



Washington State Dept. of Agriculture Organic Food Program

Certification Fact Sheet

Natural Resources and Biological Diversity Conservation

Purpose

USDA organic regulations require producers to maintain or improve the physical, hydrological, and biological features of their operation, including soil, water, wetlands, woodlands, and wildlife. This fact sheet clarifies the requirements for WSDA certified operations to meet the standards as they relate to the biological diversity and natural resources of their operation.

Background

The conservation of natural resources and biological diversity is a primary tenet of organic production. In January 2016, the National Organic Program issued a Guidance (NOP 5020) on natural resources and biodiversity conservation to:

- ◆ Provide examples of compliant conservation practices.
- ◆ Clarify the roles and responsibilities of certified operations, certifiers, and inspectors.
- ◆ Allow for the use of third-party conservation plans to demonstrate compliance.

Role of certified organic operations:

- ◆ Describe or list activities in the Organic System Plan (OSP) to conserve biological diversity by maintaining or improving natural resources.
- ◆ Consider land that is adjacent to the certified land *if* the operation is in control of the land *and* the practices directly benefit the certified land.
- ◆ Maintain any records that would support a certifier's ability to verify compliance.

Third-Party Conservation Plans

Certified organic operations may refer to current conservation plans or contracts to meet the requirements of the regulation. If you have a third-party conservation plan, our office will ensure that your operation is current and in compliance with the third-party on an annual basis and that this plan comprehensively conserves biodiversity by maintaining or improving natural resource concerns.

National Organic Standards Citation

§ 205.2 Terms Defined

Natural resources of the operation. The physical, hydrological, and biological features of a production operation, including soil, water, wetlands, woodlands, and wildlife.

Organic production. A production system that is managed in accordance with the Act and regulations in this part to respond to site-specific conditions by integrating cultural, biological and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity.

§ 205.200 General

The producer or handler of a production or handling operation intending to sell, label, or represent agricultural products as "100 percent organic," "organic," or "made with organic (specified ingredients or food group(s))" must comply with the applicable provisions of this subpart. Production practices implemented in accordance with this subpart must maintain or improve the natural resources of the operation, including soil and water quality.



Certification Requirements

The Organic System Plan (OSP) will prompt operations to:

- ◆ Acknowledge natural resource concerns on land where organic crops will be harvested
- ◆ Identify practices that are used to maintain or improve the natural resource concerns.
- ◆ Describe monitoring and recordkeeping strategies regarding the natural resource concerns.

Organic System Plan Guidance

Resource concerns identified on the OSP are consistent with priority resource concerns on cropland in Washington state, which were determined by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) in 2012. The questions asked in the OSP are consistent with screening questions used by the NRCS to determine site-specific resource concerns on cropland.

The OSP contains checkbox lists of practices used to maintain or improve natural resources for each resource concern. These practices are consistent with NRCS practice standards that would be prescribed to cropland in Washington State to manage site-specific resource concerns.

NRCS practice standards and related information are publicly available online at efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov. The practice standards contain definitions and purposes, as well as conditions where the practice applies, specific design criteria, considerations, operations, and maintenance. WSDA Organic Program utilizes the definitions and purposes of the Practice Standards to foster consistency in communication.

Certified operations are not required to implement NRCS Practice Standards. It is the responsibility of certified operations to ensure that the implementation of practices is appropriate for site-specific conditions and designed in a way that suits the purpose of each practice.

NRCS Practice Standards Defined

Alley Cropping: Trees or shrubs are planted in sets of single or multiple rows with agronomic, horticultural crops or forages produced in the alleys between the sets of woody plants that produce additional products

Brush Management: The management or removal of woody (non-herbaceous or succulent) plants including those that are invasive and noxious

Channel Bank Vegetation: Establishing and maintaining vegetative cover on channel banks, berms, spoil, and associated areas

Conservation Cover: Establishing and maintaining permanent vegetative cover

Contour Buffer Strips: Narrow strips of permanent, herbaceous vegetative cover established around the hill slope, and alternated down the slope with wider cropped strips that are farmed on the contour

Contour Farming: Aligning ridges, furrows, and roughness formed by tillage, planting and other operations to alter velocity and/or direction of water flow to around the hillslope

Cover Crop: Crops including grasses, legumes, and forbs for seasonal cover and other conservation purposes

Critical Area Planting: Establishing permanent vegetation on sites that have, or are expected to have, high erosion rates, and on sites that have physical, chemical or biological conditions that prevent the establishment of vegetation with normal practices

Cross Wind Ridges: Ridges formed by tillage, planting or other operations and aligned perpendicular to prevailing wind direction during critical wind erosion periods

