



## **Flooding and Organic Certification FAQs (July 2023)**

Vermont Organic Farmers, LLC (VOF)

The USDA accredited certification agency owned by NOFA-VT

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Vermont Organic Farmers, the certification program of NOFA-VT, has recently been contacted by certified organic growers with questions about how flooding affects the organic certification of organic fields and produce. Below are some answers to frequently asked questions for organic growers that have experienced recent flooding.

### **How does flooding affect the organic certification of my land?**

The organic regulations require that "prohibited substances" cannot be applied to land for at least three years prior to harvesting an organic crop. Floodwaters can contain many potential contaminants including manure from livestock operations, runoff from septic systems and water treatment facilities, agricultural chemicals, heavy metals as well as contaminants such as oil, diesel, gasoline or paint. Fortunately the volume of water during flooding events often dilutes the contaminants. In most cases, low levels of contaminants would be considered unavoidable residual environmental contaminants and would not affect the certification of the land. However, there are instances where prohibited residues would be of greater concern and farmers should contact Vermont Organic Farmers (VOF) to discuss next steps. If your farm is directly downstream from a source of concentrated prohibited substances, for example a sewage treatment facility or if there is evidence of contamination, for example an oily residue on your fields or an empty oil tank, VOF may decide to test for likely contaminants and continued certification of the affected field will be based on the outcome of the tests and on-site inspection.

### **How does flooding affect the organic certification status of my crops for human consumption?**

The US Food and Drug Administration considers all food crops where the edible portion of the crop has come into contact with flood water to be "adulterated" and should not be sold for human consumption. This applies to both organic and conventional crops. The University of Vermont Extension provides recommendations for preventing contamination of non-flooded crops and fields, replanting timelines and worker safety information. In addition, please note that if your wellhead was submerged, your water should be retested to ensure that it is potable. Only potable water should be used to wash organic produce. You will need to provide VOF with a copy of your completed water test.

### **How does flooding affect the organic certification of livestock feed?**

Livestock feed (including pastures) that has come into contact with flood water should be assumed contaminated and it is not recommended that it is fed to livestock, conventional or organic. The University of Vermont Extension provides recommendations for what to do with flooded hay fields, pastures and feed corn.

Please do not hesitate to contact the VOF office at 434-3821 or [info@vermontorganic.org](mailto:info@vermontorganic.org) with any additional questions. In addition, NOFA-VT has [funding for emergencies](#) of small grants and zero percent loans for NOFA-VT members and VOF certified producers.

Regards,

The VOF Certification Team and NOFA-VT Staff