



CCOF

Organic Certification

Education & Outreach

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What to Know About the Strengthening Organic Enforcement Rule

Version Date 8.28.23

Are you familiar with the [Strengthening Organic Enforcement \(SOE\) Rule](#)? This rule took effect on March 20, 2023 and includes the most significant changes to the organic regulations since the creation of the USDA National Organic Program (NOP), the federal branch of the government responsible for maintaining organic standards. The SOE regulations strengthen organic oversight and consumer trust in certified organic products by tightening gaps in the organic supply chain. All operations handling organic products will need to become familiar with this rule.

Operations impacted by the rule have until March 19, 2024, to fully comply.

Key SOE Take-Aways

- Any operation that buys, sells, or facilitates the sale of organic goods that are unpackaged or are in nonretail packaging must be certified organic.
- Any operation that buys, sells, or facilitates the sale of organic retail labeled goods that are not sealed and tamper-evident must be certified organic.
- Only operations that buy, sell, trade, or facilitate the sale of retail labeled products in sealed, tamper-evident packaging or containers are not required to be certified organic. Documentation for these sales must connect back to the last certified operation.

Tamper-evident means that the contents are sealed in a manner where an attempt to break the seal, access the contents, or reclose the package would be obvious.

- Operations that store organic products that are not in sealed and tamper-evident packaging must become certified organic.
- Private label brand owners must be certified organic if purchasing ingredients for their co-packers, or if selling nonretail products, or if selling products that are not in sealed, tamper-evident final retail packaging.
- All operations exporting or importing organic products into the United States must be certified organic. This is true regardless of product packaging.
- All organic product imported into the United States must be associated with a valid NOP Import Certificate, regardless of the country of origin. (Previously, Import Certificates were only required from countries that have equivalence arrangements with the United States.)
- Transporters and transloaders are not required to become certified organic.
- Retail establishments such as grocery stores and restaurants are not required to become certified organic.
- Businesses that process organic products and have only virtual sales do not qualify as a retail establishment and will require organic handler certification.





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Benefits of Organic Certification

- Your business will be able to handle organic products without worrying about packaging types! Getting certified is easier and cheaper than changing packaging types to maintain exempt status.
- With a certificate in your company name, you will not need to reveal your sources or contract manufacturer to your buyers.
- You will minimize paperwork with each organic transaction by providing the certificate in your company name.
- You will have full confidence you are complying with the SOE regulations and can continue handling organic products after the March 19, 2024 implementation deadline.
- Considering the nuances of the rule and risk to organic products, certified operations will likely be preferred over competitors, regardless of exempt status.
- Lastly, closing gaps in the organic supply chain strengthens consumer confidence in organic products and supports future growth of the organic sector.

CCOF has worked with all these types of operations for many years. From our years of experience supporting operations like yours, we have developed specialized forms and review procedures. This allows us to maximize efficiency while also upholding the highest standard of organic certification service. Access your certification documents and compliance details anytime through our MyCCOF online portal. You can count on CCOF's support during your operation's adjustment to the SOE regulations.

If you have questions about the new requirements and how they apply to you, contact the CCOF applicant support team at getcertified@ccof.org or (831) 423-2263, extension 1. You can also visit our [YouTube channel](#) to watch our detailed series about SOE.

Act quickly – achieving organic certification takes on average twelve weeks, and certifiers may get overwhelmed by applications as we approach the March 19, 2024 deadline. [Start working on your CCOF application](#) and contact us to learn more about our discounts for qualifying operations. Learn more about CCOF at www.ccof.org.

Next Steps



Non-exempt operations must get certified by March 19, 2024



Act Now!
Organic certification process can take 12+ weeks



CCOF Certification Discounts
Earlier application = higher discount



Contact us
getcertified@ccof.org
(831) 423-2263
Extension 1

