



Montana Department of Agriculture

Organic Certification Program

Doug Crabtree,
Program Manager

Definitions and Discussion

Organic production. *A production system that is managed in accordance with the Act and regulations in this part to respond to site-specific conditions by integrating cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity.* (from the National Organic Program final rule, definitions)

What is Organic?

*Organic agriculture is an **ecological production management system** that promotes and enhances **biodiversity**, biological cycles and **soil biological activity**. It is based on **minimal use of off-farm inputs** and on management **practices that restore, maintain and enhance ecological harmony**. (NOSB, 1995)*

- Organic refers to a production process, not a product standard.
 - Products are not organic, they are “organically grown”.
- Organic is a legal term, defined by federal and state laws and governed by the USDA.
- Organic is a label claim, recognized as value-added in the marketplace, which allows access to premium markets for many products.
- Organic implies a set of environmental, social and health benefits for which consumers are willing to pay.

What is Organic?

- Organic production systems include:
 - Cultural and mechanical controls
 - Crop rotation
 - Biological diversity
 - Cover crops and green manures
 - Organic feed for livestock
 - Intensive management
 - Detailed record keeping
- Organic production systems exclude:
 - Genetic Engineering
 - Irradiation
 - Sewage sludge
 - Synthetic fertilizers and pesticides
 - Growth hormones
 - Antibiotics

Organic Crop Production

■ **Weed, Pest and Disease Management**

Pests are managed, not eliminated. Pest management is accomplished by maintenance of biological diversity and attention to soil health and plant nutrition.

Practices:

- Crop Rotation
- Cover Crops / Intercropping
- Mulching
- Sanitation
- Tillage / Cultivation
- Bio-controls
(natural and introduced)
- Natural Pesticides
(from allowed list)

■ **Soil Fertility**

Feed the soil. Healthy biologically-active soils support healthy productive crops.

Practices:

- Crop Rotation
- Green Manures
- Compost
- Livestock Manure
- Natural Fertilizers
(from allowed list)

■ **Prohibited**

- Synthetic Fertilizers and Pesticides
- Genetic Engineering
- Sewage Sludge
- Irradiation

Organic Livestock Production

■ Feeds

*Healthy soils produce healthy crops, which grow healthy animals...**Organic livestock must eat organic feed.***

Practices

- Purchased feed must be certified organic
- Pastures and fields where feed is grown must be certified
- Feed additives / supplements must be on allowed list

■ Animal Health

*Animal health is maintained by **low-stress management** which allows the animal to express its natural behavior.*

Practices

- Vaccinations
- Adequate Nutrition
- Sanitation
- Proper Living Conditions (see below)
- Medications must be on allowed list*

■ Living Conditions

*Conditions must **allow animals to express their natural behaviors.***

Practices

- Access to outdoors, sunshine, fresh air and shelter
- Ample space and freedom of movement
- Pasture for ruminants
- Appropriate clean, dry bedding material

■ Prohibited

- Growth Hormones
- Antibiotics
- GMO's
- Synthetic Parasiticides
- Irradiation
- Confinement

** Sick animals must be treated as necessary to prevent suffering, but if treatment includes prohibited products, the animal can not be sold as organic*

Organic Handling Facilities

■ Definition:

An organic handling operation receives or acquires and processes, packages or stores an agricultural product.

■ Requirements:

All materials used in handling organic products must be organic or be listed as allowed on the materials list.

■ Product Integrity

*Organic handling operations must implement procedures to **prevent commingling** of organic and non-organic products and to **prevent contact with prohibited substances** during handling.*

■ Pest Management in Handling Facilities

● Practices

- Sanitation
- Exclusion
- Management of Environment

● Controls

- Mechanical / Physical Devices
- Lures or Repellents
- Allowed Pesticides

Organic Marketing

Organic production is a distinct process, whose products are recognized as value-added in the marketplace.

