



*Washington State Dept. of Agriculture
Organic Food Program*

Certification Fact Sheet

Manure and Compost Application Timing

A major tenet of organic agriculture is maintaining and/or improving soil quality and fertility. The USDA organic regulation states that this requirement can be met through cultivation practices, practicing crop rotation and planting cover crops, and/or applying plant and animal materials to manage crop nutrients, soil fertility and soil organic matter content. No practices should contribute to contamination of crops, soil or water.

This factsheet covers USDA organic regulation §205.203(C)(1), often referred to as the 90/120 day rule. Use the information and decision tree to determine how the rule applies to your certified organic operation.

Questions to consider when choosing what to apply.

- What are the fertility needs of the crops you plan to grow?
- What are the soil improvement needs in the area the crop will be grown?
- When do you plan to begin harvesting the crop?

When can plant materials, compost or manure be applied?

- Uncomposted or composted plant materials can be applied at any time to the soil, either incorporated into the soil or as a mulch.
- Any compost that includes manure needs to comply with the USDA organic regulations otherwise it is treated as raw manure. If it is composted in accordance with the regulations, it can be applied to the soil at any time.
- Raw or aged manure needs to be applied either 90 or 120 days prior to crop harvest, dependent on the edible portion of the crop's contact with the soil surface or soil particles.

Is your compost considered “compost” by the USDA organic regulations?

If your compost includes manure, there are requirements that must be met in order call it compost, versus raw or aged manure.

- Compost needs to be made with allowed feedstocks (non-synthetic substances and approved synthetic amendments).
- Compost must be “mixed or managed to ensure that all of the feedstock heats to the minimum of 131° F (55° C) for a minimum of three days” (NOP Guidance 5021).
- WSDA's Organic Program and the Organic Material Institute (OMRI) publish lists of brand name composts approved for use in organic production.



- If the compost product you apply is not registered and you don't have records to verify how it was composted the product would be considered a raw manure application.
- Once a compost pile has met the requirements, no more uncomposted manure can be added without the time and temperature requirements starting anew.

What records are needed to show compliance?

- On farm composting systems need to be detailed in your Organic System Plan.
- Maintain type and source records of ALL feedstock materials.
- Keep documentation showing the minimum temperature/time was met, and the practices used to ensure all compost materials met these requirements. Compliant compost is heated to a minimum temperature of 131° F (55° C) for a minimum of three days.
- Record all field applications and harvest dates; ensure you aren't harvesting within a restricted period.
- Proof of registration if using a compost registered for organic crop production by an approved agency.

90/120 Day Decision Tree

