



Flooding & Organic Certification

Have questions about how flooding affects your organic certification? Below are some answers to frequently asked questions for organic growers that have experienced 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 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 no detectable generic E.coli. 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.

What if flood waters have impacted my pastures and I can't pasture my livestock?

Producers who temporarily confine livestock must document the days the animals are not on pasture and the reason for confinement. If you have ruminant livestock and are afraid that you will not be able to meet the pasture requirements (120 days and 30% DMI) you should contact the VOF office and we will assist you through the process of requesting a temporary pasture rule variance from the National Organic Program (NOP). The NOP may grant a variance from the pasture rule for damage caused by drought, wind, flood, excessive moisture, hail, tornado, earthquake, fire, or other business interruption. It will be important to document the damage through photographs, if possible, as evidence to support the temporary variance request. Producers will be asked to submit a request for variance in writing and include supporting documentation justifying the need for the temporary variance; and will be required to maintain records on any procedures or practices impacted by the temporary variance, if it were granted. VOF staff can help producers submit this information for review.