Cross Wind Trap Strips: Herbaceous cover established in one or more strips typically perpendicular to the most erosive wind events

Early Successional Habitat Development/Management: Manage plant succession to develop and maintain early successional habitat to benefit desired wildlife and/or natural communities

Field Border: A strip of permanent vegetation established at the edge or around the perimeter of a field

Filter Strip: A strip or area of herbaceous vegetation that removes contaminants from overland flow

Grassed Waterway: A shaped or graded channel that is established with suitable vegetation to convey surface water at a non-erosive velocity using a broad and shallow cross section to a stable outlet

Heavy Use Area Protection: Used to stabilize a ground surface that is frequently and intensively used by people, animals, or vehicles

Hedgerow Planting: Establishment of dense vegetation in a linear design to achieve a natural resource conservation purpose

Herbaceous Wind Barriers: Herbaceous vegetation established in narrow strips within the field to reduce wind speed and wind erosion

Irrigation Reservoir: An irrigation water storage structure made by constructing a dam, embankment, pit, or tank

Irrigation Water Management: The process of determining and controlling the volume, frequency, and application rate of irrigation water

Lined Waterway/Outlet: A waterway or outlet having an erosion-resistant lining of concrete, stone, synthetic turf, reinforcement fabrics, or other permanent material

Micro-irrigation: An irrigation system for frequent application of small quantities of water on or below the soil surface, as drops, tiny streams, or miniature spray through emitters or applicators placed along a water delivery line

Mulching: Applying plant residues or other suitable materials produced off site, to the land surface

No Till: Limiting soil disturbance to manage the amount, orientation and distribution of crop and plant residue on the soil surface year round.

Nutrient Management: Managing the amount (rate), source, placement (method of application), and timing of plant nutrients and soil amendments

Pond: A water impoundment made by constructing an embankment, by excavating a dugout, or by a combination of both

Reduced Till: Managing the amount, orientation, and distribution of crop and other plant residues on the soil surface year round while limiting the soil-disturbing activities used to grow and harvest crops in systems where the field surface is tilled prior to planting.

Restoration and Management of Rare or Declining Habitats: Restoring, conserving, and managing unique or diminishing native terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems

Ridge Till: Managing the amount, orientation, and distribution of crop and other plant residues on the soil surface year round, while growing crops on pre-formed ridges alternated with furrows protected by crop residues

Riparian Forest Buffer: An area predominantly in trees and/or shrubs located adjacent to and up-gradient from watercourses or water bodies

Riparian Herbaceous Cover: Grasses, sedges, rushes, ferns, legumes, and forbs tolerant of intermittent flooding or saturated soils, established or managed as the dominant vegetation in the transitional zone between upland and aquatic habitats.

Row Arrangement: A system of crop rows on planned, directions, grades, and lengths

Seasonal Till: Managing the amount, orientation, and distribution of crop and other plant residues on the soil surface during a specified period of the year, while planting annual crops on a clean-tilled seedbed, or when growing biennial or perennial seed crops.

Shallow Water Development and Management: The inundation of lands to provide habitat for fish and/or wildlife

Spring Development: Collection of water from springs or seeps to provide for livestock and wildlife.

Stream Crossing: A stabilizing area or structure constructed across a stream to provide a travel way for people, livestock, equipment, or vehicles

Stream Habitat Improvement and Management: Maintain, improve, or restore physical, chemical, and biological functions of a stream

Streambank and Shoreline Protection: Treatment(s) used to stabilize and protect banks of streams or constructed channels, and shorelines of lakes, reservoirs, or estuaries

Strip-cropping: Growing planned rotations of erosion-resistant and erosion-susceptible crops or fallow in a systematic arrangement of strips across a field.

Structures for Wildlife: A structure installed to replace or modify a missing or deficient wildlife habitat component

Tailwater Recovery: An irrigation system designed to collect, store, and convey irrigation tailwater and/or rainfall runoff for reuse in irrigation

Tree/Shrub Establishment: Establishing woody plants by planting seedlings or cuttings, direct seeding or natural regeneration

Upland Wildlife Habitat Management: Provide and manage upland habitats and connectivity within the landscape for wildlife

Vegetative Barrier: Permanent strips of stiff, dense vegetation established along the general contour of slopes or across concentrated flow areas

Water and Sediment Control Basin: An earth embankment or a combination ridge and channel constructed across the slope of minor watercourses to form a sediment trap and water detention basin with a stable outlet

Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management: Retaining, developing or managing wetland habitat for wetland wildlife

Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment: Single or multiple rows of trees or shrubs in linear figurations

Contact our office to discuss the natural resource issues and concerns specific to your operation.

Washington State Department of Agriculture

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