



Briefing on Organic Certification Services in New Hampshire

November 17, 2023

Background

The New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets and Food (NHDAMF) alerted the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Hampshire (NOFA-NH) of their concerns with their ability to continue serving New Hampshire's organic farming community as an Accredited Certifying Agent (ACA) for the USDA's National Organic Program. The organizations have been collaborating to bring this issue to the organic community, with the goal of working together to develop solutions and ensure continued, uninterrupted certification services for New Hampshire's organic farmers. A [joint statement](#) outlining some possible scenarios for the future of certification in the state was distributed on August 23rd. They are:

1. NHDAMF continues to serve New Hampshire farmers as an ACA via increased legislative and state funding support, increased certification fees, and restructuring of the Division of Regulatory Services (DRS).
2. NHDAMF discontinues certification and collaborates with NOFA-NH and the NOP to assist farmers with transfer to another ACA.
3. NHDAMF discontinues certification and NOFA-NH assists a regionally-based ACA to certify New Hampshire organic farmers by opening a satellite office in New Hampshire.

A joint survey was distributed to better understand producers' preferences on the above options. Survey results and stakeholder meetings consistently revealed that farmers want NHDAMF to continue serving as an ACA. (Survey results are further detailed below.)

Additionally, NOFA-NH hosted three farmer listening sessions on the future of organic certification in New Hampshire: one with NHDAMF on August 31st, another on September 11th, and a third on November 5th. In these sessions, attendees heard from representatives of NHDAMF, NOFA-NH, and state legislators. Farmers provided feedback, raised questions, and connected with one another on their preferences and prospective paths for organic certification in the state. NOFA-NH is continuing to advocate for the organic farming community and to provide organizational support for stakeholders.

Farmers have continued to organize to keep organic certification services at the state. [An open petition](#) they created has over 1,025 individual signatures.

The USDA requires accreditation of Crops, Wild Crops, Livestock, and Handling/Processing scopes. Currently, NHDAMF is accredited by the USDA for Crops only.

Update from NHDAMF

The New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets and Food (NHDAMF) is committed to running its Organic Certification Program in 2024 as long as it has the staffing to do so. The Department is also committed to keeping organic certification fees as is for fiscal year 2024, with no fee increases.

The Department is drafting a new organic certification fee structure for fiscal year 2025. As of November 13, 2023, the projected fees for FY 2025 will range from \$2,900 to \$4,900 per certified operation, depending on acreage/greenhouse square footage. Fee projections are based on the proposed House Bill 24-2106, outlined below. If legislative funding is approved to support organic certification at NHDAMF during the 2024 legislative session, certification fees could be reduced by half in 2025. (Please see the Legislative Update below for details.) There are currently 66 farm operations certified through NHDAMF. To maintain program viability, it is critical for most farms to continue certifying through the Department.

Commissioner Jasper discussed the NHDAMF Organic Certification Program with the NH Agricultural Advisory Board at a [meeting on September 7th](#). Board members in attendance voted that the Program should be self-sustaining, which would set organic certification fees as described above. As of this writing, the minutes linked above, provided by the Commissioner, are a draft to be approved by the Agricultural Advisory Board at their next meeting.

Legislative Update

Legislators have introduced bills to keep organic certification services at NHDAMF.

Representative Peter Bixby introduced a bill to continue organic certification services at NHDAMF ([24-2106 HB Title: relative to making an appropriation to the organic certification program](#)). If passed, the bill would create one full time and one part time position in the department dedicated to organic certification. The bill also requests a one-year appropriation (from June 2024 – June 2025) of \$220,326 to fund the two NHDAMF staff positions, a vehicle, and computers to conduct organic inspections. In subsequent years, the Commissioner would request funding for the positions in the state budget. It's anticipated that half the cost would need to come from increased organic certification fees (outlined above).

Representative Dan Wolf has introduced a bill that would mandate organic certification at NHDAMF ([24-2473 HB Title: mandating a cooperative agreement with USDA for "organic" certification](#)). If passed, the bill would amend the word “may” in the existing statute governing organic certification in New Hampshire to “shall” in two instances. The change would require an organic certification program to be maintained at NHDAMF.

Farmer Stakeholder Survey Results

At the Farmer Listening Session on September 11th, 91% of attendees chose NHDAMF continuing certification as their top choice for certification services. This poll was in line with the NOFA-NH and NHDAMF joint survey results. The survey was open from August 31 - October 31, 2023 to gather stakeholder feedback.

- 53 farmers, gardeners and consumers took the survey.
- 32 respondents identified as certified organic farmers. 29 are certified by NHDAMF.

- 73% of all respondents and 83% of certified organic farmers want NHDAMF to continue certification, even if it requires increased state funding and increased farmer fees.
- Of the certified organic farmers:
 - 26 listed NHDAMF continuing certification as their first choice for certification.
 - 27 listed a NOFA-NH satellite office as their second choice for certification.
 - 27 listed transferring to a new ACA as their last choice for certification
- 19% of organic farmer respondents said they would be willing to pay \$1,000 - \$1,999 in organic certification fees.
- 81% were willing to pay varying amounts between \$0 - \$999 in organic certification fees.

Respondents see the following as critical needs for development of the organic sector in NH:

1. Adequate labor
2. Market demand/eater support
3. Development of food hubs/marketing collaboratives
4. Access to processing

NOFA-NH Organic Certification Satellite Office

NOFA-NH is exploring the establishment of a satellite organic certification office with an existing regional Accredited Certifying Agent (ACA) at its office in Concord, New Hampshire. The satellite office would enable New Hampshire organic farmers to be certified under all 4 organic certification scopes: Crops, Wild Crops (e.g., Maple Syrup), Livestock, and Handling/Processing. Currently, NHDAMF is only accredited for the Crops scope. If an operator needs certification for additional scopes, they need to apply to another ACA. Satellite office staff would disseminate organic certification information, answer certification questions, and provide initial review of producers' Organic System Plans.

Contact Us

Please contact NOFA-NH with any questions about this briefing at email address info@nofanh.org and phone number 603-224-5022. Visit www.nofanh.org/organiccertification for additional information.