



## What You Need to Know to Change to Another Accredited Certifying Agent (ACA)

### FACT SHEET

February 28, 2024

#### Background

All Accredited Certifying Agents (ACA) must be accredited by the USDA National Organic Program to offer organic certification. All ACA use the USDA Organic Regulations 7 CFR Part 205 and same certification process. This process includes submission of your Organic System Plan (OSP) application, farm map, field history and other documents and forms, review by the ACA for your ability to comply with the NOP Organic Regulations 7 CFR Part 205 and identify missing information, on-site inspection, complete final review, and decision. Getting certified by a new ACA can take 3-6 months.

Many of you may know that HB 1184 did not pass on Thursday, Feb 22, 2024. On Tuesday, Feb 27, 2024, Comm. Shawn Jasper announced that the New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets and Food (NHDAMF) will discontinue its organic certification program, **effective June 30, 2024**. This means that **all currently NHDAMF-certified operations must apply to a new ACA and inform NHDAMF of the ACA and date of application using NHDAMF's Verification Form by April 27, 2024, or surrender their organic certification to NHDAMF by April 27, 2024, using NHDAMF's Notice of Surrender Certification. Until you receive your new Organic Certificate from your new ACA, you need to continue with NHDAMF's organic certification and follow your Organic System Plan. Any certification fees you paid to NHDAMF in 2024 will be refunded.**

If you don't notify NHDAMF that you are either applying to another ACA or surrender your Organic Certificate by April 27, 2024, and continue selling your products as certified organic, the NHDAMF will issue your operation a non-compliance, which may lead to suspension or revocation of your organic certification.

#### Process to Change your Certifier (ACA)

**NOFA-NH is offering support through this process. Below are the steps to take to successfully change your Certifier. See information below if you need to speak with a NOFA representative for assistance.**

1. Maintain your current certification with NHDAMF by submitting your NHDAMF OSP update and certification fees by March 1, 2024.

#### Choosing Another ACA

There are currently [75 certifying agents](#) accredited by the National Organic Program. Be sure the ACA you choose is **USDA-accredited** for all scopes for which you are seeking organic certification. The choices of scopes are **crops, wild crops, livestock and processing/handling**. Some have specific guidelines for organic certification of specialty crops, such as mushrooms, cranberries, low-bush blueberries, and sea vegetables. In the following link to the [USDA Organic Integrity Database](#), click on a specific ACA name, then click on Accredited Scopes.

The good news is that you will now be able to have your complete operation certified by one ACA. If you have livestock or wanted to add value-added products to your operation, you can now be certified for livestock and/or processing/handling by the same ACA.

**Compare fee schedules.** All ACAs post their fee schedules publicly on their website. Some ACAs base their certification fees on gross organic sales. Some, similar to NHDAMF, base their certification fees on acreage or greenhouse square footage. There may be a one-time initial certification fee. Adding a livestock or processing scope may increase your fees. There may be a late fee if your application is not submitted by the ACA's deadline date. The inspection fee may be separate from the certification fee or if the inspection fee is more than estimated, you may be billed for the remainder. *Calculate your fees and check with the ACA on fees when you make your initial phone call.*

While certification fees will increase from what you have been paying with NHDAMF, the increase can be partially offset by the federally funded [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#), administered in NH by the Farm Service Agency (FSA). Cost share is available per scope, up to \$750 or ¾ of the certification cost for that scope. You can apply later in the year once you have your new certificate. Notify FSA so they mail you the information.

Check the new ACA application deadline dates to be sure you can meet the appropriate date. Here is a list of the 8 other ACAs already doing organic certifications in NH. Certification costs are not uniform. If an inspector comes from out of state, you may be required to pay additional inspection fees. You may want to talk to other certified organic farmers to hear how they like the ACA with whom they are certified.