■ Requirements

- Independent third-party certification and inspection
- Adherence to strict production and handling standards
- Documented procedures to protect organic product integrity

■ Market Characteristics

- While certification is largely a marketing tool, neither the MDA, NOP or any other certifier will sell your products for you or recommend specific buyers to you
- Organic marketing is **based largely on relationships**, who you know and who knows you
- Prices offered may or **may not follow conventional market prices** for similar products
- Three primary channels:
 - **Local direct marketing to consumers**
 - **Direct to processors or feeders**
 - **Export markets (Japan and Europe) through Brokers**
- Organic marketing is more difficult and **time consuming** than selling conventional agricultural products, and may entail:
 - **Strict quality requirements**
 - **On farm storage**
 - **Delayed payment**
 - **Increased risk**
- The best way to find organic markets is to **network**
 - **Other organic producers**
 - **Producer groups**
 - **Consumer groups**
 - **Direct marketing**

Key Players in the “Organic Community”

- **Organic consumers-** purchase certified organic products for perceived added value.
- **Certification Agents (MDA)-** provide independent, third-party verification of organic production and handling.
- **Inspectors-** provide on-site verification that standards are followed.
- **USDA-** administers and enforces organic rule, which provides consistent national standards for organic production and handling.
- **US Congress-** passed legislation enabling a National Organic Program (NOP) within the USDA.
- **Montana Legislature-** passed legislation authorizing formation of an Organic Program within the MDA.
- **Organic Handlers-** process, package, distribute and sell products.
- **Organic Producers-** grow, raise or gather agricultural products.
- **Producer and Consumer Associations-** promote organic products and provide education regarding organic practices and methods.

National Organic Program

- NOP is a marketing program, within the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)
- Established by the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) of 1990
- Advised by 15-member National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), comprised of:

Farmers (4)
Retailer

Handlers (2)
Scientist
Environmentalists (3)

Consumers (3)
Certifying Agent

- NOP Missions:

- Develop and Implement National Organic Standards
- Govern the marketing of organically-produced products
- Facilitate commerce in organically-produced food
- Ensure consumers that organic products meet consistent standards

- NOP Functions:

- Administer Final Rule (National Organic Standards)
 - Published March 2001
 - Effective October 2002**
- Maintain National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances
- Establish and Enforce Labeling Requirements
- Accredite Organic Certifiers- Initial **Accreditation Announcements April 2002**

Organic Labeling Requirements:



- **“100% Organic**
 - 100% organic, by weight or volume, excluding water and salt
 - May display USDA and / or Certifier’s Seals
- **“Organic”**
 - At least 95% organic, excluding water and salt
 - Remaining (5%) ingredients must be organic or allowed*, unless organic ingredient is not commercially available
 - May display USDA and / or Certifier’s Seals
- **“Made with Organic Ingredients”**
 - At least 70% organic, excluding water and salt
 - <> • No ingredients may be produced using excluded methods (i.e., GMO’s, irradiation, etc.)
 - May NOT display USDA or Certifier’s Seals
- **“Contains Organic Ingredient(s)”**
 - May ONLY identify the specific organic ingredients and total organic content (%) on the Information Panel
 - May NOT display USDA or Certifier’s Seals

** Allowed = appears on national list of allowed substances*

Organic Certification

■ **Definition**

Organic Certification is the process by which a producer or handler of agricultural products provides independent third-party verification that they follow organic standards.

■ **Advantages / Why Certify?**

- *Certification allows producers or handlers to label or otherwise identify their products as organic and gain access to premium markets.*
- *Allows you to garner rewards for sustainable agricultural practices from the marketplace (consumers)*

■ **Eligibility**

Any producer or handler of agricultural crops, wild crops or livestock based in Montana. (other agencies serve other states)

■ **Requirements**

- Comply with NOP standards and MDA rules
- Complete annual application and system plan forms
- Maintain necessary records and documentation
- Permit annual on-site inspection
- Submit required fees

Converting to Organic Production

■ **Converting the Manager**

- Read and Understand all applicable **standards**
- Learn the **record keeping** requirements
- Develop a **network** for information and advice
- **Visit** other organic producers and operations
- Practice **systems thinking**
- Know where and **how to sell** your products
- Apply to the **MDA Conversion Program**

■ **MDA Conversion Program**

- Application Review- *half the regular application fee*
 - Submit complete application and system plan forms
 - MDA staff will review forms and report any deficiencies
- Full Review and Inspection
 - Submit all forms and documentation
 - Experience inspection
 - MDA staff will review all forms, records and documentation and inspection report- then report any deficiencies
 - New applicant fee is waived for those who participate in full review

Converting to Organic Production, cont.

