

## Tips and Requirements for Organic Research at OSU's Wooster Campus

Welcome to organic research at OSU's Wooster Campus. Our organic fields and greenhouses must meet rigorous requirements. To be eligible for certification, each field or greenhouse must be managed using organic practices outlined by the National Organic Program (NOP) and must avoid all prohibited inputs for a period of at least three years. All the fields go through an annual certification process, including a visual inspection by our certifying agency. The information below should be useful as you conduct your organic research while helping to ensure that the requirements necessary to maintain organic certification are met.

Certification ensures an audit trail which allows any item marketed as organic to be traced back to the field from which it originated. That means that everything pertaining to the organic crop must be documented and tracked, from preparation of the field to planting to harvest and finally transporting the crop to market.

### **What is required?**

It is the responsibility of the researcher, their technician, grad student, and/or the farm manager to:

1. Ensure only certified organic seed is used
2. Ensure only OMRI and/or OEFFA approved inputs are used and that any restrictions for use are met and documented
3. Provide labels and receipts for all seeds and inputs to the OFFER program assistant
4. Provide documentation forms as necessary (seed search, non-GMO, equipment cleanout, etc.) to the OFFER program assistant
5. Provide details of all inputs used (planting and/or application dates, rates, etc.)
6. Provide harvest dates and quantities
7. Provide plot maps
8. Provide documentation that all equipment used in certified organic fields was properly cleaned before use, including date and cleaning method, unless dedicated to organic production
9. If in doubt, always ask

### **Who is Involved:**

**Organic Food and Farming Education and Research Program (OFFER)** is an OSU Wooster Campus program whose mission is to: *"provide outstanding research and educational support for sustainable production, processing and marketing of organic foods from the field to the table for farmers, gardeners, processors, retailers, and consumers."* The OFFER program team consists of OSU researchers, Extension, Ohio farmers and other stakeholders with a common goal of enhancing organic agriculture in Ohio.

**Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA)** is one of the organizations that provide organic certification in Ohio and is the certifier OFFER has worked with since the program began. Every spring, a detailed application, or Organic System Plan (OSP), is submitted to OEFFA, describing our operation, including field histories and plans for the current growing season.

### **The Certification Process:**

The OSP requires a list of every crop planted in certified or transitional fields, the variety and source of the seed or transplant, and the field number(s) and acreage devoted to that crop. **All seeds or transplants used must be certified organic** unless the specific variety required for research is not available as organic seed. In that case, untreated seed is allowed, but an affidavit or documentation from the supplier that the seed is untreated and non-GMO is required. In addition, a special Seed Search form is required to document that at least three attempts were made to obtain certified organic seed. The seed label (actual label, photocopy or photo) and receipt, as well as the untreated and non-GMO affidavit and seed search documentation if untreated seed was used, should be sent or provided to the OFFER program assistant to be maintained and have available for the annual inspection.

All inputs used on certified organic fields, greenhouses and crops must be listed on the OMRI or OEFFA approved products lists and must be listed on the OSP. These lists change periodically, so be sure to check every year. Inputs include seed treatments, fertility, pest and weed management, row covers, tomato stakes – anything used in the field. Note that some inputs have restrictions on use and documentation is required on how the restriction is met. This includes the use of manure which has a restriction of 90 or 120 days between application and harvest for human consumption. The required label (actual label, photocopy or photo) and the receipt for purchase should be sent or provided to the OFFER program assistant. If you have any questions on whether a product is allowed, ask either the OFFER program assistant or contact the OEFFA certification office.

Maps of every farm as well as detailed histories of each field are maintained by the OFFER program assistant. Each researcher and/or farm manager is responsible for providing detailed plot maps and a record of the current year's field activities. The crop grown, and the name and date of application of all inputs (fertility, pest and weed management practices), and harvest data need to be included, but not tillage, mowing, etc. This information and a plot map can be input into the Field Manager program or provided to the OFFER program assistant.

All equipment used in an organic field must be either dedicated to organic production, or properly cleaned before use. The cleaning should be documented and provided to the OFFER program assistant.

### **The Inspection Process:**

An on-site visual inspection is required each year during the growing season. During the inspection, the inspector meets first with the director of agricultural operations, program assistant and farm manager for a thorough review of all records. This is followed by a tour of the farms and inspection of each field.

After the inspection, if our program complies with all organic standards, an Organic Certificate is issued. If there are areas of concern, we may receive a notice of non-compliance with specific steps needed before the Organic Certificate can be issued. Only crops included on the organic certificate can be marketed or sold as organic.

**If a prohibited substance is used, even if by mistake, the field in question will lose certification.** The current crop will not be certified organic and the field will have to go through a three year transition process. During this time it must be managed organically, but the crops cannot be marketed as organic.