

THE GEORGIA CROP IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION ORGANIC CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

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INTRODUCTION

The Georgia Crop Improvement Association is an organization of farmers and others who are interested in growing and making available to the public, through certification (known sources of seed, field inspections, analytical testing), high quality seeds and propagating materials of superior varieties so grown and distributed as to insure genetic purity and identity. The Georgia Crop Improvement Association was organized in 1946 and made the legal certifying agency by passage of House Bill #104 in 1956. Senate Bill #583 in July of 1997 superseded this bill. Both bills authorized the Dean of the University of Georgia College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences to designate the Georgia Crop Improvement Association as the legal certifying agency in Georgia.

Crop Improvement Associations emphasize more efficient crop production by encouraging the use of high quality seed of superior varieties. Larger yields per acre and better quality products have always been essential for the most profitable returns from crop production.

The Georgia Crop Improvement Association's Organic Certification Program (GCIAOCP) is a natural extension of third-party certifying activities regularly performed for seed, Quality Assurance and Identity Preserved Programs currently offered.

The GCIA Organic Certification Program is committed to environmentally sound and economically viable production of food and encourages the preservation of natural resources, the improvement of soil quality and health through organic and sustainable farming practices and to foster the production of healthy livestock and poultry production.

The GCIAOCP is based on the requirements of the December 21, 2000 Part IV, Department of Agriculture and Agricultural Marketing Service 7CFR Part 205 *NATIONAL ORGANIC PROGRAM; FINAL RULE*, also known in this publication as the NOP.

I. PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

The Executive Director of the Georgia Crop Improvement Association is responsible for the daily operations of the program, and for the purposes of this publication will be known as the Program Administrator.

The Georgia Crop Improvement Association's Organic Certification Program Committee will:

Review and approve any policy and fee changes before submission to the GCIA Board of Directors for action and when applicable forwarding to the NOP.

Hear appeals and make recommendations to the GCIA Executive Committee.

Review completed applications after the on-site organic inspection and be the final approving authority for certification. The committee may approve, deny, or place in pending, an application based on the NOP.

Review the investigation by the GCIA Program Administrator of complaints about abuses in the production and sale of GCIAOCP certified crops or products, determine penalties for abuse of standards or certification labels and negotiate satisfactory settlement of the complaint and reimbursement for the investigation cost.

Upon request of the GCIA President, the GCIAOCP committee will provide an assessment of the GCIA Program Administrator's management of the GCIAOCP.

The GCIAOCP Committee will be composed of:

GCIAOCP Program Administrator (ex officio)

GCIAOCP Program Administrator will appoint two or more committee members.

Georgia Department of Agriculture representative. (Appointed by Commissioner of Agriculture, renewed or new appointment every three years (ex officio).

GCIA Organic Certification Program Change Process (Initiated by a producer, handler, processor)

The GCIAOCP Administrator will be notified in writing by the producer, buyer, handler, etc. of any suggested process, policy or fee changes. The Administrator will contact the GCIAOCP committee. The person making the suggested change may present his change to the committee. The GCIAOCP committee will make suggestions to the GCIA Board of Directors.

Appeals

The GCIAOCP Administrator will be notified in writing by the producer, buyer, handler, etc. of any appeals of actions taken by the GCIAOCP staff, Committee or GCIA Board of Directors. The Administrator will have thirty days to contact the GCIAOCP committee and establish a date for the hearing. Within thirty days of notification there will be a meeting of the GCIAOCP Committee. The person making the appeal may present his appeal to the committee. The GCIAOCP committee will make suggestions to the GCIA Executive Committee within thirty days of the hearing.

The Georgia Crop Improvement Association executive committee will be the final approving authority for any appeals.

Inspectors

The Program Administrator employs inspectors. The inspectors must not have a conflict of interest with parties they are inspecting and they are bound to maintain confidentiality regarding information in the application and information obtained as part of the inspection process. Inspectors will follow IFOAM/IOIA International Organic Inspection Manual, section 2.0. **Inspectors may not act as consultants or endorse specific items or products.** Inspectors must have completed an Independent Organic Inspectors Association Basic Training Program.

The inspector and the GCIAOCP Administrator will sign the IOIA “Annual Organic Inspector Agreement” prior to each inspection.

