



# ALBERT LEA SEED

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## **ORGANIC FARMING: Questions, Answers, Resources**

**Organic agriculture** has been one of the fastest growing segments of the agriculture industry for a number of years. The purpose of this brochure is to provide basic answers to questions you may have about organic farming practices and to provide resources where you can find additional information. Most of this information was obtained from the *Minnesota Guide to Organic Certification* by the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA), but it also applies to organic agriculture in other states. You can read the entire report at: <http://www.misa.umn.edu/vd/organic.pdf>

### **What is organic agriculture?**

The USDA – National Organic Program (NOP) defines organic agriculture as “a production system that is managed to respond to site-specific conditions by integrating cultural, biological and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity.” The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture says, organic agriculture “generally refers to a farm production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity to promote healthy crops without the use of synthetic chemicals (meaning synthetic pesticides - herbicides, insecticides, etc. - and synthetic fertilizers).” In short, organic agriculture is a system of farm and processing practices, not simply the resulting plant and animal products.

### **Why change to organic agriculture?**

Organic production is not for everyone, but there are many reasons to consider changing to organic production. They include: premium prices for organic products, improved soil and water quality associated with diversified cropping systems, reduced use of synthetic chemical inputs, reduced handling of potentially hazardous agricultural chemicals, and potential increased profits through reduced use of off-farm (purchased) inputs.

### **What do you have to do to become organic?**

Producers and processors who sell over \$5,000 per year of organic products must be certified by an accredited certification agency in order to sell their products as “organic.” Certification is a process of review and approval of a production system by an organic certification agency, after which a producer is able to call his or her product “organic” or “certified organic.” There is a transitional period of three years during which no forbidden chemicals or fertilizers can be

applied. Genetically modified organisms are also prohibited along with numerous other products. A certification agency can provide a complete list of prohibited materials.

### **How do you find a certification agency?**

Producers and handlers may contract with any USDA-accredited certifier, no matter where its office is located.

- For Minnesota producers, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture has a list of certifiers active in Minnesota along with their contact information at this website:  
[www.mda.state.mn.us/news/publications/food/organicgrowing/usdaaccredited.pdf](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/news/publications/food/organicgrowing/usdaaccredited.pdf)
- For Iowa producers, the Iowa Department of Agriculture is accredited by the USDA's National Organic Program (NOP) to certify all aspects of the organic food chain.  
<http://www.iowaagriculture.gov/AgDiversification/organicCertification.asp>  
Other certifying agencies in Iowa can be found at the following website:  
<http://extension.agron.iastate.edu/organicag/certagencies.html>

Cost of certification varies between agencies and with the size of your operation so be sure to shop around to find the best certifier for your circumstances.

### **Where can I find more help or support?**

A good place to start is your local county extension office. They should be able to answer many of your questions or point you toward someone who can. Additionally, listed below are several government agencies, universities, and private groups and that have websites where you can find current information.

#### **University Information Websites:**

- **Iowa State University - Organic Agriculture Program:**  
ISU operates an Organic Agriculture Program to provide research information and extension presentations for Iowa citizens. Field Days, workshops and classes on organics are held throughout the year.  
Contact: Dr. Kathleen Delate, Associate Professor  
Dept. of Horticulture & Agronomy  
106 Horticulture Hall  
Ames, Iowa 50011-1100  
Telephone: 515-294-7069 Fax: 515-294-0730  
Email: [kdelate@iastate.edu](mailto:kdelate@iastate.edu)  
<http://extension.agron.iastate.edu/organicag/>
- **University of Minnesota - Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA)**  
Mailing address: 411 Borlaug Hall  
1991 Buford Circle  
St. Paul, MN 55108-1013  
Telephone: (800) 909- 6472 Fax: (612) 625-1268  
Email: [misamail@umn.edu](mailto:misamail@umn.edu)  
<http://www.misa.umn.edu/home.html>

- **U of MN Southwest Research and Outreach Center (SWROC)**  
Mailing address: 23669 130th Street  
Lamberton, MN 56152  
Telephone: (507) 752-7372 Fax:(507) 752-5097 FAX  
<http://swroc.cfans.umn.edu/>  
<http://organicecology.umn.edu/>
- **Michigan State University Organic Farm Exchange**  
<http://michiganorganic.msu.edu/>

#### State and Federal Government Information Websites:

- **USDA National Organic Program (NOP)**  
<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/NOP>
- **USDA Organic Production**  
[http://afsic.nal.usda.gov/nal\\_display/index.php?info\\_center=2&tax\\_level=1&tax\\_subject=296](http://afsic.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=2&tax_level=1&tax_subject=296)
- **USDA Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (AFSIC)**  
[http://afsic.nal.usda.gov/nal\\_display/index.php?tax\\_level=1&info\\_center=2](http://afsic.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?tax_level=1&info_center=2)
- **Minnesota Department of Agriculture**  
[www.mda.state.mn.us/food/organic\\_](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/food/organic_)
- **Iowa Department of Agriculture**  
<http://www.iowaagriculture.gov/AgDiversification/organicCertification.asp>
- **Organic Farming Resources for Wisconsin**  
<http://www.organic.wisc.edu/>
- **North Dakota Organic Farming**  
<http://www.ndorganics.nd.gov/>

#### Certifying Agencies (inclusion on this list does not imply an endorsement by Albert Lea Seed):

- **Minnesota Crop Improvement Association**  
[www.mncia.org](http://www.mncia.org)
- **Midwest Organic Services Association, Inc. (MOSA)**  
[www.mosaorganic.org](http://www.mosaorganic.org)
- **Organic Crop Improvement Association – MN Chapter (OCIA)**  
[www.mnocia.org](http://www.mnocia.org)
- **OneCert**  
[www.onecert.net/default.htm](http://www.onecert.net/default.htm)

#### Other Useful Information

- **University of Minnesota – Organic Ecology**  
<http://organicecology.umn.edu/>
- **Minnesota Organic Network**  
[http://organicecology.umn.edu/?page\\_id=51](http://organicecology.umn.edu/?page_id=51)
- **The Minnesota Organic Farmers' Information Exchange (MOFIE)**  
<http://mofie.cfans.umn.edu/>

- **Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service (MOSES)**  
[www.mosesorganic.org/](http://www.mosesorganic.org/)
- **National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (ATTRA)**  
<http://attra.ncat.org/>
- **The Organic Agriculture Information website**  
[www.organicaginfo.org](http://www.organicaginfo.org)
- **Organic Trade Association (OTA)**  
[www.ota.com/organic.html](http://www.ota.com/organic.html)
  
- **Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture**  
<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/index.htm>
- **The Rodale Institute**  
<http://www.rodaleinstitute.org/>
- **How To Go Organic**  
[howtogoorganic.com](http://howtogoorganic.com)
- **The Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI)**  
[www.omri.org](http://www.omri.org)
- **eOrganic**  
<http://eorganic.info/>
- **Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society**  
<http://www.npsas.org/>
- **Practical Farmers of Iowa**  
<http://www.practicalfarmers.org/>