

## Certification Committee Policies and Procedures Handbook

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## **1. Certification Committee Members**

The Certification Committee is the primary decision-making body in certification matters. It is empowered by the NOAA board of directors to oversee the certification program administration and policy development. There is no maximum term of service. The CC members are granted a \$100 service credit yearly.

The Certification Committee is composed of 4-6 people who are members of NOAA and are committed to the certification process and are familiar with the CAN/CGSB 32.310 and 32.311 standards. A member of the committee must agree to act as liaison to the new committee when the membership rollover exceeds six people. The chairperson is elected by the committee and should have at least one year's experience on the committee. The chair may accompany the Verification Officer during farm visits. Members must declare conflict or possible conflict of interest with their function as arbiter of CAN/CGSB 32.310 and 32.311 standards. The committee would then decide whether the member must step aside.

The committee agrees to keep confidential all information reviewed in files and discussion outside of meetings and amongst other farmers is considered in violation of confidentiality. An oath of confidentiality must be signed prior to service. Further, all information that is especially sensitive in nature is to be kept in a sealed envelope under lock.

## **2. Certification Committee Co-ordinator**

This is a contract position supported through application fees. The main function of this position is to facilitate the activities of the committee. The position includes receipt and review of applications prior to the committee meetings; issuing letters to applicants outlining committee considerations and recommendations; contracting verification officers and liaison between the committee and V.O.

## **3. Certification Committee Responsibilities**

The committee provides an impartial peer group review of applications for organic status within the NOAA certification program. The purpose of the committee is to interpret and apply the standards as written. Recommendations for changes to the standards can be forwarded to the federal Standards Interpretation Committee for review and presentation to the membership.

The committee: a) reviews all applications for the certification process; b) determines any tests and audits necessary to determine compliance with the NOAA standards; c) assigns certification status to applicants; and d) reviews materials for compliance. Amendments for the production standards, deadlines for applications and materials and other documents may be proposed to the membership.

The certification committee needs a quorum consisting of half of the committee. All decisions must be justified by the CAN/CGSB 32.310 and 32.311 standards and be well informed, clearly documented and kept on file for member review.

COABC has the right to periodically review any documents kept by NOOA. A log will be kept with all dates and details of any non-compliance of standards, accreditation, labeling or signage. This log will be submitted yearly to the COABC in the first quarter of the accreditation process.

It is the responsibility of the Certification Committee members to be up to date on all organic regulations, standards, PSL, SIC judgements, NOOA policies and other relevant material. All such materials should be brought to each meeting for consultation by the CC.

#### **4. Meetings**

There shall be up to four regular meetings throughout the season to evaluate and discuss applications and issues of the membership of NOOA. Additional meetings may be required for additional applications or appeals and special issues. The committee shall agree on meeting times and schedules. The meeting can consist of members attending remotely via internet. The agenda shall be finalized by the committee chair and distributed to the committee one week in advance of the meeting.

Comprehensive minutes are an important part of the growth of the certification process. A record of discussion issues and decisions greatly assists future committees and provides continuity of standard interpretation. A committee member will volunteer at the beginning of each meeting on a rotating basis to record minutes. Minutes shall include: Attendees, Regrets, standards interpretation discussions, actions to be taken for certification status and any discussion around product approval. Minutes shall be typed and distributed by the co-ordinator and made available to the committee one week in advance of the next meeting as well as on file at the NOOA offices.

Any information (ie. Materials sources, new standard interpretations, common issues on applications) deemed to be useful to the membership as a whole or needed by individual members shall be communicated to the entire membership through a general email or the NOOAsLetter. No recommendations may be made only to individual members.

Any communications whether telephone conversations, faxes, or e-mails made by committee members with applicants in regard to status or progress of their file shall be recorded. A log with the time, persons involved in discussion, issues of discussion, and resolution should be recorded and put in the file at the office.

## **5. Committee Activities:**

In April the coordinator will receive applications and begin the preliminary review process for application completeness and any potential issues that need attention. Initial contact with the farmer for missing information and incomplete fees is made. The deadline for receipt of applications is April 15.

In late April the coordinator will finish reviewing files and will organize information prior to the first meeting. Contact with Committee members will be made and a date established for the first meeting. An agenda will be finalized in conjunction with the chairperson. The late application deadline is April 31 that will include any late fees. April 15 to remind them that the final deadline is near. April 31 is also the deadline for withdrawal of applications with an administration fee deducted (\$50 for renewal applicants and \$65 for initial applicants). Any applicants not renewing their membership shall have their files sealed and filed in the history file.