■ **Converting Land**

- Do not use prohibited materials for three years prior to harvest of certified crops
- Document Prior Land Use
- Develop an Organic Production System Plan
 - Design **crop rotation**
 - Locate source(s) of **organic seed**
 - Plan soil building / **fertility** program
 - Determine **weed and pest management** strategies

■ **Converting Livestock**

- Learn species-specific conversion times
- Do not use prohibited products
- Document source of animals
- Certify pasture, hay and forage land
- Develop an Organic Production System Plan
 - Locate source(s) of **organic feed**
 - Determine **health management** strategies
 - Plan **housing / shelter** and manure management

Current Certifiers Operating in Montana:

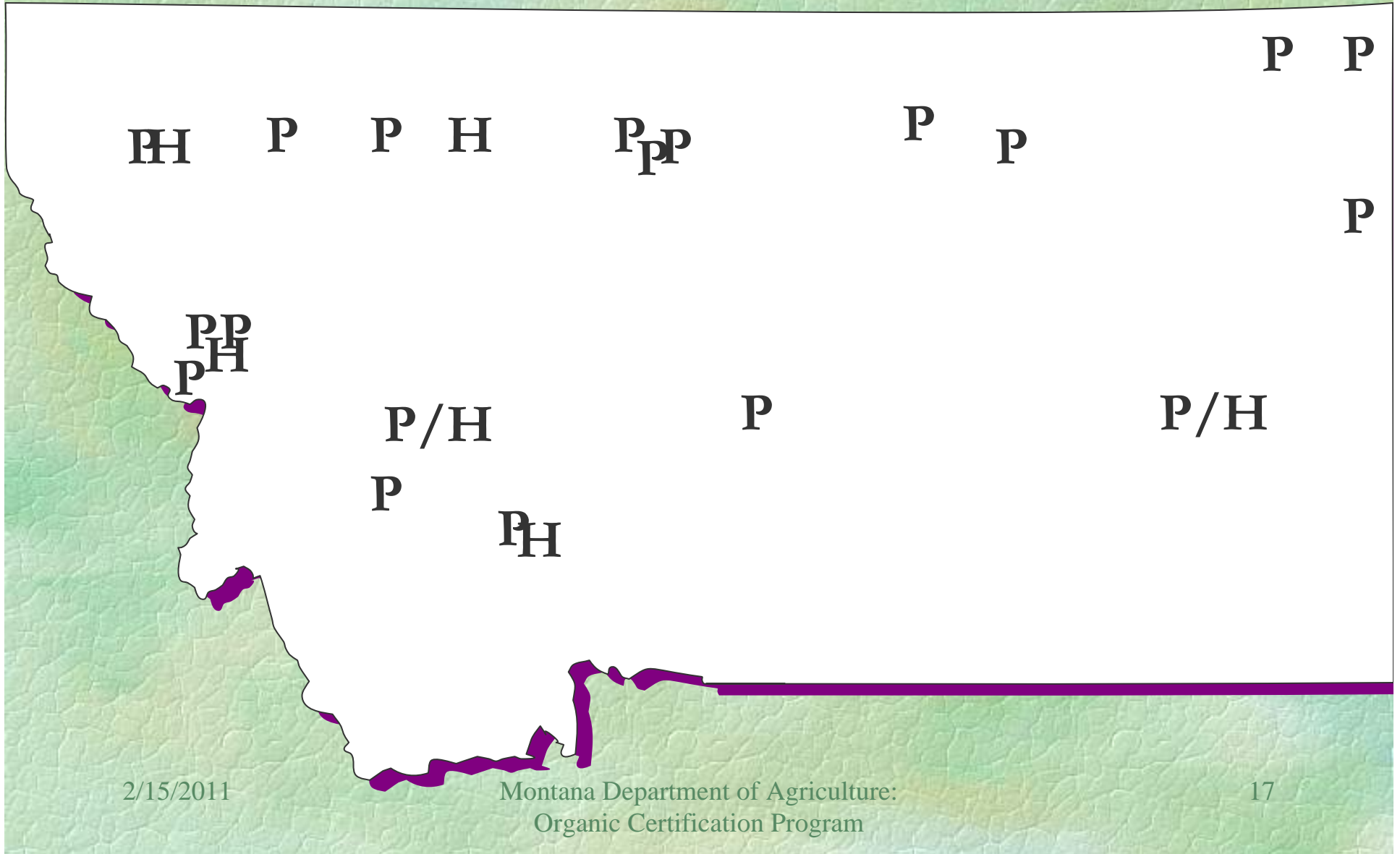
- **OCIA** (Organic Crop Improvement Association)
 - Chapter-based organization, with **four regional chapters in MT**
 - World's largest organic certifier
 - Based in Lincoln, NE
- **OCAM** (Organic Certification Association of Montana)
 - An OCIA chapter affiliate, also offers independent certification for small growers in MT
 - NOT seeking accreditation from the USDA
 - *Will no longer act as an independent certifier after October 21, 2002*
- **FVO** (Farm Verified Organic)
 - International organization, focus on Northern Plains region
 - Based in Medina, ND
- **OTCO** (Oregon Tilth Certified Organic)
 - International organization, focus on Oregon
 - Based in Salem, OR
- **GOA** (Global Organic Alliance)
 - National organization
 - Based in Bellefontaine, OH
- **Demeter Association / Aurora Organic**
 - Offers organic and Biodynamic certification internationally
 - Based in Aurora, NY

