



How to File a Complaint about Violations of the Organic Standards



The USDA organic regulations describe the standards that farmers and processors must meet to produce, process and market organic agricultural products. These standards include restrictions about the use of certain practices and substances during production and handling, as well as recordkeeping and labeling requirements. Ensuring compliance with these regulations preserves the integrity of the USDA organic label. More information on the USDA Organic Standards is available at <http://1.usa.gov/1H MhBUg>.

To assure consumers that organic products meet consistent standards and to create a level playing field for certified organic producers and processors, the NOP investigates complaints alleging violation of the USDA organic regulations and carries out enforcement actions.

How Does the Complaint Process Work?

After the National Organic Program (NOP) receives a complaint, it reviews the complaint and any evidence provided to determine if investigation is warranted. If this initial review finds there is sufficient evidence that the USDA organic regulations have been violated, the NOP opens an investigation.

The NOP Compliance and Enforcement Division investigates alleged violations by uncertified operations. The NOP typically requests certifiers to investigate alleged violations of certified operations and to report findings back to the NOP. Similarly, the NOP refers complaints concerning operations in California to the California State Organic Program and complaints concerning operations in countries that have agreements with the NOP to those countries' organic governing bodies.

Operations that knowingly violate the USDA organic regulations can face penalties of up to \$11,000 per violation. Certified operations that violate the USDA organic regulations may receive Notices of Noncompliance or proposals to suspend or revoke their organic certification.

What Are Some Examples of Violations?

- Use of organic claims or the USDA organic seal by uncertified operations on product labeling and in market information, such as webpages
- Presence of prohibited pesticides or other prohibited substances in agricultural products sold, labeled or represented as organic
- Use of uncertified co-packers or other handlers in the processing of agricultural products to be sold, labeled or represented as organic
- Use of fraudulent organic certificates to market or sell agricultural products

How Do I File a Complaint?

If you suspect that an operation is violating USDA Organic Standards, you may file a complaint in the following ways:

Email: NOPCompliance@ams.usda.gov (preferred)
Phone: 202-720-3252
Fax: 202-205-7808
Mail: USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
 NOP Compliance and Enforcement Branch
 1400 Independence Avenue SW
 Room 2648-S; Stop 0268
 Washington, DC 20250-0268

When filing a complaint, please provide as much information as possible about the product or operation. Useful information includes:

- Brand name
- Manufacturer or distributor
- Certifying agent, if applicable
- Product lot numbers or other identifying information
- Explanation of the alleged violation
- Actual product package or copy of the product label

If you are willing to discuss the issue further or wish to be notified when the case is closed, please include your name and contact information with your complaint.