



Natural Resource and Biodiversity Conservation

ORGANIC CERTIFICATION FACT SHEET

Organic farming integrates cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity. Organic farmers respond to site-specific conditions to maintain or improve the natural resources on a farm, including soil and water quality.

7CFR §205.200 and §205.203 USDA organic regulations require producers to implement practices that maintain or improve the natural resources of the operation, including soil and water. Organic regulations also require producers to implement practices that maintain or improve organic matter content, the physical, chemical, and biological condition of the soil, and minimize soil erosion.

Resource Concerns in Washington State

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial assistance to farmers and ranchers to conserve biological diversity and natural resources on their land. NRCS has identified six priority resource concerns on cropland in Washington State:

1. Soil erosion
2. Inefficient irrigation water use
3. Excess nutrients in surface and ground waters
4. Pesticides transported to surface and ground waters
5. Excessive sediment in surface water
6. Habitat degradation

Certification Requirements

WSDA Organic Program addresses our state's priority resource concerns in our Organic System Plan (OSP), a form all certified operations are required to complete and maintain. The Natural Resources and Biological Diversity section of the OSP lists common conservation practices consistent with the NRCS prescribed practice standards. This section prompts farmers to:

- Identify resource concerns on their organic land.
- List practices used to restore, conserve, or improve the natural resources and biodiversity. Examples include reduced tillage, hedgerow planting, streambank protection, and micro-irrigation.
- Describe how records are kept to document practices and activities. Records may include water or soil test results, conservation maps, and activity logs for mowing, pest monitoring, reseeding, grazing rotations, etc.

When completing the Organic System Plan, organic farmers may consider activities on land adjacent to their certified site *if* the producer is in control of the land *and* the practices directly benefit the certified site.

Organic Program staff will evaluate a farm's plan to determine compliance with USDA organic regulations. An inspector then confirms the conservation activities are occurring during their annual on-site inspection. Our team provides ongoing technical assistance and can direct farmers to resources that may help them meet organic standards.

NOP Guidance 5020 National Resource and Biodiversity Conservation

The National Organic Program developed guidance that includes examples of compliant conservation practices, clarifies the roles and responsibilities of certified producers and organic certifiers, and allows for the use of third-party conservation plans to demonstrate compliance.

[https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/NOP_5020 Biodiversity Guidance Rev01 \(Final\).pdf](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/NOP_5020_Biodiversity_Guidance_Rev01(Final).pdf)

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

NRCS can help organic producers develop a conservation plan that meets their goals, and can often help with financial assistance to implement elements of the plan. Find resources and support, including training and local field office information online:

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/organic/>

The NRCS practice standards contain definitions and purposes, as well as providing conditions, specific design criteria, considerations, and maintenance of practices. WSDA Organic Program utilizes the definitions and purposes of the NRCS standards when evaluating certified farms efforts to maintain or improve natural resources. NRCS practice standards are available online:

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/technical/cp/ncps/>



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