



STEPS TO THE ORGANIC IMPORT PROCESS

Every shipment of organic product that enters the U.S. from abroad must be accompanied by valid NOP Import certificate data. The NOP Import Certificate follows a specific sequence from the foreign supply chain to U.S. government systems. The physical shipment and the electronic certificate move independently. There is no requirement that a physical copy of the certificate accompany the shipment. This factsheet outlines the data flow and who is responsible at each step.

Step 1: The Exporter Requests the Certificate

Before the shipment departs the origin country, the certified exporter submits export shipment data to their certifying agent and requests an NOP Import Certificate. All export documents (invoices, packing lists, bills of lading) must identify the products as organic at this stage. The exporter must request early enough to allow the certifier time to evaluate the request, generate the certificate, and for the exporter to deliver it to the importer before CBP's filing deadlines.

Step 2: The Certifier Reviews and Issues the Certificate

The certifier reviews the request and determines whether the export complies with the USDA organic regulations. The certifier must have a documented organic control system for intaking and approving or rejecting NOP Import Certificate requests, and may request additional information before approving a request. The certifier issues the NOP Import Certificate through the OID only if the export is compliant, and may only certify amounts of product that are verified to be organic. For countries with organic equivalency arrangements, the certificate is generated in the Global Integrity Database rather than the USDA OID, but the data flows to the same NOP systems.

Step 3: Electronic Transfer to the U.S. Importer

The certifier electronically transfers the finalized NOP Import Certificate to the exporter, who then electronically transfers it to the U.S. importer. No physical copy is required to accompany the physical shipment.

Step 4: CBP-ACE Filing and NOP Verification

The U.S. importer (or their designated customs broker) uploads the NOP Import Certificate data into CBP's Automated Commercial Environment (ACE) as part of the standard import entry filing. The importer also verifies at this stage that the shipment is associated with a valid, finalized certificate. Product arriving without a valid import certificate must be immediately re-exported, destroyed, or donated (with restrictions).

Step 5: Importer Cross-check

The importer confirms that the details of the shipment arriving in the U.S. match the details on the NOP Import Certificate before the product is received as organic.

What Makes an NOP Import Certificate Valid?

Valid NOP Import Certificate	Not a Valid NOP Import Certificate
Generated in the USDA Organic Integrity Database (or Global Integrity Database for trade partners)	Paper certificate not generated through the USDA Organic Integrity Database (except in certain limited circumstances)
Issued by a USDA-accredited certifier (or certifier authorized under a trade arrangement)	Certificate generated by an unauthorized certifier
Carries a unique 21-character NOP-IC number (no "(draft)" in the number)	Draft certificate, NOP-IC application, or other documentation used prior to issuance
Issued before departure of the shipment from the origin country	Certificate issued after departure of the shipment from the originating country



SOURCES CITED

USDA National Organic Program, [7 CFR §205.273\(b\)](#).

USDA National Organic Program, [7 CFR §205.273\(d\)](#).

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service. (2026, June). *Strengthening Organic Enforcement Frequently Asked Questions, "Organic Imports and Import Certificates"* section.

Retrieved from https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/strengthening-organic-enforcement/faq#Organic_Imports

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service. (2025, February). *Issuing NOP-Import Certificates When the Organic Integrity Database is Unavailable*. Retrieved from <https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/NOPTipSheet.pdf>.