The first committee meeting to be held in early May. This meeting will consist of electing the committee chair; signing the oath of confidentiality; files go through the initial review and those eligible for issuance of certificates are identified; verification officer applications reviewed; material reviews conducted. Co-ordinator to offer contracts to verification officers along with timeline and prepares files for shipment including a first inspection form and committee checklist. Co-ordinator to prepare any certificates and letters of receipt and outline of committee issues to farmers. No certificate will be issued until application documentation is complete. Interim certificates to be issued upon request to accommodate farmer's market requirements. Security of information supplied for review must be guaranteed. A sealed envelope under lock and key is recommended.

Receipt of information requested by the committee following the first review is expected by the middle of June.

By July 1, letters are sent to members that have withdrawn or aren't renewing their applications to confirm that NOAA will no longer be certifying them. This will prevent confusion of the consumer regarding status of products.

June – Aug First inspections take place; information missing on inspection must be submitted to the committee by Sept 1.

During the latter part of Aug the coordinator reviews inspection reports and files to ensure completeness and to pinpoint issues that need attention as well as gathering any further information to provide the committee with complete information for review. The co-ordinator will set a date for the second meeting along with the agenda.

By the end of Aug the second committee meeting will take place with review of files and inspection reports. Committee members will not review the same files in the second review that they saw in the first file review. Decisions will be made on certificates to be

issued. Second inspection files are defined and issues that the farmer/processor needs awareness of are identified.

By mid-September all files should be complete. Co-ordinator to have completed writing final letter and sending copies of inspection reports. All certificates are issued that have passed committee review. Any appeals arising from the first inspection should be scheduled by the end of September with a possible third committee meeting.

(from NOAA Policy documents)

**Certification Status decisions:** All certification status decisions are made by the Certification Committee following a review of the application or inspection report. This decision is communicated to the Administrator who then will write a letter of status or a letter outlining the missing information or non-compliant issues. The COABC database will be updated within 10 days to agree with the decided upon status and products.

**Changes to Scope and Status:** If at any time the scope of the operation changes, the Administrator will be notified and changes shall be implemented to the certificate and database to reflect the change in scope. If the change is beyond the removal of products, a review of the product for compliance will be done by the Certification Committee prior to adding this to the certificate. The update in scope shall follow within 10 days upon notification to the Administrator by the operation for removal and by the CC for additions.

**Permitted Materials:** Materials used as inputs must meet the criteria of the current version of CAN/CGSB 32-311 Permitted Substances List for use on farms certified by NOAA. If an operator submits a request for approval of an input, the process is as follows:

- The operator shall supply all relevant information on the product such as the MSDS, product label and manufacturer, and supply references to 32.311. The administrator shall receive from the operator and compile this information.
- The administrator will then review the Canada Organic Permitted Substances List, OMRI Canada, OMRI US, Organic Inputs, EcoCert, and all other relevant authorities to determine if the product is acceptable.
- Failing a clear determination from these sources for acceptability, the Certification Committee will rule on the product with any further input from the Accreditation Board and Standards Interpretation Committee.

**VO Review:** The committee will conduct a review of the work of the VO during the review of the Inspection reports. The VO will be assessed on the following items:

1. Did the VO note Standards references for specific decisions, comments or assessments of compliance?
2. Were the In/Out Audits completed?
3. Was sufficient information provided by the VO to determine whether the audit was passed or failed?
4. Were the VO's notes clear, legible and relevant?
5. Were all items requested by the office or CC for VO follow-up completed?
6. Were labels reviewed and referenced for compliance?

## Exceptional Issues

- Previous members that have switched Certifying Body shall have files made available to other bodies upon receipt of written release form from the member Penalties for not supplying information pertinent to the certification process during inspection or on request will result in **status being reviewed/ application being denied.**
- Request for information on members to prove certification standing shall be made available with permission from the grower.

## 6. Low Risk Program

The Low Risk Program was adopted by NOOA in 2014 for review of eligible operations by the Verification Officer. Once the VO checklist is reviewed and confirmed by the CC, operations would be eligible to begin the program in the season following the approval. Eligible operations are identified by the following criteria:

1. The enterprise must receive an organic certificate in the previous three years
2. The enterprise must not have any outstanding conditions
3. The enterprise must not carry out parallel production
4. The enterprise must not have any outstanding conditions
5. The enterprise must not process products beyond on-farm drying or packaging of own products.

From the review checklist a score of 10 or less is necessary to qualify to enter the Low Risk Program. These numbers along with a full assessment of the historical compliance of the operator shall aid in the deliberation of the assessment.

A Low Risk file transfer from a COABC Accredited Body may continue the low risk status provided that the transferring operation is inspected in the transfer year by either the transferring body or NOOA so long as the inspection report is reviewed by NOOA to make certification decisions. Any transferring operation with 3 previous years of fully certified status without conditions can apply to NOOA for Low Risk status and undergo an assessment to achieve Low Risk Status in the following year.

The committee will in every case provide a reason for the assessed risk status and justification for that assessment. The operator will have full knowledge of the factors inherent in their ranking.