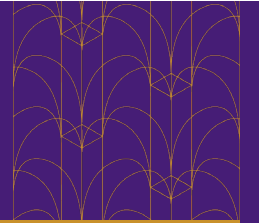




CERTIFIED PROGRAMS



Certified Sustainably Grown, Certified Naturally Grown, and USDA Certified Organic Programs Explained

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Overview

Growing safe and healthy food for our families and communities is a priority for farmers. There are many promotional and certification programs available to help producers stand out in a crowded market.

Is certification right for your farm? With so many choices, how do you know what program is best for your operation?

Three of the most common certifications found in local markets are Certified Sustainably Grown, Certified Naturally Grown and Certified Organic. Let's break down the details of each program.

Certified Sustainably Grown

Certified Sustainably Grown is a robust claim that supports your brand, helping you stand out in the marketplace and providing you access to expanded markets. The detailed framework provides a complete roadmap to build resilience while satisfying the growing and profitable market for food that is grown to the highest standards of environmental stewardship and social responsibility. It highlights the efforts of farmers to address today's most important challenges such as water conservation, pollinator protection and climate adaptation.

The Certified Sustainably Grown program, developed by SCS Global Services, is a comprehensive certification for agricultural producers that emphasizes environmental stewardship, social responsibility and business integrity. Its framework is built around three core pillars:

1. **Business integrity:** This pillar ensures that the grower's operations are transparent, accountable and legally compliant. It includes management systems, legal compliance, product traceability, quality and safety standards, and financial accountability.
2. **Sustainable farming practices:** This section focuses on minimizing environmental impact and promoting resource efficiency. Key areas include soil conservation, water stewardship, climate change mitigation, air quality management, biodiversity protection, energy efficiency, waste reduction and sustainable crop and pest management.
3. **Ethical stewardship:** This pillar addresses labor rights and worker welfare. It ensures fair wages and benefits, equitable work hours, safe working conditions, and prohibition of child labor, forced labor and discrimination.

The Certified Sustainable Grown program is overseen and regulated by SCS Global Services. SCS Global Services partners with companies, government agencies, nongovernmental organizations and stakeholders to advance sustainable development goals through independent assessment, the application of sound science and innovative solutions. SCS is a California-chartered benefit corporation, reflecting its commitment to socially and environmentally responsible business practices. SCS is also a participant of the United Nations Global Compact and adheres to its principles-based approach to responsible business.

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Certified Naturally Grown

Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) offers peer-review certification to farmers and beekeepers producing food, flowers and fiber for their local communities by working in harmony with nature, without relying on synthetic chemicals or genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Program standards are based on the National Organic Program yet are administered by a grassroots and member-led organization, not connected with any federal institution. CNG is committed to affordable annual dues, minimal paperwork and transparency — so customers can read the standards on the Certified Naturally Grown website and view producer applications and yearly inspections.

CNG offers five certification programs:

1. **Produce and flowers:** Vegetables, fruits, flowers, microgreens, herbs, grains
2. **Livestock:** All animals – ruminants, pigs, poultry
3. **Apiary:** Beekeepers focusing on honeybee health
4. **Aquaponics:** Systems integrating fish and plants
5. **Mushrooms:** Indoor and outdoor mushroom producers

The vast majority of CNG producers are certified for produce (fruits and vegetables) and flowers. These farmers are found in nearly every state and province in North America. They typically sell at farmers markets, through community-supported agriculture, and at local, independent grocers.

The core principles of Certified Naturally Grown are:

1. **Ecological farming practices:** No synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides or GMOs; emphasis on soil health through composting, cover cropping, and crop rotation; natural pest and disease management; and responsible water use and conservation.
2. **Animal welfare:** Humane treatment of livestock; access to pasture and natural diets; no synthetic growth hormones or antibiotics.
3. **Transparency and peer review:** Annual inspections conducted by other CNG farmers, extension agents or qualified community members; publicly accessible inspection reports and declarations; Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) model fosters community learning and accountability.
4. **Local and direct marketing:** Certification is tailored for farmers who sell directly to consumers through farmers markets, CSAs and local grocers; encourages strong relationships between growers and their communities.
5. **Affordability and accessibility:** Lower costs and simpler paperwork compared to U.S. Department of Agriculture organic certification; designed to be inclusive for small farms and beginning farmers.

