



## How to Select Certified Organic Foreign Supplier

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### ABSTRACT

The global demand for certified organic products has experienced a significant upsurge as consumers increasingly prioritize health, sustainability, and ethical consumption. For businesses seeking to meet this demand, the selection of a foreign certified organic supplier is a decision that goes beyond the conventional considerations of cost and product quality. This whitepaper aims to provide a comprehensive guide on how to select a foreign certified organic supplier, ensuring that businesses make informed choices aligned with their objective of delivering high-quality, organic products to the market.

**Key words:** Organic Certification, Certified Organic Suppliers, Sustainability

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### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the organic industry has witnessed dynamic growth, driven by heightened awareness of environmental conservation, health-conscious consumer preferences, and the pursuit of ethically sourced products. As a result, businesses are compelled to forge partnerships with certified organic suppliers that adhere to stringent standards, ensuring the integrity of organic claims from farm to market.

The complexity of the global supply chain necessitates a meticulous approach to supplier selection. Beyond the mere possession of organic certification, businesses must evaluate various factors, including the supplier's adherence to international regulations, transparency in sourcing and production, focus on environmental and social responsibility, and a proven track record of delivering high-quality organic products.

This whitepaper will guide businesses through the multifaceted process of choosing a foreign certified organic supplier, emphasizing the critical considerations at each stage of the selection journey. From understanding the nuances of organic certification standards to negotiating favorable terms and maintaining ongoing relationships, businesses will gain actionable insights to streamline the supplier selection process and establish robust partnerships that align with their goals of sustainability and quality.

We will look into the details of organic certification, explore the key factors that businesses should consider when evaluating potential suppliers, and provide practical guidance on conducting thorough research, negotiating agreements, and fostering long-term relationships. After this, businesses will be equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to make well-informed decisions in selecting foreign certified organic suppliers, contributing to the growth and success of the global organic market.

### UNDERSTANDING CERTIFIED ORGANIC SUPPLIERS

Certified organic suppliers play a critical role in meeting the growing demand for organic products worldwide. Organic certification serves as a cornerstone of trust and transparency in the organic supply chain, providing consumers with assurance regarding the integrity and authenticity of organic claims.

Organic certification is a designation granted to agricultural producers, processors, and handlers who adhere to strict guidelines governing the cultivation, production, and handling of organic products. At its core, organic certification is basically a commitment to sustainable farming practices, environmental stewardship, and the promotion of biodiversity. Certified organic suppliers embrace holistic approaches to agriculture, eschewing

synthetic pesticides, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and artificial additives in favor of natural and environmentally friendly alternatives.

The importance of organic certification lies in its role as a trusted emblem of quality, purity, and integrity within the organic industry. In an era characterized by heightened consumer consciousness and sustainability concerns, organic certification serves as a beacon of transparency, empowering consumers to make informed choices aligned with their values and preferences.

### **A. Obtaining Organic Certification**

The process of obtaining organic certification entails a series of rigorous evaluations, inspections, and audits conducted by accredited certification agencies. These agencies, authorized by regulatory bodies and industry associations, serve as impartial third-party entities responsible for assessing compliance with organic standards and verifying adherence to organic principles.

Companies seeking organic certification must undergo a comprehensive application process, wherein they submit detailed documentation outlining their farming or production practices, sourcing protocols, and quality management systems. Certification agencies meticulously review these documents to ensure alignment with established organic criteria, including prohibitions on synthetic inputs, guidelines for soil health and fertility, and requirements for crop rotation and pest management.

Following the submission of documentation, certified organic suppliers undergo on-site inspections conducted by qualified inspectors trained in organic agriculture and certification protocols. These inspections serve to validate the accuracy of information provided in the application, assess compliance with organic standards, and identify areas for improvement or corrective action.

