

The National Organic Program (NOP): What Agricultural Professionals Need to Know

The USDA has established a National Organic Program (NOP) Rule for the production and handling of agricultural and processed food products labeled as ‘organic.’ The NOP Rule sets uniform production standards for crops and livestock, handling and processing standards for how products are handled post-harvest. Included in the NOP Rule is a *National List* of synthetic substances approved for organic production and non-organic substances used in handling and processing. State and private organic certification programs accredited by USDA certify organic crops, livestock, and handling operations that comply with the program’s requirements. State and Federal authorities share enforcement responsibilities. Labeling requirements for organic products and products containing organic ingredients are also spelled out in the NOP Rule.

The final rule is available on the National Organic Program web site at www.ams.usda.gov/nop. A downloaded copy of the final rule has been included in this binder. Additional, official copies can be purchased from the Federal Register by calling (202) 512-1800.

Selected Key Provisions of the NOP Rule

(Appropriate sections of 7 CFR are given in parentheses)

- Most producers and handlers must be **certified** by a USDA accredited certifying agent. (205.100)
- Producers with sales **under \$5,000 are exempt** from certification. (205.101)
- Most synthetic **fertilizers, pesticides, animal drugs, feed additives, and ingredients** are prohibited; those that are allowed may be used only with **restrictions**. (205.105)
- Organic producers and handlers must prepare an **Organic Systems Plan** that the certifier must review, evaluate and approve. (205.201)
- Land cannot be certified as “organic” until **three years** after the date of the application of the last prohibited material. (205.202)
- The use of **raw manure** is restricted, and manure that is made into **compost** must meet specific process requirements. (205.203)
- **Organic seeds** must be planted unless they are not commercially available. (205.204)
- Most **seed treatments** are prohibited. (205.204)
- Producers and handlers need to implement and document **proactive and preventative management practices** before they can use pesticides. (205.206)
- Animals must meet most of their nutritional requirements from **organic feed**. (205.237)
- **Animal drugs** cannot be applied in the absence of illness. (205.238)
- **Antibiotics** are prohibited. (205.238)
- Livestock must have **access to the outdoors**, with only temporary exceptions. (205.239)
- Ruminants must have **access to pasture**. (205.239)
- Residues of prohibited pesticides that result from unavoidable contamination are limited to **5% of EPA Tolerance**. (205.671)