

Certification Procedures Supporting the Organics Programme

General requirements for certification

This should be read in conjunction with the most current version of the AsureQuality Standard Terms of Business for the provision of Certification. This document is not in lieu of those terms and conditions but provides supplementary information on the audit process.

All applicants for organic certification must sign a scope of works agreement titled “Application for Registration to Organic Certification” that includes: identifying the type of certification required, products to be certified and location of certified activities, including the location of any subcontracted processing or handling (assuming the standard allows such activities to be subcontracted). The official language of AsureQuality is English. Any party wishing to do business with AsureQuality in another language must provide translation for personnel and documentation.

Application for certification

All applicants must submit a certification application that includes the requirements relative to the respective standard(s). In addition to the application form, additional forms to be submitted may include: credit application, applicable Organic Management Plan (OMP), property map(s), inputs list, product recipe(s) and pasture plan. Old versions of forms and forms created by other accredited agencies are accepted from applicants, provided the appropriate level of detail has been covered. The initial review of documents verifies that all necessary information has been submitted in whatever form.

Review of application

After an application is received, it must be reviewed to verify that it meets the following requirements:

- A review to ensure that the application is complete;
- A determination of whether the applicant appears to comply or may be able to comply with the applicable requirements of the production and handling standards; and
- Verification that an applicant who previously applied to another certifying agent and received a notification of noncompliance or denial of certification has submitted documentation to support the correction of any noncompliances identified in the notification of noncompliance or denial of certification.

The review of the application will take place within a reasonable time after receipt of the application. After the review is complete the applicant will be notified of any findings.

If the application meets the requirements, an on-site inspection of the operation will be scheduled. The initial review may be done by the same person who conducts the onsite inspection. The purpose of the inspection is to determine whether the applicant qualifies for certification if the review of Organic Management Plan and supporting documentation indicates that the production or handling operation may be in compliance with the applicable requirements if applied as stated. Fundamentally the onsite audit is to verify the operator is doing what is stated in the OMP.

A copy of the Non Conformance Summary Form will be left with the applicant by the auditor. The audit report and a copy of the test results for any samples taken by an auditor will be sent to the applicant along with the results of the certification review or earlier upon request. Non-conformances must be closed before certification and this must occur within six months, or a re-

audit will be required. Applicants have the right to withdraw their application at any time. Applicants must request withdrawal in writing preferably using the OMP Update Form. Fax and email are acceptable methods of notification. The withdrawal will be effective at the time and date it is received by AsureQuality unless a date is specified which is covered by the current certification.

On-site inspections

An initial on-site inspection will be scheduled as soon as practical after the initial review indicates the operation's ability to comply. Annual on-site inspections will continue to be conducted for as long as the operation continues certification with AsureQuality. Additional on-site inspections may be conducted as needed to determine compliance with the regulations if the initial inspection reveals significant noncompliances. The operator will be responsible for the cost of follow-up inspections that are necessary to verify compliance. Random unannounced inspections may also be conducted to verify continued compliance with the regulations. Additional inspections may be announced or unannounced at the discretion of AsureQuality, or as required by the standard owner in the case of other standards.

On-site inspections are to be conducted when an authorized representative of the operation who is knowledgeable about the operation is present. Inspections are to be scheduled at a time when land, facilities, and activities that demonstrate the operation's compliance with or capability to comply with the production and handling requirements can be observed. These requirements do not apply to unannounced on-site inspections.

AsureQuality will provide the auditor, prior to each on-site inspection, with previous on-site inspection reports, organic system plans, supporting documents, and other information that must be verified by the auditor.

The auditor's evaluation ensures that the on-site inspection of an operation verifies:

- The operation's compliance or capability to comply with the regulations;
- That the information, including the Organic Management Plan, accurately reflects the practices used or to be used by the applicant or by the certified operation; and
- That prohibited substances have not been and are not being applied to the operation through means which, at the discretion of the certifying agent, may include the collection and testing of soil; water; waste; seeds; plant tissue; and plant, animal, and processed products samples.

The auditor must conduct an exit interview with an authorized representative of the operation who is knowledgeable about the inspected operation to confirm the accuracy and completeness of inspection observations and information gathered during the on-site inspection. The auditor must address the need for any additional information as well as any issues of concern. The auditor must provide the operation's authorized representative with an onsite report (draft report) and if applicable a receipt/written acknowledgement for any samples taken by the auditor during the inspection part of the audit. The operator must not charge auditors for the samples taken.

