

(3) An update on the correction of minor noncompliances previously identified by the certifying agent as requiring correction for continued certification; and

(4) Other information as deemed necessary by the certifying agent to determine compliance with the Act and the regulations in this part.

(b) Following the receipt of the information specified in paragraph (a) of this section, the certifying agent shall within a reasonable time arrange and conduct an on-site inspection of the certified operation pursuant to § 205.403: *Except*, That, when it is impossible for the certifying agent to conduct the annual on-site inspection following receipt of the certified operation's annual update of information, the certifying agent may allow continuation of certification and issue an updated certificate of organic operation on the basis of the information submitted and the most recent on-site inspection conducted during the previous 12 months: *Provided*, That, the annual on-site inspection, required pursuant to § 205.403, is conducted within the first 6 months following the certified operation's scheduled date of annual update.

(c) If the certifying agent has reason to believe, based on the on-site inspection and a review of the information specified in § 205.404, that a certified operation is not complying with the requirements of the Act and the regulations in this part, the certifying agent shall provide a written notification of noncompliance to the operation in accordance with § 205.662.

(d) If the certifying agent determines that the certified operation is complying with the Act and the regulations in this part and that any of the information specified on the certificate of organic operation has changed, the certifying agent must issue an updated certificate of organic operation pursuant to § 205.404(b).

§§ 205.407–205.499 [Reserved]

Subpart F—Accreditation of Certifying Agents

§ 205.500 Areas and duration of accreditation.

(a) The Administrator shall accredit a qualified domestic or foreign applicant in the areas of crops, livestock, wild crops, or handling or any combination thereof to certify a domestic or foreign production or handling operation as a certified operation.

(b) Accreditation shall be for a period of 5 years from the date of approval of accreditation pursuant to § 205.506.

(c) In lieu of accreditation under paragraph (a) of this section, USDA will accept a foreign certifying agent's accreditation to certify organic production or handling operations if:

(1) USDA determines, upon the request of a foreign government, that the standards under which the foreign government authority accredited the foreign certifying agent meet the requirements of this part; or

(2) The foreign government authority that accredited the foreign certifying agent acted under an equivalency agreement negotiated between the United States and the foreign government.

§ 205.501 General requirements for accreditation.

(a) A private or governmental entity accredited as a certifying agent under this subpart must:

(1) Have sufficient expertise in organic production or handling techniques to fully comply with and implement the terms and conditions of the organic certification program established under the Act and the regulations in this part;

(2) Demonstrate the ability to fully comply with the requirements for accreditation set forth in this subpart;

(3) Carry out the provisions of the Act and the regulations in this part,

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including the provisions of §§ 205.402 through 205.406 and § 205.670;

(4) Use a sufficient number of adequately trained personnel, including inspectors and certification review personnel, to comply with and implement the organic certification program established under the Act and the regulations in subpart E of this part;

(5) Ensure that its responsibly connected persons, employees, and contractors with inspection, analysis, and decision-making responsibilities have sufficient expertise in organic production or handling techniques to successfully perform the duties assigned.

(6) Conduct an annual performance evaluation of all persons who review applications for certification, perform on-site inspections, review certification documents, evaluate qualifications for certification, make recommendations concerning certification, or make certification decisions and implement measures to correct any deficiencies in certification services;

(7) Have an annual program review of its certification activities conducted by the certifying agent's staff, an outside auditor, or a consultant who has expertise to conduct such reviews and implement measures to correct any noncompliances with the Act and the regulations in this part that are identified in the evaluation;

(8) Provide sufficient information to persons seeking certification to enable them to comply with the applicable requirements of the Act and the regulations in this part;

(9) Maintain all records pursuant to § 205.510(b) and make all such records available for inspection and copying during normal business hours by authorized representatives of the Secretary and the applicable State organic program's governing State official;

(10) Maintain strict confidentiality with respect to its clients under the applicable organic certification program and not disclose to third parties (with the exception of the Secretary or the applicable State organic program's governing State official or their authorized representatives) any business-related information concerning any client obtained while implementing the

regulations in this part, except as provided for in § 205.504(b)(5);

(11) Prevent conflicts of interest by:

(i) Not certifying a production or handling operation if the certifying agent or a responsibly connected party of such certifying agent has or has held a commercial interest in the production or handling operation, including an immediate family interest or the provision of consulting services, within the 12-month period prior to the application for certification;

(ii) Excluding any person, including contractors, with conflicts of interest from work, discussions, and decisions in all stages of the certification process and the monitoring of certified production or handling operations for all entities in which such person has or has held a commercial interest, including an immediate family interest or the provision of consulting services, within the 12-month period prior to the application for certification;

(iii) Not permitting any employee, inspector, contractor, or other personnel to accept payment, gifts, or favors of any kind, other than prescribed fees, from any business inspected: *Except*, That, a certifying agent that is a not-for-profit organization with an Internal Revenue Code tax exemption or, in the case of a foreign certifying agent, a comparable recognition of not-for-profit status from its government, may accept voluntary labor from certified operations;

(iv) Not giving advice or providing consultancy services, to certification applicants or certified operations, for overcoming identified barriers to certification;

(v) Requiring all persons who review applications for certification, perform on-site inspections, review certification documents, evaluate qualifications for certification, make recommendations concerning certification, or make certification decisions and all parties responsibly connected to the certifying agent to complete an annual conflict of interest disclosure report; and

(vi) Ensuring that the decision to certify an operation is made by a person different from those who conducted the review of documents and on-site inspection.

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(12)(i) Reconsider a certified operation's application for certification and, if necessary, perform a new on-site inspection when it is determined, within 12 months of certifying the operation, that any person participating in the certification process and covered under §205.501(a)(11)(ii) has or had a conflict of interest involving the applicant. All costs associated with a reconsideration of application, including on-site inspection costs, shall be borne by the certifying agent.