Evaluations of Program, Inspectors, and Program Administrator

The Program Administrator will evaluate inspectors annually. The OCC/IOIA inspector evaluation form “Organic Inspector Evaluation Form” will be used.

The GCIAOCP will be evaluated for compliance with the NOP each year by the GCIAOCP Committee.

The Program Administrator will be evaluated each year by the GCIA Executive Committee. (See section, E.)

The GCIAOCP Administrator will submit an annual report to the National Organic Program Administrator as required in sections 205.510 of the NOP.

II. APPLICATION FOR CERTIFICATION AND INSPECTION

Any producer, handler, processor of Organic Product may apply for certification. Application is made by submitting a completed form with the appropriate fee. Certification is an annual process. Every certified farm, handler, or processor must annually renew certification by updating field/facility histories, affidavits, processing facility changes, etc. and have a new certification compliance inspection. The application due date is the anniversary of the original application.

Upon request, the GCIAOCP Administrator will provide:

The GCIAOCP Administration and Policy Manual including:

Introduction

Program Administration

Appeals Process

Inspector Requirements

Application Procedures

Fees

Non-Compliance, Warning and Pending Procedures

Liability Statement

Confidentiality Statement
Conflict of Interest Statement
GCIA OCP Application Flow Chart
Organic Questionnaire (The appropriate questionnaire; field, livestock, handling, etc.)
Sections 205.100 through Section 205.681

The applicant must provide a knowledgeable authorized representative of the operation to be present with the inspector to answer questions, sign appropriate papers, and be present at exit interview.

The organic plan will be reviewed by the OCP Administrator prior to inspection and auditing. The applicant will be notified within 30 days of an inspection schedule, problems with the original application, non-compliance, fee estimate, etc. The implementation and documentation of the plan will be one of the areas the inspector will be reviewing.

The GCIAOCP Administrator will provide the inspector with:

- The appropriate questionnaire
- Previous on site inspections
- The appropriate inspection report
- Copy of GCIAOCP Administration and Policy Manual

The GCIAOCP Inspector will use the appropriate IOIA form. Inspections will be completed and returned to GCIAOCP within 30 days of receiving application.

The Inspector will be notified of the GCIAOCP Committee's decision regarding certification of the production or handling operation site inspected by the inspector and of any requirements for the corrections of minor noncompliances.

The inspector may take samples of water, soil, plant tissue, plants, etc. for testing. A receipt will be given to the producer; the producer will not charge the OCP for the sample taken. The cost of testing will be paid by the applicant, and the applicant will receive a copy of the analysis.

Applicants withdrawing prior to issuance of a notice of non-compliance will not be issued a notice of non-compliance.

Applicants withdrawing prior to issuance of notice of certification denial will not be issued a notice of certification denial.

All inspections will be made when organic production, handling, processing activities best represent compliance or non-compliance with the standards and NOP.

Inspectors will conduct an "exit" interview with the applicant or authorized representative upon completion of the inspection process. The inspector will cover all potential problem areas noted on the inspection form.

The GCIAOCP administrator will convene the GCIAOCP Committee within 30 days of receiving the completed inspection report and will notify the applicant within 15 days of the advisory board's decision.

Upon review of the inspectors report, the GCIAOCP Committee will approve, deny, or place an application in pending. If placed in pending or if certification is denied the OCP administrator will have 15 days to notify the applicant. Section 205.405 of the NOP protocol will be followed. The administrator of the NOP will be notified simultaneously with the issuance of any notice of denial of certification issued pursuant to section 205.405 of the NOP notification of non-compliance, notification of non-compliance correction, notification of proposed suspension or revocation, and notification of suspension or revocation sent pursuant to section 205.662 of the NOP. If the applicant is granted certification, a certificate will be issued. The certificate will resemble the OCO/IOIA example and will comply with section 205.404 of the NOP.

The GCIAOCP will accept the certification decisions made by another certifying agent accredited or accepted by the USDA pursuant to section 205.500 of the NOP.

Participation in this program will not be denied to any person due to discrimination because of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status.

An application is considered a legal document. Signing of the application attests to the truthfulness of the historical information presented, the desire to carry out the organic farm plan, permission to inspect the applicants operation and records and to notify the inspector of any unusual hazards to his personal safety. Only complete applications will be accepted.

III. FEES

An estimate of fees charged will be provided to each applicant prior to inspection.

