

Organic Certification in India

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INTRODUCTION

Organic certification is a certification process for producers of organic food and other organic agricultural products. In general, any business directly involved in food production can be certified, including seed suppliers, farmers, food processors, retailers and restaurants. Requirements vary from country to country, and generally involve a set of production standards for growing, storage, processing, packaging and shipping that include:

1. Avoidance of synthetic chemical inputs (e.g. fertilizer, pesticides, antibiotics and food additives), irradiation, and the use of sewage sludge.
2. Avoidance of genetically modified seed.
3. Use of farmland that has been free from prohibited chemical inputs for a number of years (often, three or more).
4. Keeping detailed written production and sales records (audit trail).
5. Maintaining strict physical separation of organic products from non-certified products.
6. Undergoing periodic on-site inspections.



Purpose

Organic certification addresses a growing worldwide demand for organic food. It is intended to assure quality and prevent fraud, and to promote commerce. While such certification was not necessary in the early days of the organic movement, when small farmers would sell their produce directly at farmers' markets, as organics have grown in popularity, more and more consumers are purchasing organic food through traditional channels, such as supermarkets. As such, consumers must rely on third-party regulatory certification.

For organic producers, certification identifies suppliers of products approved for use in certified operations. For consumers, "certified organic" serves as a product assurance, similar to "low fat", "100% whole wheat", or "no artificial preservatives".

Certification is essentially aimed at regulating and facilitating the sale of organic products to consumers. Individual certification bodies have their own service marks, which can act as branding to consumers a certifier may promote the high consumer recognition value of its logo as a marketing advantage to producers.

In India, APEDA regulates the certification of organic products as per National Standards for Organic Production. "The NPOP standards for production and accreditation system have been recognized by European Commission and Switzerland as equivalent to their country standards. Similarly, USDA has recognized NPOP conformity assessment procedures of accreditation as equivalent to that of US. With these recognitions, Indian organic products

duly certified by the accredited certification bodies of India are accepted by the importing countries." Organic food products manufactured and exported from India are marked with the India Organic certification mark issued by the APEDA. APEDA has recognized 11 inspection certification bodies, some of which are branches of foreign certification bodies, others are local certification bodies.

Certification process: In order to certify a farm, the farmer is typically required to engage in a number of new activities, in addition to normal farming operations: Study the organic standards, which cover in specific detail what is and is not allowed for every aspect of farming, including storage, transport and sale.

Steps in organic certification

1. **Receipt of application form:** The farmer intending to get his farm organically certified must apply to the organic certification board. The documents required for applying are duplicate of application form, Pan card, Annual cropping pattern, Field map, General details of the farm, Soil and water analysis report, Chitta (land documents), a written annual production plan must be submitted, detailing everything from seed to sale (seed sources, field and crop locations, fertilization and pest control activities, harvest methods, storage locations, etc.).
2. **Scrutiny and registration of application:** The application received along with the others farm or field details are verified by

the inspector if it meets the requirements then the application is forwarded for the registration. For the registration the farmer must pay a prescribed amount. Once the farm is registered it must be strictly maintained under the organic conditions only.

3. **Inspection and evaluation of the farms and documents:** Annual on-farm inspections are required, with a physical tour, examination of records, and an oral interview is done. Record keeping written, day-to-day farming and marketing records maintained and will be checked, the farmers must have covered all activities like biodiversity conservation and buffer zone. The farmer must be available for inspection at any time. In addition, short-notice or surprise inspections can be done by the certification officer.
4. **Sampling of soil, water and plant products if necessary:** if the certification officers doubt that the grower has done a mal practice then he has all the right to collect the soil, water and plant sample. Analysis of plant and soil sample will be done and if the results indicate the presence of any chemicals or toxic substance then their certificate will be taken back.
5. **Issue of certificate to eligible organic farms:** if the grower has maintained his farm purely under organic condition then a certificate will be given to him assuring others that he is an organic grower.

The certificate is online generated, and it takes around six months from date of application.

Certification & Product Labelling

Being able to put the word "organic" on a food product is a valuable marketing advantage in today's consumer market as people have become more health conscious. Certification is intended to protect consumers from misuse of the term organic, and make buying of organic products an easy task. However, the organic labelling made possible by certification.

In India the following certificates and labels are mandate to produce, sell and export any organic produce.

1. **Scope certificate-** This is the certificate that is provided by the organic certification agency which ensures that field is maintained organically according to the NPOP standards. The certificate needs to be renewed every year by paying a prescribed fee. Scope certificate contains the following details of the organic grower and the field.
2. **Transaction Certificate-** Transaction Certification is an authorization certificate given by APEDA stating that the products or stocks mentioned in transaction certificate has been produced and/or prepared in compliance with the current NSOP/NPOP standards. This certificate shall also be issued to the seller, if the seller provides the required details after the verification by the Organic Certification Inspector and evaluator.