(ii) Refer a certified operation to a different accredited certifying agent for recertification and reimburse the operation for the cost of the recertification when it is determined that any person covered under §205.501(a)(11)(i) at the time of certification of the applicant had a conflict of interest involving the applicant.

(13) Accept the certification decisions made by another certifying agent accredited or accepted by USDA pursuant to §205.500;

(14) Refrain from making false or misleading claims about its accreditation status, the USDA accreditation program for certifying agents, or the nature or qualities of products labeled as organically produced;

(15) Submit to the Administrator a copy of:

(i) Any notice of denial of certification issued pursuant to §205.405, notification of noncompliance, notification of noncompliance correction, notification of proposed suspension or revocation, and notification of suspension or revocation sent pursuant to §205.662 simultaneously with its issuance; and

(ii) A list, on January 2 of each year, including the name, address, and telephone number of each operation granted certification during the preceding year;

(16) Charge applicants for certification and certified production and handling operations only those fees and charges for certification activities that it has filed with the Administrator;

(17) Pay and submit fees to AMS in accordance with §205.640;

(18) Provide the inspector, prior to each on-site inspection, with previous on-site inspection reports and notify the inspector of its decision regarding certification of the production or han-

dling operation site inspected by the inspector and of any requirements for the correction of minor noncompliances;

(19) Accept all production or handling applications that fall within its area(s) of accreditation and certify all qualified applicants, to the extent of its administrative capacity to do so without regard to size or membership in any association or group; and

(20) Demonstrate its ability to comply with a State's organic program to certify organic production or handling operations within the State.

(21) Comply with, implement, and carry out any other terms and conditions determined by the Administrator to be necessary.

(b) A private or governmental entity accredited as a certifying agent under this subpart may establish a seal, logo, or other identifying mark to be used by production and handling operations certified by the certifying agent to indicate affiliation with the certifying agent: *Provided, That*, the certifying agent:

(1) Does not require use of its seal, logo, or other identifying mark on any product sold, labeled, or represented as organically produced as a condition of certification and

(2) Does not require compliance with any production or handling practices other than those provided for in the Act and the regulations in this part as a condition of use of its identifying mark: *Provided, That*, certifying agents certifying production or handling operations within a State with more restrictive requirements, approved by the Secretary, shall require compliance with such requirements as a condition of use of their identifying mark by such operations.

(c) A private entity accredited as a certifying agent must:

(1) Hold the Secretary harmless for any failure on the part of the certifying agent to carry out the provisions of the Act and the regulations in this part;

(2) Furnish reasonable security, in an amount and according to such terms as the Administrator may by regulation prescribe, for the purpose of protecting the rights of production and handling operations certified by such certifying

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agent under the Act and the regulations in this part; and

(3) Transfer to the Administrator and make available to any applicable State organic program's governing State official all records or copies of records concerning the person's certification activities in the event that the certifying agent dissolves or loses its accreditation; *Provided*, That, such transfer shall not apply to a merger, sale, or other transfer of ownership of a certifying agent.

(d) No private or governmental entity accredited as a certifying agent under this subpart shall exclude from participation in or deny the benefits of the National Organic Program to any person due to discrimination because of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status.

§ 205.502 Applying for accreditation.

(a) A private or governmental entity seeking accreditation as a certifying agent under this subpart must submit an application for accreditation which contains the applicable information and documents set forth in §§205.503 through 205.505 and the fees required in §205.640 to: Program Manager, USDA-AMS-TMP-NOP, Room 2945—South Building, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090-6456.

(b) Following the receipt of the information and documents, the Administrator will determine, pursuant to §205.506, whether the applicant for accreditation should be accredited as a certifying agent.

§ 205.503 Applicant information.

A private or governmental entity seeking accreditation as a certifying agent must submit the following information:

(a) The business name, primary office location, mailing address, name of the person(s) responsible for the certifying agent's day-to-day operations, contact numbers (telephone, facsimile, and Internet address) of the applicant, and, for an applicant who is a private person, the entity's taxpayer identification number;

(b) The name, office location, mailing address, and contact numbers (tele-

phone, facsimile, and Internet address) for each of its organizational units, such as chapters or subsidiary offices, and the name of a contact person for each unit;

(c) Each area of operation (crops, wild crops, livestock, or handling) for which accreditation is requested and the estimated number of each type of operation anticipated to be certified annually by the applicant along with a copy of the applicant's schedule of fees for all services to be provided under these regulations by the applicant;

(d) The type of entity the applicant is (e.g., government agricultural office, for-profit business, not-for-profit membership association) and for:

(1) A governmental entity, a copy of the official's authority to conduct certification activities under the Act and the regulations in this part,

(2) A private entity, documentation showing the entity's status and organizational purpose, such as articles of incorporation and by-laws or ownership or membership provisions, and its date of establishment; and

(e) A list of each State or foreign country in which the applicant currently certifies production and handling operations and a list of each State or foreign country in which the applicant intends to certify production or handling operations.

§ 205.504 Evidence of expertise and ability.

A private or governmental entity seeking accreditation as a certifying agent must submit the following documents and information to demonstrate its expertise in organic production or handling techniques; its ability to fully comply with and implement the organic certification program established in §§205.100 and 205.101, §§205.201 through 205.203, §§205.300 through 205.303, §§205.400 through 205.406, and §§205.661 and 205.662; and its ability to comply with the requirements for accreditation set forth in §205.501:

(a) *Personnel*. (1) A copy of the applicant's policies and procedures for training, evaluating, and supervising personnel;