

My organic inspection is over and it went well. Now, what can I do to make my certificate arrive faster?

First, take another look at the affidavit your inspector left behind. Did he/she note any areas of concern? Was there any missing paperwork? If so, take care of this immediately. Ideally, you want to send that information to your certifier even before they receive the report noting that it is needed. If you get a fax, letter, email or phone call from your certifier requesting more information or clarification, respond immediately!

The most common reason for delayed certificates is missing information, and it is usually very simple information that we need—an updated map, an input label, etc. Certification reviewers can't make a decision until they have all the information.

Also, double-check to make sure you are up to date in your certification payments. By the time the inspection is finished, your certifier has already invested a lot of time and money on your file, as well as paying the inspector on your behalf—all trusting that you will meet your financial obligations. If you are behind in your payments, it is likely that your file will be held, waiting for payment.

Normally, files are reviewed in the order in which they are received: first in, first out. If you have sent in everything that was requested of you, your payments are up to date, and you have a sale pending receipt of your certificate, you may call your certifier to request that your file be moved closer to the top of the review pile. Please don't do this unless it is truly an unusual and urgent situation—if everyone requests that they be moved to the top, we are back to where we started.

What are grain samples and why are they important?

Samples of your organic product serve two very important functions. One is marketing; the other is to help protect your integrity. Based on your sample, your buyers will decide if they want your product and will pay a good price for it. If something goes wrong and your product is contaminated by the time it gets to the end user, your sample will be your proof that it was clean when it left your farm.

Your sample must be truly representative of your crop. Skimming a cup from the bin after it's full is not good enough. Most producers will keep a clean pail, clearly marked with the bin number, beside each bin at harvest time. As the trucks are unloading, they will take swipes through the stream with a cup. You can buy special sampling cups, but a clean, recycled yogurt container works just as well. It's important to swipe from side to side, not just the middle of the stream, and to take samples from the top, bottom and middle of each load.

Once the bin is full, mix up all the grain in your pail so you have a good representative sample. You will then want to send some to a lab for tests, depending on the quality requirements of your buyers. Make sure you package and label the samples you send to buyers well. A clean Ziploc bag works; just don't fill it so full that it bursts in transit!

Ask your buyers how much they need—some will require a small amount, others may need a pound or more to do milling or sprouting tests. Remember to stick a label on each bag with your name, contact information, crop variety, quality info (falling number, etc), the certifications the crop has (NOP, Canada, OCIA, EU, Bio-Suisse, JAS, etc.) and the lot or crop year and bin numbers. Include copies of any lab reports. Some producers will also include the amount they have for sale—others prefer to keep that information to themselves for negotiating purposes.

Do you have a question you'd like to see answered in a future column? Please send it to Debbie Miller, OCIA Canada, Box 310, Rockglen, SK S0H 3R0, sunrise.orgamics@sasktel.net or 306-476-2739.

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