Organic Production in Montana

- **209,000 Total Organic Acres, including**
 - 72,000 crop acres
 - 137,000 of Pasture / Rangeland
 - Increased 161% since 1997
- **Rank among States**
 - # 1 in Wheat Production
 - # 2 in Total Certified Acres; Grains, Peas, Lentils and Flax
 - # 3 in Total Cropland; Pasture and Rangeland
 - Top 10 in Herbs, Rye, Oats, Sunflowers, Millet, Soybeans
- **Growth Opportunities = Value Added**
 - Livestock
 - Processing
 - Grain, Beans, Oilseeds (continued leadership)

Map of Certified Entities:

P= Producers (19); H= Handlers (6)



Why the MDA is involved with organic agriculture:

- **Requested by a Constituency**

Members of Montana's Organic Community formed a coalition that lobbied the legislature to create a State Organic Program

- **Directed by the Legislature**

Enabling legislation, sponsored by Senator Jon Tester of Big Sandy, passed in 1999. The law directed the MDA to create an Organic Certification Program

- **Adoption of the NOP rule**

The USDA officially adopted a uniform, consistent set of National Organic Standards, the NOP rule. These standards take effect October 21, 2002

- **Approved by Petition**

68% of Montana's Certified Organic Producers and Handlers petitioned the MDA to develop a program in April 2001.

MDA Program History

- ✓ **1999**– *Enabling Legislation*
Montana Code Annotated (MCA)
Title 80, Chapter 11, Part 6
- ✓ **1999**– *Organic Community Organizes-*
Steering Committee Formed
- ✓ **April 2001-** *Petition to develop Program-*
approved by 68% of Montana’s Certified Producers
and Handlers
- ✓ **June 2001-** Montana State Organic Certification Advisory
Committee (MSOCAC) Established
- ✓ **October 2001–** Organic Certification Program
Manager Hired
- ✓ **October 2001–** Application for Accreditation
Submitted to the USDA

MDA Program Timeline*

- April 29, 2002—** USDA Announced Accreditation of Montana's Organic Certification Program
- June 2002-** 78% of original petitioners approved Implementation of the MDA Program
- June 2002—** Commence rule adoption process
- June 17 2002-** Organic Certification Services offered to Montana's Producers and Handlers
- July 2002-** MDA Director appoints Montana Organic Commodity Advisory Council
- October 2002—** Organic Producers and Handlers must be certified by a USDA-accredited Certifying Agent