Cotton, Flax, Papaya, Plum, Potato, Rapeseed, Rice, Rose, Soybean, Sugar Beet, Tobacco, Tomato, Yellow Squash, Zucchini.

Inputs Used for Treatment of Seeds or Planting Stock

Seed and planting stock treatments are only permitted if all ingredients comply with the USDA organic regulation. Non-compliant seed treatments are a prohibited material.

Treatments that must be evaluated for compliance:

- Substances used by a seed or planting stock purveyor prior to the harvest of their non-organic seeds or non-organic planting stock for sale and use in organic production are not considered "treatment". Substances that are used by a seed or planting stock purveyor for seed cleaning and preparation (e.g. trisodium phosphate and chlorine solutions) after they harvest their non-organic seeds for sale in organic production are also not considered "treatment", since they do not remain on the seed when it is planted.
- Pesticides, including fungicides, herbicides and insecticides used as seed treatments: All pesticides used as seed treatments must be compliant for organic production, including inert and active ingredients. Botanical or biological preparations cannot be genetically modified.
- Pelleting: A clay coating applied to seed to increase its size and modify its shape into a more uniform ball. Ingredients used in pelleting must be nonsynthetic or included on the National List at § 205.601 for an appropriate use.
- Inoculants: Bacteria that fix nitrogen from the air and soil that are commercially prepared for use with legumes during seeding. The materials used in *Rhizobium* or other microbial preparations cannot be genetically modified.

Resources for Locating Organic Seeds

- AOSCA Organic Seed Finder. www.organicseedfinder.org
- Organic Seed Alliance. www.seedalliance.org | Phone 360-385-7192
- ATTRA, Seed Supplier Search. http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/organic_seed/
Phone: 800-346-9140 (English) or 800-411-3222 (Español)

For questions or application forms:

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Olympia, WA 98504-2560
(360) 902-1805, organic@agr.wa.gov
<http://agr.wa.gov/foodanimal/organic>

USDA National Organic Program (USDA NOP) and links to the USDA organic regulations
Phone: 202-720-3252 | <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/nop>

Organic Seed Decision Tree

