



1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Room 2646-South, STOP 0268
Washington, DC 20250-0201

May 22, 2014

Dear Local Market Manager,

The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) National Organic Program (NOP) is happy to share a new fact sheet with you. The Organic Labeling at Farmers Markets fact sheet can help your vendors properly market organic fruits, vegetables or livestock products to consumers who are looking for fresh, locally sourced foods.

The USDA National Farmers Market Directory currently lists 1,985 markets reporting that they offer organic products for sale. That is 24% of all farmers markets that have voluntarily registered in the Directory. USDA supports farmers markets to move local and regional food to consumers because direct-to-consumer marketing enables producers to obtain a greater share of the food spending dollar, allows customers to access fresh local foods and learn firsthand about the practices used to grow it, and strengthens local economies by providing jobs and volunteer opportunities and keeping more food dollars circulating within communities.

Organic is a labeling term for food or other agricultural products that have been produced according to the USDA organic regulations. These standards require the integration of cultural, biological and mechanical practices which foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity.

The NOP oversees organic production through a certification process. Most products that are represented as organic must be certified by a USDA accredited certifying agent, who verifies that all organic regulations are being followed. **Most farms and business that grow, handle or process organic products must be certified, with only a few exceptions.** Small organic farms and businesses whose gross agricultural income from organic sales does not exceed \$5000 per year do not have to be certified to market their products as organic. These operations still must comply with organic standards as described in the attached fact sheet. This fact sheet will help you and your market participants understand the organic requirements and know when organic certification is required. It offers a list of requirements that an exempt organic farmer should be able to verify. The fact sheet also points to additional resources on USDA organic regulations and how to become certified.

If an operation decides that organic certification is right for them, they are urged to visit the NOP website for more information. They may also contact a certifier in their area to get information and begin the process. The farm or business applying for certification is responsible for the costs associated with the review process. Assistance may be available through the Organic

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Certification Cost-Share Program. This program reimburses eligible operations for as much as 75 percent of their certification costs-up to a maximum of \$750 a year. Learn more at www.ams.usda.gov/nop.

Are you concerned that an organic product isn't meeting the USDA standards, or that an operation is making an organic claim without certification? Suspected violations of the organic regulations may be anonymously reported to the USDA. We investigate every complaint we receive, and if we find any problems we take action. Send an email to NOPCompliance@ams.usda.gov or call the National Organic Program at 202-720-3252.

We appreciate your interest in organic agriculture, and we encourage your efforts to provide wholesome local products to consumers. The National Organic Program continues to support the integrity of organic farming on every level.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Miles McEvoy", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Miles McEvoy
Deputy Administrator
National Organic Program
Agricultural Marketing Service

Enclosure