

## Issues to Resolve: Suggested Questions to Certifiers

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Website: [www.paorganic.org](http://www.paorganic.org)

Farm Application Packet: <https://paorganic.org/certification/get-started/>

Handler (Processor) Application Packet: <https://paorganic.org/certification/get-started/>

### 1. How does confidentiality and information sharing work between NJDA and new agency?

[PCO's Confidentiality policy](#) is as follows:

[PCO](#) maintains strict confidentiality with respect to its clients under the applicable organic certification program and does not disclose to third parties (with the exception of Secretary or the applicable State organic program's governing State official or their authorized representatives, NOP accredited certifying agents and other third parties as required by law (e.g. subpoena)), any business-related information concerning any client obtained while implementing the regulations in 7 CFR Part 205, except as provided for in §205.504(b)(5).

[§205.504\(b\)\(5\)](#) requires [PCO](#) to make the following information available to any member of the public:

- a) Certification certificates issued to operations during the current and 3 preceding calendar years.
- b) A list of producers and handlers whose operations it has certified, including the name of the operation, type(s) of operation, products produced, and the effective date of the certification, during the current and 3 preceding calendar years.
- c) The results of laboratory analyses for residues of pesticides and other prohibited substances conducted during the current and 3 preceding calendar years, unless the testing is part of an ongoing compliance investigation.
- d) Other business information as permitted in writing by the producer or handler.

Additionally, NOP instructions require [PCO](#) to submit annually to NOP a complete list of operations granted certification or continuing certification during the preceding year. The list must include the operation's name, scope(s) of certification, whether the operation is a grower group, the name, address and telephone number (if applicable) of the contact person for the operation, and a list of products produced. The list may also include the operation's email address (if applicable). The NOP publishes this information in the Organic Integrity Database (OID) on the NOP website, which lists of all operations certified by all accredited certifiers.

### 2. Fees- How transparent is certifier's Fee Schedule?

-[PCO's Fee schedule](#) is very transparent and may be accessed on our website or by contacting [PCO](#) at any time. For this particular situation with the transfer of potential clients, [PCO](#) is waiving the application fee for any NJDA client that is making the switch.

-Fee Schedule Link - <https://paorganic.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Info-PCO-Certification-Fee-Schedule-2022.pdf>

3. Fees – Are they flat or is there a relationship to size of operation, time spent on review?  
-PCO has a flat fee for basic certification and additional fees based on scope. Crops is included in the basic fee. Livestock and Processor / Handler operations are subject to additional OSP fees. Our complete Fee Sheet can be accessed on our website under the Certification Tab, or can be mailed to any postal clients upon request.
4. Fees – Does the fee schedule include inspection costs and are those charges flat or does it depend on inspector time on site, hotel costs, miles driven etc.?  
-Inspection costs are based by the hour. This includes on-site and off-site ( e.g. Travel time, file prep, report writing). The client does not pay for hotel costs. Inspector fees are based on scope and can be found on our fee sheet. \* Expedited inspections may occur more fees based on client / inspector timelines.
5. Do you have other clients in NJ? Can you provide their names as references?  
-Currently PCO has roughly 26 operations in NJ. These range from crops / livestock to Processor Handlers.  
- Mushroom King Farm (Manalapan NJ)  
-Krystal & Jay Hall (Tarbenacle NJ)  
-Mitsui & Co Coffee Trading Co (Norwood NJ)
6. Inspectors – Does certifier have some relatively local to NJ?  
-PCO currently does have inspectors that reside in NJ and many in surrounding areas (PA/NY/MD)
7. Is the agency non-profit, for profit or a state agency?  
-Non-profit
8. What kind of client services do you provide: Will each client have a specific person to deal with or can anyone on your staff provide service/answer questions for anyone?  
-New clients are assigned to a “New Client Team” that includes a direct contact with a certification specialist to assist with any questions regarding paperwork, inputs and inspections. Once the inspection has taken place the client will be assigned to another Certification Specialist that will be their main contact and file reviewer for each year.
9. What is your Materials Review Process (i.e. – rely on OMRI or WSDA?, Use OMRI & also publish own list, own list, shared list w/ other certifiers)?  
-PCO has its own in-house Materials Review Team. We currently contract to perform materials review for other certifiers as well. Our database consists of over 29,000 inputs and operates in “real-time”, meaning if an input has a status change it is immediately reflected in our system and alerts the reviewer of this change once the clients file is opened. Each year PCO sends our clients an updated “Approved Materials” Booklet

based on their scope of operation. Additionally, we allow OMRI and WSDA listed materials.

10. How do you disseminate information on successfully reviewed materials?
  - When clients submit a material for review or if there is a status change they are notified by PCO with the applicable information regarding that input. (i.e. Use up period, Discontinue Use, or Compliance that may need addressed). PCO sends this info directly to the client via postal letter or our client portal. Additionally, PCO publishes a list of Approved Materials annually as well as add/drop lists a few times per year.
11. Is your annual update a long form, a summary of changes or editing of existing OSP?
  - Our Annual Update Form itself is summary of changes. Additionally we require that operations submit changes to their Fields & Crops/Maps/Materials/Product Profiles/Herd Lists etc. Depending on the complexity of the operation changes directly to the OSP may be necessary/required.
12. Are there initial testing requirements of new clients such as soil & water and if so, who bears the cost?
  - PCO does not require initial testing of water or soil unless it is required by the NOP regulations such as micronutrient use. If during the inspection there are risk based findings, PCO may ask the operation to perform such tests at the cost of the producer.
13. Electronic Capabilities – are there minimum software requirements? Are handwritten paper submissions OK?
  - Both Electronic and Paper Submissions of forms are accepted.
14. If you have software requirements, does your staff provide support services during initial application process and beyond?
  - PCO has a knowledgeable team of Program Assistants that are here to help any client navigate our online portal should a producer need help. Additionally we have videos available to help clients navigate the online client portal.
15. Do you offer add-on certification services such as Certified Humane, Regenerative etc.?
  - PCO is happy to announce that we are currently in the process of becoming eligible to perform Regenerative Organic Certification. Our goal is to launch this portion of our certification services sometime this Spring 2022. We also conduct / certify operations to the Organic Plus Trust (OPT) Grass Fed Standards.
16. Do you offer International Certification Services?
  - At this time PCO does not offer any International Certification besides verifying compliance for operations wishing to export under existing international equivalency arrangements.

17. Any other information you would like potential clients to know about your agency.

-PCO is currently the 5<sup>th</sup> largest certifier in the US with over 1700 clients spanning 25 States. We are committed to customer service and addressing the needs of our producers while ensuring the organic integrity of their products. Please don't hesitate to reach out to PCO with any questions and we are happy to help.