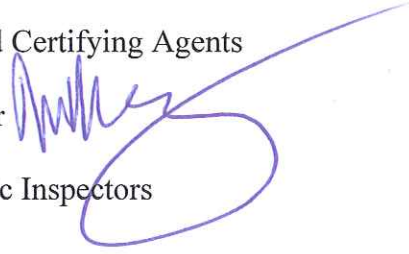


APR 27 2012

To: National Organic Program Accredited Certifying Agents
From: Miles McEvoy, Deputy Administrator 
Re: Criteria and Qualifications for Organic Inspectors

Organic inspectors play a vital role in ensuring organic integrity. Their visits to organic farms and processing facilities are often the most direct contact that certifying agents have with their clients, and they bring back the on-the-ground observations that form the foundation for certification.

Given the importance of these inspectors, the National Organic Program (NOP) is issuing this memo to remind certifying agents of the importance of a rigorous hiring and selection process when recruiting these specialists as members of your team. Regardless of whether the inspector is a full-time employee, or an independent contractor, Section 205.501(a)(1) of the NOP regulations states that certifying agents and their staff must, "have sufficient expertise in organic production or handling techniques to fully comply with and implement the terms and conditions of the organic certification program under the Act and the regulations . . ."

Assessing a candidate for the appropriate level of expertise takes time and care. We encourage certifiers to request and then contact the candidate inspector's previous employers and clients, professional references, and other sources that can provide honest feedback about the candidate's credentials and past experience. Remember, your inspectors are often the face of your organization, and by extension, the NOP. As such, the thorough vetting of any candidate inspector is a vital step in ensuring the integrity of the program overall.

Later this year, the NOP plans to release draft guidance describing the qualifications needed by inspectors and reviewers to fully comply with and implement the terms and conditions of the organic certification program to the organic standards. Once the guidance is finalized, these qualification criteria will assist certifiers in affirming that inspectors and reviewers have sufficient expertise to effectively certify operations to the NOP regulations. Careful assessment during the hiring and recruiting process are vital first steps that all certifiers should have in place as standard practice.