

Organic Farming Certification in India

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Organic Farming

Organic farming is a type of farming that focuses on cultivating the land and raising crops in such a way that the soil remains alive and well by using organic wastes (crop, animal and farm wastes, aquatic wastes) and other biological materials, as well as beneficial microbes (biofertilizers), to release nutrients to crops for increased sustainable production in an environmentally friendly, pollution-free environment.



What is Certification?

Producers of organic food, seeds, and other organic agricultural goods go through a certification procedure. Any firm directly involved in food production, such as seed providers, farmers, food processors, merchants, and restaurants, can be certified. Organic seeds are double certified in general because they are certified twice, once by the seed certification team and then again by the organic certification and monitoring team. Requirements for certification and seed demand vary from country to country, and usually involve a set of production standards for growing, storage, processing, packaging and shipping of organic produce that include:

- Complete avoidance of synthetic chemical inputs such as fertilizer, pesticides, antibiotics, food additives and genetically modified organisms.
- Farmland must be free from chemicals for a number of years (often, three or more).
- Keeping detailed written production and sales records (audit trail).
- Maintaining strict physical separation of organic products from non-certified products.
- Undergoing periodic on-site inspections.

Why Certification?

- It is necessary to assure quality and prevent fraud. For organic producers, Certification identifies providers of items permitted for use in certified operations for organic growers.
- For consumers, "certified organic" serves as a product assurance, similar to "low fat", "100% whole wheat", or "no artificial preservatives".
- The goal of certification is to regulate and facilitate the sale of organic products to customers.
- Certification is intended to protect consumers from misuse of the term, and make buying organics easy.
- Assurance to the consumers that its concern for healthy food has been addressed.

Certification process

In order to certify a farm, the farmer is typically required to engage in a number of new activities, in addition to normal farming operations (represented in Figure also)

- **Study** of organic standards, which cover in specific detail what is and is not allowed for every aspect of farming, including storage, transport and sale.
- **Compliance** - farm facilities and production methods must comply with the standards, which may involve modifying facilities, sourcing and changing suppliers, etc.
- **Documentation**-Documents outlining the farm's history and current setup, as well as the results of soil and water testing, are required.
- **Planning** - A detailed yearly production plan must be provided, describing everything from seed to sale, including seed sources, field and crop sites, fertilisation and pest control operations, harvest procedures, and storage locations, among other things.





- **Inspection** - annual on-farm inspections are required, with a physical tour, examination of records, and an oral interview.
- **Fee** - A fee is to be paid by the grower to the certification body for annual surveillance and for facilitating a mark, which is acceptable in the market as symbol of quality.
- **Record-keeping** - Written, day-to-day agricultural and marketing records must be available for review at all times. In addition, inspections on short notice or by surprise are possible, as can particular testing (e.g. soil, water, plant tissue).

Organic standards

1. **Conversion period** it is the minimum time required for the conversion of inorganic field to completely organic field. It's generally two years for annuls while three years for perennials.
2. **Buffer zone:** It's a three-meter square area that must be left in border of field to separate the organic field from inorganic field. If the organic field is in low regions, then there must be a drench dug to avoid entry of polluted water in the form of runoff to organic field.
3. One per cent of area must be covered under the trees to protect the biodiversity and the farm must have a live fencing.
4. **Selection of crop and variety:** The crop chosen must be appropriate for the location as well as the climate. If organic seeds are not available, the farmers can use commercial seed for the first year and then must utilize seeds grown on their farm the following year.
5. Only biodegradable material such as microbial, plant or animal origin should be used, minimize nutrient loss is needed and accumulation of heavy metals and other pollutants must be prevented.
6. Origin farm must encourage the soil and water conservation.

National Accreditation Body

The National Steering Committee would also function as the National Accreditation Body. The members of the National Accreditation Body shall comprise of representatives from Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, APEDA, Coffee Board,

Spices Board and Tea Board. The Chairman of the Body shall be the Chairman of the National Steering Committee. The work of the National Accreditation body includes:

- a. Drawing up procedures for evaluation and Accreditation of certification programs.
- b. Formulating procedures for evaluation of the agencies implementing the programs.
- c. Accreditation of inspection and certification agencies.

Every certifier will implement a certification programme and a programme cannot be accredited without accrediting the certifier.

Inspection methods:

Inspections shall regularly include, but are not restricted to:

- a. Visits of facilities, fields, etc.
- b. Review of records and accounts.
- c. Calculation of input/output norms, production estimates etc.
- d. Assessment of production system of Licensed Operator.
- e. Interview with responsible persons.

Registration can be done by

1. **Individual farmers:** -the farmer willing to register a field under organic must be a legal owner of the land and there no limit of area for certification.
2. **Group:** - all the members of the group must be within the revenue district and no restriction on the area for certification but numbers of farmers with more than 10 ac of land should be less than 50 per cent of total area of group.
3. **Corporate bodies:** -group of farmers can come together and register as a corporate body. They can produce organically, process and sell but there should be an office setup to monitor the activities.



Participatory Guarantee System (PGS)

PGS (Participatory Guarantee System) is a quality assurance project that is locally relevant, emphasizes stakeholder engagement, including producers and consumers, and operates outside of the framework of third-party certification.

Advantages of PGS over third party certification system:

- a. The procedures are simple; documents are basic and use the local language understandable to farmers.
- b. All of the members are from the area and know each other. Organic farmers, as individuals, have a high level of understanding of day-to-day agricultural knowledge or familiarity.
- c. Peer appraisers are among the group and live in the same village, therefore have better access to surveillance.
- d. Peer appraisal instead of third party inspections reduces cost.
- e. Empowers farmers with increased capacity building.
- f. Bring consumers to the farm without the need of middleman.

Future Prospects

- PGS being low cost and locally relevant ideal for domestic trade.
- Capacity built in PGS can help in future shift to TPC without the need for separate ICS.
- PGS will strengthen organic movement.
- Being trust based and transparent better suited to organic philosophy.