

# Introduction: Tips for Successful Recordkeeping

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In considering whether organic certification is right for your farm, recordkeeping requirements are often one of the major obstacles for farmers who are already strapped for time. Many of those that actually seek certification, however, can testify to the positive results of consistent documentation of farm inputs, field activities, pest problems, harvest yields, market sales and other pertinent information. Each growing season brings new challenges and is riddled with unpredictable issues. With an extensive history of past decisions and their results, a farmer is better equipped to avoid unnecessary risks and repeated failures in the field and in the marketplace. Your records are an important tool that can help you understand what parts of your operation are the most profitable.

At the peak of the growing season when every minute of daylight is precious, it can be overwhelming to keep up with the office work and recordkeeping that comes with running a farming business. For this reason, it is essential to spend some time during the slower part of the year developing a recordkeeping plan so that the necessary tools are in place to streamline your efforts.

## Good to Know

Here are a few helpful tips drawn from organic farmers, inspectors and certifying agents:

1. **Write down what you do each day on the farm.**

Block off 5-10 minutes each evening to recount the specific tasks you and your staff accomplished - either in a journal, planner or large desk calendar. You don't have to make long or excessively detailed entries; just enough so that you can look back and understand your observations and tasks.

Some things you should consider noting:

- field preparations,
- planting,
- cultivating,
- irrigating,
- pest/weed scouting and damage,
- pesticide application,
- harvesting,
- equipment/vehicle cleaning,
- weather conditions and
- rainfall.

This is easy to do when the day is fresh in your mind. Putting it off for several days or weeks means that you will inevitably forget many important details.

**2. Develop recordkeeping sheets that are specific to your farm.**

In addition or in place of a journal of your daily general notes, some find it useful to have separate Excel spreadsheets (or printed sheets) with various recordkeeping objectives. Many good templates already exist and can be tweaked to make them even more relevant to your farm's systems.

If you prefer printed copies, place these sheets on clipboards in protected areas around the farm where you need them the most. Hang one by your produce scale to record yields as well as quantities of products that go to and return from market. If you make your own compost, keep one with your pile thermometer. Write in pencil in case of water damage.

**3. Compile your daily notes and sheets into a master file regularly.**

Your master file can be organized in many ways, for example: by field; crop or growing season. I find it most helpful to keep all information for a given field together. Having soil test results, application of inputs, crop maps and yields, and locally problematic pest and weed information all in one place can be useful in making management decision for the coming season.

**4. Save all invoices, product labels, seed packets and other farm-related documents.**

Dedicate a file folder to each of these categories to have on hand for your annual inspection and for your reference. Get in the habit of putting these items away each time you finish using them - before they get consumed by your desk.

## From the NOP

The following is an excerpt from the NOP Final Rule regarding recordkeeping requirements:

**§ 205.103 Recordkeeping by certified operations.**

(a) A certified operation must maintain records concerning the production, harvesting, and handling of agricultural products that are or that are intended to be sold, labeled, or represented as "100 percent organic," "organic," or "made with organic (specified ingredients or food group(s))."

(b) Such records must:

(1) Be adapted to the particular business that the certified operation is conducting;

(2) Fully disclose all activities and transactions of the certified operation in sufficient detail as to be readily understood and audited;

(3) Be maintained for not less than 5 years beyond their creation; and

(4) Be sufficient to demonstrate compliance with the Act and the regulations in this part.

(c) The certified operation must make such records available for inspection and copying during normal business hours by authorized representatives of the Secretary, the applicable State program's governing State official, and the certifying agent.