

Product Integrity Critical

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Zuck. To do that, inspectors have to visit each and every farm that applies for the PCO label. They have to "walk the farm and check for overall soil erosion, crop health, look at the cows, examine the buffers," and other things, Zuck noted.

In the end, the recordkeeping and other processes are often similar to standard records. All the work is done in an effort to preserve the integrity of the organic label.

For growers who worry about having all the paperwork ready, Zuck assured about 85 producers who attended the workshop and seminar that you "don't have to have everything 100 percent ready when we get there, so that's less stress for you," she said.

Growers must pay a fee, depending on overall organic sales, and must be certified on an annual basis to sell their organically produced items, which can command significantly better dollars at the wholesale and retail levels.

To be certified, producers must prevent the application or use of prohibited materials, including pesticides, nonorganic fertilizers, hydrated lime, ground up wallboard for gypsum, and various livestock health materials.

Producers must also meet approved crop rotations and have a plan for rotation.

They must also have a plan to improve and maintain soil organic material and overall tilth.

Producers must also consider the number of feet of buffer area near roads, which are exposed to prohibited pesticides, and nonorganic neighboring farms.

An inspector will visit the farm and tour the fields and check out the buildings, "even those not used for the product," said Zuck. The inspector will look at the crops to see how healthy they are.

"We can't look over your

shoulder all the time to see if you have prohibited materials," said Zuck. Much of what they count on is the good faith of the applicants.

However, for those caring for animals in an organic system, if there is an emergency where the animal's life is compromised, then the producer can use the material.

The Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) provides lists of allowed and prohibited substances. In the end, after the process is approved, producers must have on their label "Certified By Pennsylvania Certified Organic" below or near the name or address of the last operation that produced the product.

Zuck pointed to one farmer who had a pallet of unapproved fertilizer in a shed. Fortunately, the producer was able to document that the material was registered to an uncle.

Producers must show good faith in trying to use organic inputs, from seeds to fertilizers, and animal health products as well. Every attempt must be made to ensure the organically produced label, including use of transplants and many grower materials.

The integrity must be maintained to ensure consumer confidence. Zuck pointed out a case where a large-scale Georgia broiler grower was allowed to label organic chicken that was not in fact managed organically.

USDA has the power to enforce material sold in stores that is labeled organic or sold as organic that isn't. Retailers can face fines of \$10,000 and up to five years in jail for violations.

Farms that want to try to "prequalify" as organic farms can't do so because inspectors are not allowed, according to USDA, to tell producers how to overcome barriers to certification.

Seed must be untreated, with the presence of no genetically modified organisms



Pennsylvania Certified Organic Association staff and board members gathered in Bird In Hand in early March. Front, from left, Penny Sandoval, certification director; Ned MacArthur, secretary; and Sabine Carey, certification assistant. In back, Roy Brubaker, board member; Mike Byers, certification assistant; Jerry Maloney, treasurer; Leslie Zuck, executive director; and Hue Karreman, board member. Photo by Andy Andrews, editor

(GMOs). Growers must attempt to go after seeds and seedstock material that is organically certified. Treated seed, usually sprayed with a fungicide, noted Zuck, is "not allowed in any way or under any circumstances."

During a special workshop for organic crop growers, including vegetable and fruit producers, growers from Indiana, Schuylkill, Berks, Dauphin, Lancaster, Perry, Lehigh, and Chester counties gathered to review the certification process with Sabine Carey, PCO certification assistant.

As one grower from Perry County pointed out, "It's the little things that are not there that are important," focusing

on the importance of micronutrients to good organic soil health.

Carey pointed out the OMRI products list overview and went over various forms, including the field and pasture records worksheet and organic system plan general information.

Carey pointed out the following to about two dozen growers who attended:

- Growers need to look for organic seeds, including organic inoculants.

- Look for non-GMO seed, and use only seed bred through traditional hybrid methods.

- Organic seedlings should have records of where they were purchased.

- Have a soil fertility and erosion plan in place.

- Watch application of composted manures to ensure they are applied to prevent human consumption on final product.

- Have water diversion and buffer systems in place.

- Crop rotational plans are critical.

- Weed management plans are critical.

- Pest management plans must include pest control adviser and scouting information.

- Water quality is critical, and water testing is essential.


- Maintain boundary integrity, especially if nonorganic neighbors use Bt and GMO crops.

- Producers need to keep track of split and parallel production, ensure equipment is not contamination with inorganic material, and crops are stored properly to prevent contamination.

- Record keeping, including field maps, activity logs, and historical documents, remains critical.

Last year, according to Leslie Zuck, PCO executive director, 251 farmers and processors were certified with the PCO label, including 84 dairy, 100 produce and orchard growers, and more than 100 crop farms. About 35-40 food processors and feed mills were PCO certified.

According to Zuck, there are plans to have two meetings per year for PCO updates and reviews, including one in the eastern half of the state in Lancaster County and one in the western half.



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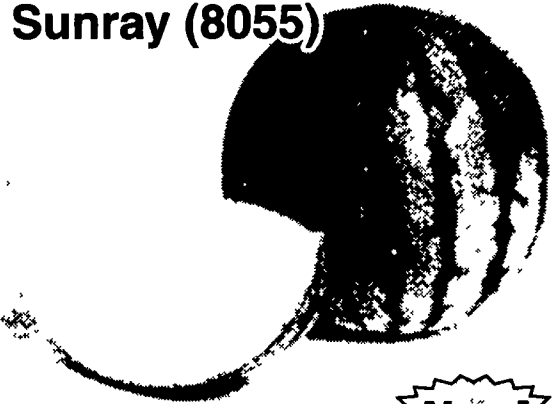
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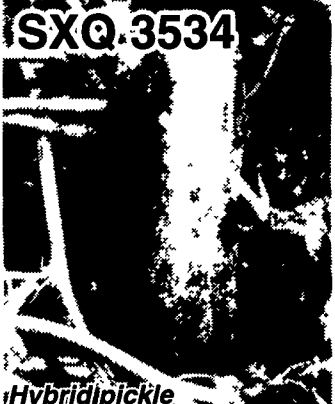


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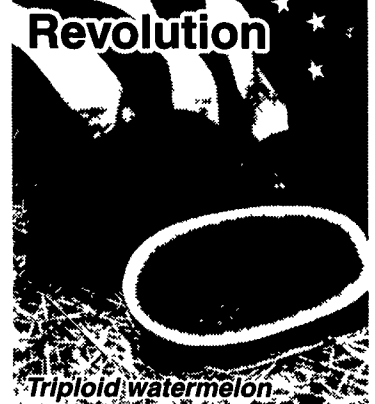
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