### **B. Criteria for Organic Certification**

Organic certification is governed by a set of criteria established by regulatory bodies, industry associations, and certification agencies. While specific requirements may vary depending on geographic region and certifying body, there are core principles that universally define organic agriculture and production:

1. **Prohibition of Synthetic Inputs:** Organic certification prohibits the use of synthetic pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in agricultural practices. Certified organic suppliers rely on natural and organic alternatives to manage pests, enhance soil fertility, and promote plant health.
2. **Soil Health and Fertility:** Organic standards emphasize the importance of soil health and fertility as foundational elements of sustainable agriculture. Certified organic suppliers employ practices such as crop rotation, cover cropping, and composting to nurture soil ecosystems, enhance nutrient availability, and minimize erosion and degradation.
3. **Biodiversity Conservation:** Organic certification prioritizes biodiversity conservation by promoting diverse crop rotations, preserving natural habitats, and minimizing the ecological impact of agricultural activities. Certified organic suppliers embrace principles of agroecology and regenerative agriculture to foster resilience, adaptability, and ecological balance within agroecosystems.
4. **Transparency and Traceability:** Organic certification mandates transparency and traceability throughout the supply chain, from farm to fork. Certified organic suppliers maintain detailed records of inputs, processes, and transactions, enabling comprehensive traceability and accountability at every stage of production and distribution.

With these criteria, certified organic suppliers uphold the principles of organic agriculture and contribute to the advancement of sustainable food systems, environmental conservation, and public health.

### **TYPES OF CERTIFIED ORGANIC PRODUCTS**

Certified organic products encompass a diverse array of agricultural commodities, food items, and consumer goods that adhere to organic standards and principles. From fresh produce and grains to packaged foods and personal care products, the organic market offers a wide range of options for consumers seeking healthier, environmentally friendly alternatives.

**1. Organic Fruits and Vegetables**

- a. USDA Organic Certification: The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers organic certification for fruits and vegetables grown using organic farming practices.
- b. Products bearing the USDA Organic seal meet stringent standards for soil quality, pest and weed management, and use of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers.

**2. Organic Grains and Pulses**

- a. Canada Organic Certification: The Canada Organic Regime (COR) provides certification for organic grains and pulses produced in Canada.
- b. COR certification ensures compliance with Canadian organic standards, including soil health, crop rotation, and sustainable farming practices.

**3. Organic Dairy Products:**

- a. EU Organic Certification: The European Union (EU) Organic Certification guarantees that dairy products comply with organic farming regulations established by the EU.
- b. Certified organic dairy products adhere to strict guidelines regarding animal welfare, feed quality, and pasture access for livestock.

**4. Organic Meat and Poultry:**

- a. Certified Humane Raised and Handled: While not specific to organic certification, the Certified Humane program ensures humane treatment of animals raised for meat and poultry products.
- b. Certified Humane standards cover aspects such as living conditions, diet, and handling practices, providing assurance of ethical treatment throughout the production process.

**5. Organic Packaged Foods**

- a. Non-GMO Project Verified: The Non-GMO Project Verification label indicates that packaged foods are free from genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and comply with rigorous standards for GMO avoidance.
- b. While not synonymous with organic certification, many organic packaged foods also bear the Non-GMO Project Verified seal to affirm their compliance with non-GMO ingredients.

**6. Organic Beverages**

- a. Fair Trade Certification: Fair Trade certification ensures that beverage ingredients such as coffee, tea, and cocoa are sourced from producers who adhere to fair labor practices and sustainable farming methods.
- b. While not exclusive to organic products, Fair Trade certification aligns with organic principles of environmental stewardship and social responsibility.

**7. Organic Personal Care Products:**

- a. NSF/ANSI 305 Organic Personal Care Certification: The NSF/ANSI 305 standard establishes criteria for organic personal care products, including ingredients, manufacturing processes, and labeling requirements.
- b. Products certified under NSF/ANSI 305 contain a minimum percentage of organic content and meet strict guidelines for ingredient sourcing and processing.

