



Washington State Dept. of Agriculture Organic Food Program

Certification Fact Sheet

Preventative Practices – Crop Pest, Weed, and Disease

What are Preventative Practices?

Preventative practices are techniques that help farmers avoid crop pest, weed, and disease problems in their organic farming system. Preventative practices may also help minimize damage from these problems if they occur.

The USDA organic regulations require that producers use a three-tiered approach in dealing with crop pest, weed, and disease problems (7CFR 205.206). An organic producer must be able to demonstrate through records and observable practices that they implemented each level before the use of any approved materials to control pests, weeds and diseases.

- **Step 1** – Prevention of the problem through crop rotation and soil management practices, sanitation, and cultural practices.
- **Step 2** – Use of mechanical or physical methods to prevent problems
- **Step 3** – The application of approved synthetic materials.

Many of the step 1 and step 2 preventative practices outlined in the organic standards are methods farmers are already using to produce quality and healthy crops. These practices may include:

- Consistent observation and monitoring of fields and storage areas, recording potential issues and taking action before a problem arises.
- Crop rotation and use of cover crops.
- Selecting varieties of seeds and plants suited to a farm's conditions and/or resistant to diseases found in a farm's soils.
- Managing soil health to improve health of crops and reduce pest pressure.

Preventative Crop Pest Control Measures may also include:

- Crop rotation
- Insect or rodent traps
- Frog ponds, bird houses or bat houses
- Resistant varieties
- Timing of planting
- Release of beneficial insects
- Companion planting and trap crops
- Physical removal and physical barriers

Preventative Weed Control Measures may also include:

- Mowing and cultivation
- Crop rotation
- Crop spacing
- Use of mulches
- Hand or flame weeding
- Cover cropping



Preventative Disease Control Measures may also include:

- Crop rotation
- Resistant varieties
- Vector management to limit the transmission of disease pathogens
- Plant spacing
- Companion planting
- Nonsynthetic biological, botanical, or mineral inputs
- Compost or compost tea use
- Soil solarization
- Field sanitation (physical removal of plant debris)
- Timing of planting or cultivation
- Irrigation practices to reduce disease pressure

How are preventative practices evaluated?

An organic producer outlines their management practices in an Organic System Plan. This plan which details all of their practices, including preventative, is updated at least once a year. During the inspection, the inspector will evaluate whether or not the practices outlined in the Organic System Plan have been implemented as described.

The inspector will look for signs of preventative practices observable at inspection, such as row spacing or beneficial habit; as well as review the records of practices that were implemented but are no longer observable. For this reason it is important to keep clear records of what preventative practices are implemented and when.

The records required should be adapted to meet the needs of the particular business and therefore vary based on the complexity and scale of the farm; however, management records as simple as a field note book or a wall calendar tracking daily activities may prove sufficient.

Additional Resources

Washington State Department of Agriculture Organic Program

Phone: 360-902-1805 | E-mail: organic@agr.wa.gov | Website: <http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/Organic/>

NOP Guide for Organic Crop Producers

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5101542>

Cooperative Extension:

Preventative Practices in Organic Weed Management

<http://www.extension.org/pages/59489/preventative-practices-in-organic-weed-management#.VYBwfvIkq>

Fire Blight Control for Organic Orchards: Moving Beyond Antibiotics

<http://www.extension.org/pages/70541/fire-blight-control-for-organic-orchards:-moving-beyond-antibiotics#.VYBY2PIVhBc>

The Organic Center: Grower Lessons and Emerging Research for Developing an Integrated Non-Antibiotic Fire Blight Control Program in Organic Fruit

https://www.organic-center.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/TOC_Report_Blight_2b.pdf

ATTRA Publications and Resources on Organic Farming and Pest Control

<https://attra.ncat.org/organic.html>

Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service: Managing Pests & Diseases in an Organic Apple Orchard

http://mosesorganic.org/wp-content/uploads/Publications/Fact_Sheets/32ManagingPestsInOrchard.pdf