

PCO offers full certification services for Processors and Handlers seeking USDA National Organic Program (NOP) organic certification. We currently certify operations that process baked goods, snack items, egg products, dairy products, dry tea, iced tea, coffee, livestock feed, etc. Regardless of the exact type of product that your company may produce, PCO will verify that your operation and the products in particular that you produce are in compliance with the regulations.

## Certification Process

It's important to note that this process will likely take months, not days or weeks. Planning ahead is crucial if you have a specific target date in mind for a product launch or a deal closure.

*See inside for the steps of organic certification.*

## International Export

**European Union** – PCO offers verification to the EU regulations. After the verification cycle is complete, you would be able to sell your products directly to EU countries, or to another entity for further processing to the EU regulations.

**Canada** – The USDA NOP and the Canadian Organic Products Regulations established an equivalency agreement in 2009. This means that PCO-certified products can be sold to entities for sale in Canada without a separate certification to the Canadian regulations. PCO must verify a few additional stipulations for the certified client before this can occur.

**Japan & Taiwan** – The USDA NOP has an export arrangement with Japan & Taiwan. This means that PCO-certified products can be sold to entities for sale in both countries without a separate certification to the Japanese or Taiwanese regulations. PCO must verify a few additional stipulations for the certified client before this can occur.

# Processor & Handler Organic Certification Guidance



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Organic

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## Steps to Certification

The **first step** is to order an application package, fill out the necessary forms and documents, and submit them to PCO for review with your application fee. See *the PCO website for the full breakdown of certification fees.*

The **second step** occurs once PCO receives your complete application. PCO will perform an initial review to ensure your ability to comply with the NOP regulations. A report will be sent to you (the client) and the assigned inspector outlining specific points to be addressed at inspection.

**Step three** is the inspection itself. An inspector will come on site to serve as the eyes and ears for PCO, noting and verifying systems in place. The inspector will then submit an inspection report to PCO.

The **fourth step** involves PCO reviewing the inspection report and generating a certification report. This will outline any non-compliances that the client must correct prior to certification. The client must sign the certification report and correct any non-compliances that were noted.

Upon receipt of the signed certification report and satisfactory correction of non-compliances, the **fifth and final step** can occur. PCO will issue a new Certificate and supplemental Organic Product Verification (OPV) page to the client. The client is now

## HACCP vs. OCPP

Many questions often arise regarding Organic Control Point Plans (OCPPs). What are they? What do they cover? Why would I need one when I already have a HACCP plan? The easiest way to think of OCPPs is as an organic control assurance from receiving to sale.

HACCP plans generally have three main food safety concerns: biological, chemical, and physical. OCPPs have two main organic assurance concerns: commingling and contamination. Commingling refers to organic ingredients or products coming into contact with conventionally grown/produced ingredients or products. Contamination occurs when organic ingredients or products come into contact with prohibited substances that are not allowed per NOP regulations.

PCO does not currently require that clients have an explicit OCPP on file. However, developing and maintaining an OCPP may be a useful tool in helping you identify areas where organic integrity could be compromised in your system. Some clients may choose to modify their HACCP plan already in place to include organic control points. Others choose to submit their OCPP in the form of a detailed narrative. The most appropriate form of OCPP for you ultimately depends on your type of operation.

## New Products

Once you've completed the first cycle of certification, you will receive a Certificate and Organic Product Verification (OPV). The OPV will explicitly list the products that PCO has reviewed and approved for your operation. **Any and all new products that you would like to produce in the future must be reviewed by PCO prior to sale or representation as "100% Organic", "Organic", or "Made with organic..."**

This applies to any reformulated previously certified products or even reformatted product labels. This last point is exceedingly important, as **all labels must be approved by PCO prior to use.** Orders of new labels are often made in large quantities, and it can be quite costly if labels were not submitted for review, and then a problem is found regarding the already ordered labels afterward. The NOP offers guidance on labeling requirements within their website: **[www.ams.usda.gov/AMsv1.0/NOP](http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMsv1.0/NOP)**