Mileage will be charged at the prevailing GCIA rate at time application is made.

Re-inspection will be \$50.00 per hour.

Certification transfer fee \$25.00.

The GCIAOCP reserves the right to audit sales records.

Field-Farm Organic Producer Inspection

Administration fee per application \$500

Farms in excess of 20 acres add \$5 per acre

Organic Processor/Handler, Livestock, Poultry Inspections

Administration fee	\$350
Plus Gross Annual Sales of Organic Product Fee	
<\$10,000/year	\$100
\$10,000-\$50,000/year	\$200
\$50,000-\$100,000/year	\$300
\$100,000-\$200,000/year	\$400
\$200,000-\$300,000/year	\$500
\$300,000>/year	***

*** 0.5% of gross organic sales minus cost of raw organic product. Maximum annual assessment of \$10,000; minimum annual assessment of \$600

Organic Greenhouse

Administration Fee	\$400
Plus Gross Annual Sales of Organic Product Fee	
<\$10,000/year	\$100
\$10,000-\$50,000/year	\$200
\$50,000-\$100,000/year	\$300
\$100,000-\$200,000/year	\$400
\$200,000-\$300,000/year	\$500
\$300,000>/year	***

*** 0.5% of gross organic sales; maximum annual assessment of \$10,000

Certification Fee Refund Policy: Certification fees are non-refundable except in the following instances:

Withdrawal of initial application prior to the producer, handler, processor on-site inspection. A processing fee of \$50 will be retained by GCIAOCP.

Refunds will be made within 60 days of final decision.

Interest of 1.5% per month will be charged on all past due accounts and certification will be suspended 60 days after failure to pay. The Georgia Department of Agriculture will be notified of suspension.

Late Fees: Applications for audits are due on the anniversary date of the original application. Those applications past the anniversary date will be charged at the following rate:

1 st week	\$25.00
2 nd week	\$50.00
3 rd week or later	\$75.00

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If application is made on time, but is incomplete, a ten-day grace period is provided from the day additional information for completion is requested. Late fee charges will be imposed on all incomplete applications after the ten-day grace period.

IV. NON-COMPLIANCE, WARNINGS, PENDING, AND INVESTIGATIONS

Non-Compliance with the GCIAOCP may result in the loss of certification.

The GCIAOCP Committee may, at its discretion, issue written warnings for minor infractions of the standards and administrative procedures. Warnings will be for a three-year period. If more than three warnings are in effect for a certified operation at a given time, the farm, handler, and processor will lose certification for one year. The Georgia Department of Agriculture and the administrator of the NOP will be notified of loss of certification.

If a producer, handler, processor cannot comply with a standard or condition set by the GCIAOCP Committee, the application may be placed in pending. The GCIAOCP Committee will determine the pending period.

The GCIAOCP Administrator may investigate complaints of noncompliance with the Act or regulation of this part concerning production and handling operations certified as organic. The GCIAOCP Administrator will notify the NOP Manager, the GCIAOCP Committee, and the Georgia State Department of Agriculture of all compliance proceedings and actions taken.

The Georgia State Department of Agriculture, as the State of Georgia's Organic Program governing body, may investigate complaints of non compliance with the Act or regulations. Fraud will result in immediate termination of certification.

The Georgia Department of Agriculture and the administrator of the NOP will be notified of any fraud and the loss of certification.

The GCIAOCP Committee will review the investigation by the GCIA Program Administrator of complaints about abuses in the production and sale of GCIAOCP certified crops or products, determine penalties for abuse of standards or certification labels and negotiate satisfactory settlement of the complaint and reimbursement for the investigation cost.

V. INSPECTION AND TESTING, REPORTING, AND EXCLUSION FROM SALE

All agricultural products that are to be sold, labeled, or represented as "100 percent organic," "organic," or "made with organic (specified ingredients or food group(s))" must be made accessible by certified organic production or handling operations for examination by the GCIAOCP S Administrator, the Agricultural Marketing Service Administrator and the state of Georgia's Organic Program official.

One or all of the above may require preharvest or postharvest testing of any agricultural input used or agricultural products to be sold, labeled, or represented as "100 percent organic", "organic", or "made with organic (specified ingredients or food group(s))" when there is reason to believe that the agricultural input or product has come in contact with a prohibited substance or has been produced using excluded methods. Such tests must be conducted by the applicable State organic program's governing State official or the certifying agent at the official's or certifying agent's own expense.