These certifications provide consumers with assurance that certified organic products meet established standards for organic production, integrity, and sustainability. Depending on the region and regulatory framework, additional certifications and labels may also signify adherence to specific organic criteria and quality assurance measures.

**FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN SELECTING A FOREIGN CERTIFIED ORGANIC SUPPLIER**

When selecting a foreign certified organic supplier, several factors come into play to ensure the integrity, quality, and sustainability of the products. From certification standards to transparency in sourcing and production processes, each aspect contributes to the overall reliability and trustworthiness of the supplier.

**A. Certification Standards and Accreditation**

Certification standards serve as the foundation of organic integrity, outlining the criteria and requirements for organic production and handling practices. It is essential to verify that the foreign supplier adheres to recognized

certification standards accredited by reputable organizations or regulatory bodies. Common organic certification standards include:

- **USDA Organic:** Administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the USDA Organic program sets rigorous standards for organic agriculture, livestock production, and food processing. USDA Organic certification ensures compliance with strict guidelines for soil health, pest management, and prohibited substances.
- **EU Organic:** The European Union (EU) Organic Certification guarantees that products meet organic farming regulations established by the EU. EU Organic certification covers aspects such as crop rotation, biodiversity conservation, and animal welfare standards, ensuring sustainable agricultural practices.
- **JAS Organic:** The Japan Agricultural Standard (JAS) Organic certification certifies organic products produced or processed in Japan. JAS Organic standards emphasize environmental conservation, chemical-free farming methods, and traceability throughout the supply chain.

Accreditation by recognized certifying bodies validates the credibility and authenticity of the organic certification, providing assurance that the products meet stringent organic standards and regulatory requirements.

### **B. Transparency in Sourcing and Production Processes**

Transparency in sourcing and production processes is paramount for ensuring traceability, accountability, and ethical practices throughout the supply chain. When evaluating foreign certified organic suppliers, consider the following transparency measures:

- **Supply Chain Traceability:** Verify that the supplier maintains comprehensive records of product origins, cultivation methods, and processing steps. Transparent supply chain management enables traceability from farm to fork, allowing consumers to make informed decisions about product authenticity and quality.
- **Ingredient Sourcing Practices:** Assess the supplier's focus on sourcing organic ingredients from reputable growers and producers. Transparency in ingredient sourcing involves disclosing the origin, cultivation methods, and certification status of raw materials to uphold organic integrity and consumer trust.
- **Production Transparency:** Evaluate the supplier's production facilities, equipment, and practices to ensure compliance with organic standards and hygiene protocols. Transparent production processes promote accountability and quality control, minimizing the risk of contamination or adulteration.

### **C. Quality Assurance and Testing Protocols**

Quality assurance and testing protocols play a vital role in verifying the safety, purity, and efficacy of certified organic products. Robust quality assurance measures show the supplier's focus on product quality and consumer satisfaction. Consider the following aspects of quality assurance and testing:

- **Batch Testing and Analysis:** Confirm that the supplier conducts batch testing and analysis to verify compliance with organic standards and specifications. Batch testing involves comprehensive laboratory analysis of raw materials, intermediate products, and finished goods to detect contaminants, pesticide residues, and microbiological hazards.
- **Certificates of Analysis (CoA):** Request certificates of analysis for each product batch to validate compliance with organic certification requirements and quality specifications. Certificates of analysis provide detailed information about product composition, purity, and compliance with regulatory standards, offering transparency and accountability throughout the supply chain.
- **Third-Party Audits and Inspections:** Inquire about third-party audits and inspections conducted by accredited certifying bodies to assess the supplier's adherence to organic standards and best practices. Third-party audits provide independent verification of compliance with certification criteria, ensuring confidence in the integrity and authenticity of certified organic products.