Granting certification

The applicant's file will be reviewed as soon as possible after the on-site inspection report, the results of the analyses of any samples taken, and any additional information requested from or supplied by the applicant have been received in the AsureQuality office.

Certification is granted based on the determination that:

- The applicant is in compliance with its organic system plan and all procedures;
- The activities of the applicant's operation are in compliance with the regulations; and
- The applicant is able to conduct operations in accordance with the plan.

The certification decision may include requirements for the correction of minor noncompliances within a specified time period as a condition of continued certification.

If certification is granted, a certificate will be issued which specifies the:

- Name and address of the certified operation;
- Effective date of certification;
- Categories of organic operation, including crops, wild crops, livestock, or processed products produced by the certified operation; and
- Name, address, and telephone number of the certifying agent.

NB. A certificate is not issued in the stand down year, rather a letter confirming such status.

Continuation of certification

A certified operation must pay annual certification fees and submit the following information, as applicable.

- An OMP Update Form
 - Reconfirming contact details
 - Summarizing production for the previous 12 months
 - Providing an estimate of production for the next 12 months
 - Summarizing exports in the previous 12 months
 - Confirming whether there have been or will be any changes to the OMP (if so also provide updated OMP)
 - Confirming continuation and compliance to the program
- An updated Organic Management Plan which includes:
 - highlighting any deviations from, changes to, modifications to, or other amendments made to the previous year's organic system plan during the previous year; and
 - Any additions to or deletions from the previous year's organic management plan, intended to be undertaken in the coming year.
- Other information as deemed necessary by AsureQuality to determine compliance with the regulations.

Fees and other charges for certification

The current AsureQuality Fee Schedule is provided to each new applicant and to each certified operation prior to their annual renewal.

Re-evaluation of Certification

Due to change in standards

In the event of significant changes to standards for certification, certified operators and applicants will be notified of the changes, the date those changes will be effective, and the deadline for demonstrating compliance to the new standards. The deadline for demonstrating compliance may be the regular annual inspection date or an earlier date if accelerated compliance is necessary to maintain organic integrity. Continued compliance will be evaluated when the requested information is provided by the applicant or certified operation.

Due to change in Certified Operation:

Certified operators are required in the Terms and Conditions of Certification to provide notice of significant changes to their organic management plan, location of premises, ownership, or management structure that may affect compliance with the standards. When such notice is received, the certification will be re-evaluated to determine continued compliance with the regulations. AsureQuality will issue an updated certificate of organic operation if the operation continues to comply and any of the information specified on the certificate of organic operation has changed.

Unannounced Audits

Unannounced audits are partial audits conducted without prior warning. These are risk based meaning they are selected based on risk factors such as past performance of the operator, parallel processing, or other risks identified at the previous audit, and take into account timeliness of non-conformance closure and/or re-occurring issues. Such audits are in integral part of the assurance process, and are required under the organic accredited programs. AsureQuality is responsible for the cost of unannounced inspections, which is taken into account as part of the annual certification fee. Operators must ensure that AsureQuality staff are appropriately warned of any Health and Safety Hazards they may encounter while carrying out unannounced audits.

Inspection and testing of agricultural product to be sold or labeled “organic”

All organic agricultural products **must** be made accessible by certified operations for examination by representatives of AsureQuality.

AsureQuality will test a percentage of our certified operations annually, with the percentage being based on the levels required by the each respective organic program. The percentage in the USDA NOP program is 5% of operators.

AsureQuality may **require** pre-harvest or postharvest testing of any agricultural **input** used or **organic product** when there is reason to believe that the agricultural input or product has come into contact with a prohibited substance or has been produced using excluded methods.

When testing is required, an auditor representing AsureQuality must collect the pre-harvest or postharvest tissue test samples.

- Sample integrity **must** be maintained throughout the chain of custody.
- Residue testing **must** be performed in an accredited laboratory at such time that an appropriate laboratory becomes accredited.
- Chemical analysis **must** be made in accordance with the methods accredited by IANZ or other current applicable validated methodology determining the presence of contaminants in agricultural products.

If the test results exceed acceptable levels (which in most cases is nil detectable as measured in mg/kg), the results will be reported immediately. Test results that violate the higher EPA MRL tolerances must be reported to the appropriate agency as such results represent a food safety issue.

GMO Testing

For all organic certifications GMO testing will be ordered by AsureQuality only when there is suspicion. AsureQuality may obtain tests done by buyers or importers and review these at any time.