Preharvest or postharvest tissue sample collection must be performed by an inspector representing the Agricultural Marketing Service Administrator, applicable State organic program governing State officials, or the GCIAOCP Administrator. Sample integrity must be maintained throughout the chain of custody, and residue testing must be performed in an accredited laboratory. Chemical analysis must be made in accordance with the methods described in the most recent edition of the Official Method of Analysis of the AOAC

International or other current applicable validated methodology determining the presence of contaminants in agricultural products.

The results of all analyses and tests performed must be promptly provided to the Agricultural Marketing service Administrator; Except, That, where a State organic program exists, all test results and analyses shall be provided to the State organic program's governing State official by the applicable certifying party that requested testing; and will be available for public access, unless the testing is part of an ongoing compliance investigation.

If test results indicate a specific agricultural product contains pesticide residues or environmental contaminants that exceed the Food and Drug Administration's or the Environmental Protection agency's regulatory tolerances, the certifying agent must promptly report such data to the Federal health agency whose regulatory tolerance or action level has been exceeded.

When residue testing detects prohibited substances at levels that are greater than 5 percent of the Environmental Protection Agency's tolerance for the specific residue detected or unavoidable residual environmental contamination, the agricultural product must not be sold, labeled, or represented as organically produced. The Agricultural marketing Administrator, the applicable State organic program's State official, or the GCIAOCP Administrator may conduct an investigation of the certified operation to determine the cause of the prohibited substance.

When a prohibited substance is applied to a certified operation due to a Federal or State emergency pest or disease treatment program and the certified operation meets the requirements for certification, the certification status of the operation shall not be affected as a result of the prohibited substance: Provided, that:

- (a) Any harvested crop or plant part to be harvested that has contact with a prohibited substance applied as the result of a Federal or State emergency pest or disease treatment program cannot be sold, labeled, or represented as organically produced; and
- (b) Any livestock that are treated with a prohibited substance applied as the result of a Federal or State emergency pest or disease treatment program or product derived from such treated livestock cannot be sold, labeled, or represented as organically produced; Except, That:
 - (1) Milk or milk products may be sold, labeled, or represented as organically produced beginning 12 months following the 1st date that the dairy animal was treated with the prohibited substance; and
 - (2) The offspring of gestating mammalian breeder stock treated with a prohibited substance may be considered organic: Provided, That, the breeder stock was not in the last third of gestation on the date that the breeder stock was treated with the prohibited substance.

VI. LIABILITY

No GCIAOCP staff member, inspector, board of directors, advisory committee member, GCIA officer, may be held liable or responsible for any amount in excess of the administrative fees paid. Any monetary claim arising out of or relating to the administration of the program will be settled by arbitration. The GCIA Executive Committee will chose a representative, the person making the claim will chose a representative, and the two representatives will choose a third party for arbitration. The decision will be final. Signing of the Organic Application by the producer, handler, and/or processor is agreement with the above.

The GCIAOCP will hold the Secretary of Agriculture harmless of any failure on the part of the certifying agent to carry out provisions of the NOP act.

VII. CONFIDENTIALITY

All employees, contractors, and organic program committee members must adhere to the principals of confidentiality. Information submitted by applicants for certification will not be released to the public, including production practices, ingredients, customer list, complaint log, etc. without written permission of the applicant. However, the following may be released:

- A. The name, address and telephone number of the applicant.
- B. To confirm whether or not the applicants operation was certified on a specific date.
- C. Any information to comply with a court order.
- D. Any information to comply with a request from the Georgia Department of Agriculture investigating an alleged complaint.
- E. Any information to comply with a request from the USDA.
- F. Information will be shared with other certifying agencies upon request and completion of the OCC/IOIA "Document Exchange Request Form".

VII. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Conflict of interest is defined as having an economic interest with a farm or processor under review for certification one year prior to, during or one year after work or employment was concluded. Staff, contractors and organic committee members with a conflict of interest must make the conflict known and not participate in discussion or decisions regarding the farm or processor under review.

Staff, contractors and organic committee members must sign a conflict of interest statement annually.

Should a conflict of interest be found, corrective action outlined in section 205.501, (12) (i) of the NOP will be followed.