#### D. Compliance with International Regulations and Standards

When evaluating foreign certified organic suppliers, it is essential to ensure compliance with international regulations and standards governing organic agriculture and food production. International compliance of organic standards facilitates trade, promotes consumer confidence, and ensures uniformity in organic certification requirements. Consider the following aspects of compliance with international regulations and standards:

- **Unification of Standards:** Verify that the supplier's organic certification aligns with internationally recognized standards and regulations, such as those established by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) and the Codex Alimentarius Commission. Unification of standards promotes consistency, transparency, and mutual recognition of organic certifications across borders, facilitating global trade and market access for organic products.
- **Equivalence Agreements:** Explore whether the supplier operates in countries with equivalence agreements or mutual recognition agreements with other organic certification bodies. Equivalence agreements enable the reciprocal recognition of organic certifications between countries, streamlining the certification process and facilitating market access for organic products in diverse international markets.
- **Compliance with Import Regulations:** Familiarize yourself with import regulations and requirements governing the importation of organic products into your country or region. Ensure that the supplier complies with relevant import regulations, documentation requirements, and certification procedures to facilitate smooth customs clearance and regulatory compliance.

#### E. Traceability and Documentation

Traceability and documentation are fundamental components of a robust quality assurance system, enabling transparent tracking of product origins, movements, and transformations throughout the supply chain.

Effective traceability and documentation practices enhance accountability, mitigate risks, and ensure regulatory compliance. Consider the following aspects of traceability and documentation:

- **Documentation of Product Origins:** Require suppliers to maintain comprehensive records documenting the origins of organic products, including information about farms, growers, harvest dates, and cultivation practices. Transparent documentation of product origins facilitates traceability and enables verification of organic certification status, ensuring product authenticity and integrity.
- **Batch-Level Traceability:** Implement batch-level traceability systems that enable the identification and tracking of individual product batches from production to distribution. Batch-level traceability allows for rapid response to quality issues, recalls, or safety incidents, minimizing the impact on consumers and stakeholders.
- **Electronic Data Management Systems:** Leverage electronic data management systems to streamline documentation processes, facilitate data capture, and enhance traceability across the supply chain. Electronic data management systems enable real-time access to critical information, automated record-keeping, and seamless integration with inventory management and quality control systems.

#### F. Environmental and Social Responsibility Practices

Environmental and social responsibility practices are integral to sustainable business operations and ethical supply chain management.

When selecting foreign certified organic suppliers, prioritize suppliers that show environmental stewardship, social equity, and community engagement.

Consider the following aspects of environmental and social responsibility practices:

- **Sustainable Agriculture Practices:** Verify that the supplier employs sustainable agriculture practices that minimize environmental impact, conserve natural resources, and promote biodiversity. Sustainable agriculture practices may include organic farming methods, water conservation measures, soil regeneration techniques, and agroecological approaches to pest and disease management.
- **Fair Trade and Social Certification:** Look for suppliers that hold certifications or memberships in fair trade organizations or social responsibility initiatives. Fair trade certification ensures fair wages, safe working conditions, and community development opportunities for agricultural workers and local

communities. Social certification programs promote ethical labor practices, human rights protection, and social inclusion within the supply chain.

- **Community Engagement and Development:** Assess the supplier's engagement with local communities, indigenous peoples, and marginalized groups to promote socio-economic development, cultural preservation, and community empowerment. Meaningful community engagement initiatives may include capacity-building programs, educational opportunities, healthcare initiatives, and infrastructure development projects that benefit local stakeholders and enhance social cohesion.