Certified Naturally Grown farmers don't use synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicide or GMOs, just like certified organic farmers. The main difference between CNG and certified organic is the certification model, which relies on peer inspections, transparency and direct relationships rather than third party inspection and certification.

CNG is a private nonprofit organization that's not affiliated with the USDA's National Organic Program. CNG's certification approach is based on the Participatory Guarantee System model that relies on peer review inspections where the inspectors are typically other farmers. This model keeps paperwork to a minimum and certification dues affordable. CNG's certification process is transparent and open to the public. Every CNG producer has a profile on the Certified Naturally Grown website which includes the information they submitted in their application, as well as summaries of their inspection reports. More information is available at www.naturallygrown.org.

USDA Certified Organic

The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) administers programs that create domestic and international marketing opportunities for U.S. producers of food, fiber and specialty crops. AMS also provides the agriculture industry with valuable services to ensure the quality and availability of wholesome food for consumers across the country. The National Organic Program (NOP) is a federal regulatory program that develops and enforces consistent national standards for organically produced agricultural products sold in the United States.

Organic certification allows a farm or processing facility to sell, label and represent their products as organic. The organic brand provides consumers with more choices in the marketplace. The USDA protects consumer options by protecting the organic seal. Any organic operation violating the USDA organic regulations faces enforcement actions, which can include financial penalties or suspension/revocation of their organic certificate.

Organic accreditation authorizes private, foreign or state organizations to certify farms or processing facilities. Certifying agents are accredited by the USDA and handle making sure USDA organic products meet all organic standards. These certifiers and USDA work together to enforce the standards, ensuring a level playing field for producers and protecting consumer confidence in the integrity of the USDA Organic seal.

The core tenets of the USDA Certified Organic program are:

1. **Prohibited substances:** No use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, GMOs, irradiation or sewage sludge. Only substances listed as allowed on the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances may be used.
2. **Soil and ecosystem health:** Practices must maintain or improve soil and water quality; conservation of wetlands, woodlands and wildlife is required; use of compost, cover crops and crop rotation to enhance soil fertility.
3. **Organic system plan (OSP):** Every certified operation must submit an OSP detailing production practices, inputs and recordkeeping. This plan is reviewed and verified by USDA-accredited certifiers.
4. **Transition period:** Land must be free of prohibited substances for three years before crops can be certified organic.
5. **Animal welfare standards:** Livestock must be raised on organic feed and have access to the outdoors. No antibiotics or synthetic growth hormones are allowed.
6. **Certification and inspection:** Annual inspections by USDA-accredited certifiers. This includes both announced and unannounced audits to ensure compliance.
7. **Labeling requirements:** Products must meet specific criteria to use the USDA Organic seal:
 - **100% organic:** All ingredients and processing aids are organic.
 - **Organic:** At least 95% organic ingredients.
 - **Made with organic ingredients:** At least 70% organic ingredients.
8. **Recordkeeping and traceability:** Operations must keep detailed records for at least five years. Records must allow traceability from farm to final product.

The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) advises USDA on standards. Public input is invited on changes to the national list and other regulations.

Certifiers can be found using the Organic Integrity Database Certifier Locator to search by location, scope of certification (e.g., crops, livestock, processing), fee structure and services. Visit www.ams.usda.gov for more information.

