

Summary of Certifications

- USDA Organic
- Certified Naturally Grown
- Salmon-Safe

USDA Certified Organic:

What it is:

- Organic is a labeling term for food/agricultural products that have been produced using cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that support the cycling of on-farm resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity in compliance with the USDA organic regulations.
- Organic certification verifies that a farm complies with the USDA organic regulations and allows the farmer to represent, label, and sell their products as organic.
- USDA organic regulations describe specific standards required for the farmer to use the organic seal, or even the word “organic.”
- There are four categories of organic products: (1) crops, (2) livestock, (3) processed products, and (4) wild crops.
- There is a 36-month transition period. Any land used to produce raw organic products cannot have had prohibited substances applied to it for the past three years. Until the transition period is met, you may not (1) sell, label, or represent your product as organic or (2) use the USDA organic seal.



Cost:

- Organic certification costs and fees vary, depending on the certifying agent and the type, size, and complexity of the operation.
- Costs can range from a few hundred to several thousand dollars.
- There is generally an application fee, annual renewal fee, assessment on annual production and sales, and inspections fees.

Requirements:

- **USDA Organic Regulations:**
http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?c=ecfr&sid=3f34f4c22f9aa8e6d9864cc2683cea02&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title07/7cfr205_main_02.tpl

Certification process:

To become certified, you must apply to a [USDA-accredited certifying agent](#). They will ask you for information, including:

- A detailed description of the operation.
- Complete history of substances applied to the land during the previous 36 months.
- The type of organic products grown, raised, or processed.
- Written Organic Systems Plan describing the practices and substances to be used.

The process:

- Farmer adopts organic practices, then submits application and fees to certifying agent.

- Certifying agent reviews application to verify compliance with USDA organic regulations.
- Inspector conducts on-site inspection of the operation.
- Certifying agent reviews application and inspection report to determine compliance.
- Certifying agent issues organic certification.

Recertification process (annual):

- Farmer provides annual update to certifying agent.
- Inspector conducts an on-site review of the operation.
- Certifying agent reviews application and inspection report to ensure compliance.
- Certifying agent issues organic certification.

Helpful Resources:

- What is organic certification?
<https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/What%20is%20Organic%20Certification.pdf>
- USDA Guide for Organic Crop Producers:
https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/Guide%20for%20Organic%20Crop%20Producers_0.pdf
- Guide to Organic Certification:
https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/Guide%20to%20Organic%20Certification_0.pdf
- National Organic Program Handbook:
 - o Section A. Standards:
<https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic/handbook/sectiona>
 - o Section B. Certification:
<https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic/handbook/sectionb>
 - o Section E. Compliance and Enforcement:
<https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic/handbook/sections-d-f>

Certified Naturally Grown:

What it is:

- Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) is a private non-profit, often referred to as the “grassroots alternative to certified organic.” It was founded in 2002 (the same year as the USDA National Organic Program) with the intention of being a simpler and less costly alternative to USDA NOP certification, while maintaining production standards based on the USDA NOP. CNG is tailored to direct-market farmers producing food for their local communities. Some CNG farms later transition to USDA organic.
- CNG farms don’t use synthetic pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers or GMOs.
- CNG’s certification approach is based on peer reviews, in which other farmers generally carry out inspections. Thus, this model helps promote farmer-to-farmer knowledge about best practices and foster local networks to strengthen the farming community.
- The CNG label is best for farms that market directly (CSAs, farmer’s markets, local businesses). USDA organic certification is a better fit for farmer’s looking to sell to larger retailers or wholesalers.



- CNG offers certifications for produce, apiary, livestock, aquaponics, and mushrooms.

Cost:

- CNG recommends \$200 per year for farmers (more or less depending on the size of the farm operation).

Requirements:

- Produce Standards: http://www.cngfarming.org/produce_standards
- Allowed and prohibited substances: <http://www.cngfarming.org/alprosubstances>
- Annual Requirements: <http://www.cngfarming.org/requirements>

Certification process:

- First, the farmer must complete an online application, which is reviewed by CNG staff, and sign the declaration indicating they understand/accept the terms of participating in the CNG program.
- Upon acceptance, a peer (a local certified farmer) completes an inspection.
- After a successful inspection, CNG authorizes the farmer to use the CNG name and logo
- As an additional safeguard, CNG periodically conducts unannounced inspections.

Helpful resources:

- CNG FAQs: <http://www.cngfarming.org/faqs>
- Forms and Guidelines: <http://www.cngfarming.org/cngforms>

Certified Salmon-Safe:

What it is:

- Salmon-Safe is an independent non-profit, based out of Portland, Oregon, whose mission is to “transform land management practices so Pacific salmon can thrive in west coast watersheds.”
- More than 95,000 acres of agricultural and urban land have been certified in Oregon, Washington, California, and British Columbia.
- Salmon-Safe offers several peer-reviewed certification programs (urban, vineyards, farms, corporate/university, large-scale infrastructure, parks, and golf courses).
- Salmon-Safe encourages farms to implement ecologically sustainable agriculture practices that protect water quality and wildlife habitat in PNW watersheds.
- The farm certification is focused in six main areas: (1) riparian area management (2) water use management (3) erosion and sediment control (4) integrated pest management and water quality protection (5) animal management (6) biodiversity conservation.



Cost:

- Dependent upon certifier.

Requirements:

- Salmon-Safe Certification Standards for Farms:
<https://www.salmonsafe.org/sites/default/files/file/salmonsafe-farm-standards-june2013-update.pdf>

Certification process:

- There is a comprehensive farm assessment, valid for three years after inspection.
- Organic farms seeking certification can be inspected and certified by Oregon Tilth.
- Puget Sound inquiries can contact Salmon-Safe directly or Stewardship Partners.

Helpful resources:

- Salmon-Safe for Farms: <https://www.salmonsafe.org/getcertified/farms>