



## Organic Policy Statement General

### ON- SITE INSPECTIONS AND THE ROLE OF THE ORGANIC INSPECTOR

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**Pertinent NOP Rules: § 205.402 Review of application, § 205.403 On-site inspections, §205.501 General requirements for accreditation**

#### **When does an on-site inspection occur?**

An on-site inspection is scheduled after the Organic System Plan (OSP) or application has been accepted, reviewed for completeness and determined that the OSP appears to comply or may be able to comply with NOP Standards. The on-site inspection is conducted by a qualified representative of the certifying agent. The inspection will be completed at the facility, production unit or site that produces or handles organic products that is included in an operation for which certification is requested.

An on-site inspection must be conducted annually for each operation that produces or handles organic product. According to the NOP Rules, additional inspections may be announced or unannounced at the discretion of the certifying agent or as required by the USDA Administrator.

All on-site inspections must occur when a knowledgeable authorized representative of the operation is present. They should also be conducted at a time when land and facilities can be observed, i.e. when a crop is growing or when a product is being created or packaged.

#### **What are the purposes of an on-site inspection?**

The purpose of an inspection is to determine whether to approve the request for initial certification or whether the certification of the operation should continue.

The on-site inspection of an operation must verify that the information found in the OSP accurately reflects the practices used or to be used by the applicant. Also, to ensure that all prohibited substances have not been and are not being applied to the operation.

#### **What is the role of an Organic Inspector?**

A certifying agency hires and trains organic inspectors to be the “eyes, ears, and nose” of the agency.

The inspector’s job is to listen, observe, ask and record their findings. The organic inspector is at the operation to verify and report information in a professional and courteous manner. Also, the NOP Rules specifically state that all representatives of an accredited certifying agent must maintain strict confidentiality with respect to its clients and not disclose any business-related information concerning any client.

In April, 2013, the NOP issued guidance outlining what technical assistance from inspectors may occur. As inspectors are the primary point of contact for many certified parties, often they are asked many questions, this policy will outline the information they are allowed to address.

**An Organic Inspector CANNOT:**

- Make a certification decision on an Organic System Plan or perform an initial review on the operations they inspect;
- Provide advice on how a specific operation can overcome barriers to certification;
- Suggest actual changes to an OSP that would bring an operation into compliance;
- Suggest that the certification process would be simpler, easier, or less expensive if specific activities were undertaken;
- Accept payment, gifts or favors of any kind from any business inspected.

**An Organic Inspector CAN:**

- Ask and answer questions, collect information, and explain the regulations;
- Provide information on well-known alternatives for overcoming problems, provided the information is equally available to everyone and specific or proprietary to a single operation;
- Suggest alternatives that are in accordance with published decisions or the NOP program handbook, ensuring the operation understands their responsibility for choosing their own production and handling methods.

**Additional Information on Organic Inspection can be found at:**

[www.ioia.net](http://www.ioia.net)

[http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?  
dDocName=STELPRDC5103411](http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5103411)

Disclaimer: This policy statement is provided as guidance to organic producers/handlers and is not to be used a substitute for or in place of the National Organic Program rules.