

Regional Organic Specialists and Organic Considerations in Alaska



Who are the Organic Conservation Specialists?

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) support for organic farms and their conservation needs is part of the Organic Transition Initiative (OTI).

NRCS expanded their 14 year-long partnership with Oregon Tilth to establish six Organic Specialists who hold joint positions with NRCS and organic partners, including:

Oregon Tilth, Marbleseed, California Certified Organic Farmers Foundation (CCOF), Organic Agronomy Training Service (OATS), and the Organic Trade Association (OTA).

West Region



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What is our goal?

The Organic Specialist agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will increase conservation planning and implementation on organic and transitioning-to-organic farms to address resource concerns.

What are our overall objectives?

- Developing knowledge within NRCS about organic systems and their unique needs.
- Instilling comfort and confidence in NRCS staff working with organic producers.
- Supporting the certification of more Technical Service Providers (TSPs) to work with organic producers.
 - CPA 138 (Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition)
 - DIA 140 (Transition to Organic Design)

What are our overall objectives?

- Building more relationships between the organic community and NRCS.
- Building awareness within the organic community regarding opportunities for support from NRCS programs.

What are some specific activities we are working on?

At least 24 training sessions provided each year throughout the the country driven by NRCS state and staff requests:

- Working Effectively with Organic Producers (WEWOP)
- Organic 101
- CPA 138/DIA 140 and the Organic System Plan (OSP)
- Technical Service Providers (TSPs) - host regional TSP trainings and conduct outreach to prospective TSPs
- Organic pest, nutrient, livestock, and pasture management

What are some specific activities we are working on?

- Provide monthly national organic office hours for NRCS staff on third Thursday from 11am-12 pm Alaska time. An informal space for NRCS staff to bring any questions, challenges, feedback with organic. Part of NRCS? Reach out for the link!
- Seek out opportunities for NRCS to have a presence at organic conferences and host workshops for organic and transitioning-to-organic producers.
- Conduct outreach to State Technical Advisory Committees and help facilitate organic representation on these committees.

Alaska Organic Acreage

- A recent search of the [Organic Integrity Database](#), revealed 16 operations and 518 certified organic acres.
- Total Organic Acreage in 2023: 1,245 acres
 - Source: Table A.2- [Organic Situation Report](#), 2023 Argus-reported organic harvested acreage by state)
- Certified organic commodities include: rhodiola, birch sap, kelp, veggies/fruits/flowers, and handling (grocery, coffee, kelp).

Eligibility for Organic Certification



Transitioning to Organic



If applied prohibited substance(s) in last 3 years:

3-year period of transitioning to organic begins from the date of last application of prohibited substance (pesticide, treated seeds, etc.)

If no prohibited substances were applied in last 3 years:

Show documentation that no prohibited substances were applied and may be able to certify immediately



Organic Certifiers



4 organic certifiers in Alaska

73 organic certifiers in United States

Certification Process

SUBMIT OSP

Complete certifier's
OSP



Organic System Plan (OSP)

- Land history
- Buffer zones
- Seeds, planting stock
- Pest management
- Harvest, storage, transportation
- Labeling
- Materials
- Recordkeeping



NATURAL RESOURCES & BIODIVERSITY

Section

C6

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Operation Name:

Date:

- Complete this form for all acreage to be included under certification, and all operations engaged in crop and animal production including greenhouses, poultry production, and other non-field organic production systems.

NOP 205.200 An operation must implement production practices that maintain or improve the natural resources and biodiversity of the operation, including soil and water quality. "Natural resources" are defined as the physical, hydrological, and biological features of the operation, including soil, water, wetlands, woodlands and wildlife. NOP Guidance 5020, Natural Resources and Biodiversity Conservation, clarifies the responsibility of certified operations to implement practices in compliance with §205.200, monitor them as appropriate, and maintain any records necessary for a certifier to verify compliance. NOP Guidance 5020 Appendix A provides examples of conservation activities that could be performed on operations to comply with this requirement.

BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

- 1) Do you have a current conservation plan or contract? ☐ Yes ☐ No

- a) If Yes, select the agency(ies) and describe the conservation and management practices below.

- ☐ USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
☐ Farm Services Agency (FSA)
☐ Salmon Safe
☐ Soil Conservation District
☐ Land trust
☐ Other:

- 2) How do you manage water for the needs of crops, livestock, native species, and riparian ecosystems?

- a) I conserve water by doing the following:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Plant regionally appropriate crops | ☐ Plant drought-tolerant natives |
| ☐ Use efficient irrigation | ☐ Schedule irrigations/avoid over drafting groundwater/facilitate recharge |
| ☐ Monitor soil moisture | ☐ Encourage infiltration in fields and pastures |
| ☐ Locate ponds correctly (adhere to federal/state regulations) | |

Possible Resource Concerns



Transitioning to organic is going from an input-based system to a biologically-based system

Management changes need to take place like:

- Buffers
- Nutrient Management
- Pest Management
- Weed Control and Tillage
- Livestock Outdoor Access
- Mitigating Soil Disturbance



Common NRCS Practices for Organic Crop Producers

- Conservation Crop Rotation (328)
- Cover Crop (340)
- Nutrient Management (590)
- Pest Management Conservation System (595)
- High Tunnel (325)
- Buffer Practices:
 - Field Border (386)
 - Hedgerow Planting (422)
 - Conservation Cover (327)



Common NRCS Practices for Organic Livestock Producers

- Pasture and Hay Planting (512)
- Prescribed Grazing (528)
- Fence (382)
- Forage Harvest Management (511)
- Stream Crossing (578)
- Watering Facility (614)
- Compost Facility (317)
- Roofs and Covers (367)
- Livestock Pipeline (516)





Questions?

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- Have a question about working with organic producers or organic regulations?
 - Interested in getting involved in organic conferences, workshops, or events?
 - Interested in conducting outreach to organic producers or helping organic producers make connections with NRCS?

Contact me!



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