

## Water Quality Enhancement Activity – WQL20 - Transition to Organic Cropping Systems

The term “organic” has a legal definition based on the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) Rule, based on the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990. The NOP Rule, in effect since 2002, applies to the production, handling and labeling of agricultural and processed food products that are sold as organic. The NOP Rule established uniform production standards for crops and livestock as well as after harvest product handling and processing standards.

A copy of the NOP Rule is posted at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop>. Some of the key provisions of the rule are as follows:

- Most farmers and handlers must be certified by a USDA accredited certifying agent
- Most synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, animal drugs, feed additives and ingredients are prohibited. Those that are allowed may be used only with restrictions.
- Organic farmers and handlers must prepare an Organic System Plan that a certifier must review, evaluate and approve.
- Land cannot be certified as “organic” until three years after the date of application of the last prohibited material.
- Farmers and handlers need to use and document proactive and preventative management practices before they can use pesticides.

For more information about transitioning to organic, consult MSU Extension Bulletin E3067, “Transition to Certified Organic in Michigan – “Where to Start?”, which is found at:

<http://web2.msue.msu.edu/bulletins/Bulletin/PDF/E3067.pdf>

For more sources of information on transitioning to organic farming, refer to Michigan Agronomy Technical Note #8, Transitioning to Organic Resources, found in Section I of the FOTG.