



Organic Policy Statement Crop Rotation

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CROP ROTATION IN ORGANIC PRODUCTION

Pertinent NOP Rules: §205.2 Terms Defined
§205.205 Crop rotation practice standard
§205.206 Crop pest, weed and disease management practice standard

Purpose

Crop rotation is a required component of the National Organic Standards (NOS). This guidance clarifies the organic production requirements for the CDA certified operations to meet the crop rotation standard as it relates to soil fertility, managing plant nutrients, erosion control and the management practices for preventing crop pests, weeds and diseases.

Background

The specific crops and the frequency and sequencing of their use in rotation are not specifically defined in the NOS. This provides flexibility for the grower and certifying agent to determine the practices that meet the crop rotation standard within the context of each operation and site-specific conditions. The following definitions and policies are utilized by the Washington State Department of Agriculture and other certifying agents to create consistency among operations and certifiers.

Crop Rotation Functions

- Maintain or improve soil quality and soil organic matter contact (NOS 205.200, 205.205)
- Manage crop nutrients and soil fertility (NOS 205.203, 205.205)
- Pest management in annual and perennial crops (NOS 205.205, 205.206)
- Prevent crop pests, weeds and diseases (NOS 205.206)
- Provide erosion control (NOS 205.205)

Pasture Production Sites

Pasture production sites are exempt from the crop rotation standard.

Annual Cropping Systems Definitions

Crop – Pastures, cover crops, green manure crops, catch crops or any plant or part of plant intended to be marketed as an agriculture product, fed to livestock or used in the field to manage nutrients and soil fertility (NOS 205.2)

Crop rotation – The practice of alternating the annual crops grown or a specific field in a planned pattern or sequence in successive crop years so that crops of the same species or family are not grown repeatedly without interruption on the same field (NOS 205.2).

Crop year – The normal growing season for a crop determined by USDA (NOS 205.2).

To provide assistance in understanding the National Organic Program definition of Crop Rotation, CDA utilizes the following definitions:

Repeatedly – Grown in more than two consecutive crop years.

Interruption:

- Planting and harvesting a crop from a different species or family in the subsequent crop year.
- Planting and harvesting a crop from a different species or family within the same production year (e.g., double cropping, triple-cropping).
- Leaving the field fallow for at least one crop year provided that crop residue and volunteer vegetation manages the soil fertility and adequately prevents soil erosion.

Annual Cropping Systems Compliance

If annual crop growers use a crop rotation system outside the parameters of the above definitions, CDA will issue a Notice of Noncompliance for failure to implement an adequate crop rotation practice. To resolve the Notice of Noncompliance, growers would need to:

- Implement an adequate crop rotation practice; OR
- Provide verification, supported by credible data that their production practices of the above definitions satisfy all relevant crop rotation functions (NOS 205.200, 205.203, 205.205 and 205.206; and

If a grower alleges that any crop rotation functions are not applicable to the farm's production systems, the CDA, based on site-specific conditions, will review the information on a case-by-case basis.

If CDA determines the information is not adequate to verify compliance with the

National Organic Standards, the grower may implement an alternative adequate crop rotation practice or CDA will issue a Notice of Proposed Suspension, at which point the grower may appeal to the NOP.

Perennial Cropping System Definitions

Perennial cropping systems employ means such as alley cropping, intercropping and hedgerows to introduce biodiversity in lieu of crop rotation (NOS 205.2).

Alley cropping – The practice of establishing adequate ground cover in the alley ways between perennial crops rows including but not limited to sod, volunteer vegetation, cover crops, green manure crops and catch crops.

Biological diversity – The degree of variation of life form within a given ecosystem (farm or production site).

Intercropping – The practice of simultaneously cultivating two or more crops in the same production area.

Hedgerows – The practice of establishing trees or shrubs used to foster biological diversity.

Perennial Cropping System Compliance

If perennial crop growers do not have ground cover in alleyways at any time (i.e. year-round clean tilling), CDA will issue a Notice of Noncompliance for failure to comply with the crop rotation standard (e.g. erosion control, biological diversity, soil fertility). To resolve the Notice of Noncompliance, growers would need to plant an adequate ground cover between perennial crop rows.

If biological diversity cannot be verified or observed during the annual inspection,

CDA will issue a Notice of Noncompliance for failure to comply with the crop rotation standard. To resolve the Notice of Noncompliance, growers would need to:

- Implement intercropping or hedgerows to meet the crop rotation standard
- Provide documentation supported by credible data that verifies the production practices provide biological diversity for their farm or production site.

If CDA determines the information is not adequate to verify compliance with the NOP Standards, the grower may implement intercropping or hedgerows to comply, or the CDA will issue a Notice of Proposed Suspension, at which point the grower may appeal to the NOP.

References and Resources

National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (ATTRA):
www.attra.ncat.org/organic.html

Washington State Department of Agriculture Organic Program:
www.agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/Organic

National Organic Program:
www.ams.usda.gov

Rodale Institute:
www.rodaleinstitute.org