

FAQs for ALL Transitioning Producers (Crop and Livestock)

I can't track down the previous landowner; who else can sign a land affirmation statement?

If you have contact with *anyone* who has insight into how the land was managed, you can have them sign the affirmation statement; it does not need to be the previous landowner. If you can't find anyone who has an idea of how the land was managed, then you can get certified 3 years from the day you began to manage the land without prohibited substances. If you've already managed the land for 3 years without prohibited substances, then you don't need to get anyone's signature for an affirmation – you can leave that blank and move forward with the certification process!

Can I certify land I'm leasing? What happens if I move my operation to a different location?

Yes! Leased land can be certified as organic. In these situations, provide your certifier with a copy of your **lease agreement**. If you change the location of your operation, your certification transfers to the new location (provided the new location has been managed organically for at least 3 years prior to the first certified harvest). The organic certification follows the producer and/or legal entity, not the land itself. Note that this also means land **cannot** be sold as “certified organic!” While the land may have been managed organically up to the point of sale, once the land is under different ownership, it is no longer officially certified.

How do I know what inputs I can or can't use?

Check the [OMRI](#) and [WSDA](#) lists of materials to see which inputs have been approved for use in organic production. If a material is listed as “Approved” on one of these lists, be sure to pay careful attention to any **use restrictions**. Some materials can only be used in certain situations and are otherwise prohibited. For example, a restriction may stipulate that a certain product can only be applied via a specific method. If you are ever unsure, it is *always* a good idea to check with a certifier on a questionable substance. The consequences of accidentally applying a prohibited substance to land can be severe, sometimes even resetting the 3-year transition clock.

Is treated wood allowed?

New installations of treated wood are prohibited for certified operations. If you already have treated wood installed on-site, you must demonstrate that the existing treated wood will not come into contact with any crops or livestock. For instance, **livestock cannot brush against treated wood**. You can implement **buffers** to prevent contact between crops/livestock and the treated wood, such as hot wires to discourage livestock, or sheaths made of metal or plywood around any posts that crops may touch. Any land using wood treated with **creosote** (such as old railroad ties or telephone poles) cannot be certified until the creosote wood is removed. If treated wood must be used, a contamination prevention plan must be included in the operation's Organic System Plan (AKA, the application to get certified).

Do I need to use organic seeds and seedlings?

You must use organic seeds whenever possible. In the instances when you cannot find organic seed in the **quantity** (e.g. 100 lb), **quality** (e.g. specific variety), **or form** (e.g. pelleted) that is needed, you may use non-organic, untreated, non-GMO seed after performing a *Commercial Availability Search*. In the search, you must contact at least 3 likely suppliers of organic seed to determine if the desired seed is available in an organic form. You must document this search to prove that there was a sincere attempt to source organic seed. Remember that **any non-organic seeds that are used must be verifiably untreated and non-GMO**. Seed suppliers can provide certificates to verify these statuses. **Annual transplanted seedlings must always be organic.**

What's the minimum buffer zone width I need to have?

There is **no magic number for buffer zones**. This is because every operation has different circumstances: some operations have neighbors who regularly spray prohibited substances, while others border protected conservation land. The most important factor of buffer zones is that they are **sufficient to prevent contamination** of your crops. If you border any operations that spray prohibited substances, consider hanging **spray cards** around your crops, which can indicate how far the sprayed substances are drifting. You can be creative with buffers – consider planting a hedgerow, or pollinator-friendly wildflowers. Your certifier's goal isn't to police your buffers, but to ensure your land is protected from prohibited substances.

How do I keep records for organic certification?

A producer must keep records that can prove that **the amount of sold organic product aligns with how much was planted**, as well as records that demonstrate that **organic practices were maintained throughout a crop's lifecycle**. Think big picture: this would include records on planting, inputs, harvests, and sales. An inspector just wants to see transparency in your operation. There's **no specific format** these records have to be in. A dedicated operation notebook, digital spreadsheets, or a marked-up calendar all suffice for recordkeeping. It's encouraged to keep records in a way that makes the most sense for you and your operation.

What kinds of on-farm processing can I do without needing to get a Handling Certification?

Washing, sorting, and/or drying your own products are all covered under Crop Certification, so you don't need to get an additional Handling Certification for those types of activities. However, if you ever process **someone else's produce**, even a neighbor's, you *will* need a Handling Certification. In situations where you make a product on-site out of multiple ingredients, like salsa, but you use an ingredient from off-site, such as vinegar, you *would* need a Handling Certification. Bottom line, if you are sticking to basic processes on your own site using your own crops, you will be just fine with only a Crop Certification.

FAQs for Transitioning LIVESTOCK Producers

Can I transition my conventional livestock to organic?

Dairy operations are the *only* type of operation that can transition nonorganic animals to organic, and each dairy operation may only transition a group of animals **one time**. When that one-time, 12-month transition process is complete, no new animals can be transitioned to organic. **Conventionally-raised animals intended for slaughter cannot be transitioned to organic**. Organic livestock raised for slaughter must be managed organically from the last 3rd of gestation, while avian species must be managed organically from the second day of life.

Can I feed transitional crops grown on-site to my transitioning dairy livestock?

Transitioning dairy livestock and their offspring can eat transitional crops sourced from on-site if those crops are in their **3rd year of transition to organic** (i.e., no prohibited substances have been applied for at least 2 years).

My livestock are certified organic, but the slaughtering/packaging facility is not. Can the meat products handled there still be sold as organic?

Unfortunately, no. Any processor handling organic products must also be certified organic in order for those products to be sold as organic. Check the Organic Integrity Database to find certified processing facilities near you.