National certifiers that work in Louisiana include:

Program	Website
California Certified Organic Farmers	https://ccof.org/
Oregon Tilth Certified Organic	https://tilth.org/certification/
EcoCert USA	https://www.ecocert.com/en-US/home
Americert International	https://www.americertorganic.info/
Organic Certifiers	https://www.organiccertifiers.com/
Quality Certification Services	https://qcsinfo.org/

Certifying agents perform crucial functions including:

- Review Organic system plan (OSP)
- Conduct annual inspections
- Issue organic certificate
- Ensure ongoing compliance with USDA organic standards

Core principles of Certified Sustainably Grown, Certified Naturally Grown and USDA Certified Organic programs.

Certified Sustainably Grown	Certified Naturally Grown	USDA Certified Organic
Farmworker protection	No synthetic inputs	Ecological and sustainable farming practices
Water conservation	Ecological sustainability	Prohibited substances and practices
Biodiversity protection	Animal welfare	Organic system plan (OSP)
Pollinator friendly	Transparency and peer Review	Certification and inspection
Soil conservation	Local and community focus	Legal protection and enforcement
Climate neutral	Affordability and accessibility	Transparency and public Input

Certification program, costs and certifying parties.

Program	Cost	Certifying Party
Certified Sustainably Grown	\$1,000-\$3,000/year ^a	SCS Global Services
Certified Naturally Grown	\$300/year	Peer-reviewed ^b
USDA Certified Organic	\$1,200-\$3,500 ^c	USDA-accredited certifying agents ^d

^aBased on industry norms, exact pricing isn't publicly listed. Costs vary based on farm size, location and complexity of operations and include application and audit fees, on-site inspection costs and inspector travel expenses.

^bIncludes application fees, inspection fees (depending on farm size and location), sales assessments or user fees based on gross organic sales and inspector travel expenses.

^cOther CNG-certified farmers, non-CNG farmers, extension agents, Master Gardeners, customers, community members.

^dPrivate organizations, state departments of agriculture.

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Commonalities across Certified Sustainably Grown, Certified Naturally Grown and USDA Certified Organic programs.

Principle	Certified Sustainably Grown	Certified Naturally Grown	USDA Certified Organic
No synthetic chemicals	✓	✓	✓
Non-GMO requirement	✓	✓	✓
Soil health focus	✓	✓	✓
Environmental stewardship	✓	✓	✓
Annual inspections	✓	✓ (peer-reviewed)	✓ (third-party)
Transparency	✓	✓	✓
Animal welfare standards	✓	✓	✓

Key differences among Certified Sustainably Grown, Certified Naturally Grown and USDA Certified Organic programs.

Feature	Certified Sustainably Grown	Certified Naturally Grown	USDA Certified Organic
Certifying body	SCS Global Services	CNG (grassroots, peer-reviewed)	USDA-accredited certifiers
Scale of farms	All sizes, including large commercial	Small-scale, direct-market farms	All sizes
Inspection type	Third-party audits	Peer inspections	Third-party audits
Cost and accessibility	Moderate to high	Low-cost, farmer-friendly	Moderate to high
Use of synthetic inputs	Some allowed if approved	None allowed	None allowed
Marketing reach	Accepted by major retailers	Local markets, CSAs	National and international markets
Labeling standards	No universal seal; varies	CNG seal	USDA Organic seal with strict labeling tiers
Social responsibility	Strong emphasis (worker rights, community)	Less formalized	Not a core requirement

Summary

- **Certified Sustainably Grown** is holistic, covering environmental, social and economic sustainability. It's ideal for farms aiming for broader sustainability goals beyond just organic practices.
- **Certified Naturally Grown** is community-driven, affordable and tailored for small farms using organic methods but not seeking USDA certification.
- **USDA Certified Organic** is the most recognized and regulated, with strict federal standards and broad market access, but it can be costly and bureaucratic.

Certified Sustainably Grown

<https://www.scsglobalservices.com/services/sustainably-grown-certification>

Certified Naturally Grown

<https://www.naturallygrown.org/>

USDA Certified Organic

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/organic-certification>



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