- [Baystate Organic Certifiers \(BOC\)](#), Dighton, MA, 774-872-5544
- [Ecocert SAS](#), Ecocert USA, Plainfield, IN 510-452-8000
- [MOFGA Certification Services](#), Unity, ME, 207-568-6030
- [Oregon Tilth Certified Organic \(OTCO\)](#), Corvallis, OR, 503-378-0690
- [Pennsylvania Certified Organic \(PCO\)](#), Spring Mills, PA, 814-422-0251
- [Quality Assurance International \(QAI\)](#), San Diego, CA, 858-792-3531
- [SCS Global Services, Inc](#), Emeryville, CA, 510-452-8000
- [Vermont Organic Farmers \(VOF\)](#), Richmond, VT, 802-434-3821

2. Call your chosen ACA to start the process and establish an account. Ask any relevant questions regarding your operation you may have, particularly with any inputs you are currently using or plan to use. You should also establish what fees you would pay. Ask if you are allowed to use up your existing inventory of labels that identify NHDAMF as your ACA. The application and OSP may be filled out online, making it easy to make changes in your OSP and annual updates. You must create an account to get access to the online application and OSP. Be aware of any deadline dates.

3. Submit your complete OSP application for certification to another ACA as a new applicant before **April 27, 2024**. Submit accompanying documents, such as farm or facility maps, for the scope(s) of certification requested. Google maps can be used but you need to add in your fields with ID, adjoining land use and buffers you maintain. Examples or templates of these documents and other resources are usually available at the ACA website to download.

4. Pay fees to the new ACA according to their fee schedule.

5. Submit the [NHDAMF Verification Form](#), with the name of your ACA and date of application, to NHDAMF by **April 27, 2024**. **NHDAMF must be notified by the above date or you will receive a notice of noncompliance.**

6. Continue the certification process with your new ACA, including on-site inspection.

7. Maintain your current certification with NHDAMF until the new certification process is complete and a new Organic Certificate has been issued by your new ACA. Completing the inspection does not mean that you are certified. You need to receive notification from your new ACA that you are certified organic. You will receive an organic certification letter. You can access your certificate at the [NOP's Integrity Database](#) within 3 days of your certificate issue.

8. If you have not received notification of your organic certification by your new ACA by June 30, 2024, your operation's listing at the USDA NOP Organic Integrity Database (OID) which lists all certified organic operations globally, will appear as "(---) "Transitioning to a New Certifier".

9. Once you have received your new Organic Certificate from your new ACA, you are required to notify the USDA NOP. This can be done by email to [Callie.Herron@usda.gov](mailto:Callie.Herron@usda.gov).

### Using Your Existing Labels

If you have applied for organic certification with another ACA, you may use up your existing inventory of labels that identify NHDAMF as your ACA if your new ACA approves it, according to NOP's instructions for label use-up approval. This may be a limited time period, such as 90 days. We are researching this provision and will update this Fact Sheet as soon as possible.

### **Choosing to Surrender Your Organic Certification**

If you choose to surrender your organic certification at this time, you still have some responsibilities. Once surrendered, you must not sell, label or market your products as organic.

Note: You can still market them as “organic” if you meet the exempt producer requirement (7 CFR Part 205.101(a)), i.e., have gross agricultural income from organic sales total \$5,000 or less annually.

1. By **April 27, 2024**, send a signed [Surrender of Organic Certification](#) form to NHDAMF, Div of Regulatory Services, 25 Capitol St, PO Box 2042, Concord, NH 03301-2042. Click on the link to access this form at the NHDAMF website.
2. If you do not send in a signed [Surrender of Organic Certification](#) form to NHDAMF by April 27, 2024, and continue selling your products as organic, you will be issued a Non-Compliance by NHDAMF, which may lead to suspension or revocation of your organic certification.

### **Technical Assistance from NOFA-NH**

If you are planning to transfer to a new ACA and need help with the process, or with completing your new Organic System Plan, NOFA-NH is providing help.

Volunteer & NOFA-NH Board Member, Joyce Ford. Email is [joyceford51@gmail.com](mailto:joyceford51@gmail.com). Joyce is now retired from her certified organic farm, but has been an organic inspector and involved in organic certification for many years.

NOFA-NH Staff Member, Teresa Downey. Email is [Teresa@nofanh.org](mailto:Teresa@nofanh.org). Teresa is an experienced certified organic farmer and works with certified organic farmers at NOFA-NH.

NOFA-NH Board President, Julie Davenson. Email: [osgoodridgefarm@gmail.com](mailto:osgoodridgefarm@gmail.com). Can offer free grant coaching and support to apply for funding this spring.

### **Additional Resources**

NOP Program Handbook, Doc # 2604, [Instruction: Responsibilities of Certified Operations Changing Certifying Agents](#). See also USDA organic regulations, § 205.401.