### G. Reputation and Track Record

When evaluating foreign certified organic suppliers, reputation and track record serve as valuable indicators of reliability, integrity, and customer satisfaction. A supplier's reputation reflects its focus on quality, consistency, and ethical business practices within the organic industry. Consider the following aspects of reputation and track record when selecting a foreign certified organic supplier:

- **Industry Experience:** Assess the supplier's industry experience, tenure, and track record of success within the organic sector. Established suppliers with a proven track record of excellence are more likely to uphold high standards of quality, integrity, and customer service throughout the supply chain.
- **Customer Feedback and Testimonials:** Seek feedback and testimonials from existing customers, industry stakeholders, and trade associations regarding their experiences with the supplier. Positive customer feedback, endorsements, and recommendations attest to the supplier's reputation for reliability, professionalism, and responsiveness to customer needs.
- **Case Studies and Success Stories:** Review case studies, success stories, and project portfolios showcasing the supplier's successful partnerships, innovative solutions, and contributions to sustainable agriculture and organic production. Case studies provide insights into the supplier's capabilities, performance metrics, and impact on business outcomes.
- **Reputation in the Market:** Evaluate the supplier's reputation in the market, including its standing among competitors, industry peers, and regulatory authorities. Reputation rankings, industry awards, and recognition from reputable organizations can provide insights into the supplier's standing within the organic community and its affinity for excellence.

### H. Pricing and Cost Considerations

Pricing and cost considerations play a crucial role in selecting a foreign certified organic supplier, balancing affordability with quality, value, and long-term sustainability. While competitive pricing is important, it should not compromise product quality, safety, or ethical standards.

- **Cost of Organic Certification:** Factor in the cost of organic certification, accreditation fees, and inspection expenses associated with verifying compliance with organic standards and regulations. Organic certification adds value to products by certifying their authenticity, purity, and adherence to organic principles, but it also entails additional costs for suppliers.
- **Comparative Pricing Analysis:** Conduct a comparative pricing analysis to assess the competitiveness of the supplier's pricing structure relative to other suppliers in the market. Consider factors such as product quality, specifications, packaging, and additional services when comparing prices to ensure an apples-to-apples comparison.
- **Total Cost of Ownership:** Consider the total cost of ownership over the product lifecycle, including procurement, transportation, storage, handling, and distribution costs. Evaluate the overall cost-effectiveness of sourcing from the supplier, taking into account factors such as lead times, order quantities, payment terms, and logistics considerations.
- **Value-Added Services and Benefits:** Evaluate the value-added services, benefits, and incentives offered by the supplier, such as volume discounts, promotional offers, technical support, and after-sales service. Seek suppliers that provide comprehensive solutions, responsive customer support, and flexible pricing arrangements tailored to your business needs.
- **Cost-Benefit Analysis:** Conduct a cost-benefit analysis to weigh the financial implications of sourcing from the supplier against the potential benefits, savings, and value proposition offered by their products.

and services. Consider both short-term cost considerations and long-term objectives when making sourcing decisions.

The idea here is to take a closer look at the reputation and track record, as well as pricing and cost considerations of each foreign certified organic supplier. This way, businesses can make informed decisions when selecting foreign certified organic suppliers. Prioritizing suppliers with a positive reputation, proven track record, competitive pricing, and value-added services enhances supply chain efficiency, mitigates risks, and fosters long-term partnerships based on trust, transparency, and mutual benefit within the organic industry and beyond.

### RESEARCHING POTENTIAL SUPPLIERS

Researching potential suppliers is a crucial step in the process of selecting a foreign certified organic supplier. This phase involves identifying, evaluating, and engaging with suppliers to assess their suitability and alignment with your organization's requirements and values.

#### A. Identifying Potential Suppliers

1. **Market Research:** Begin by conducting market research to identify potential suppliers operating in regions known for organic agriculture and certification. Utilize online directories, industry associations, trade shows, and networking platforms to compile a list of certified organic suppliers specializing in your desired product categories.
2. **Referrals and Recommendations:** Seek referrals and recommendations from industry peers, trade partners, and professional networks familiar with certified organic sourcing practices. Personal recommendations can provide valuable insights and help streamline the supplier selection process.
3. **Online Supplier Portals:** Explore online supplier portals and marketplaces specializing in certified organic products. These platforms often feature detailed profiles of suppliers, including certification status, product offerings, and contact information, facilitating initial outreach and engagement.

#### B. Conducting Background Checks and Due Diligence

1. **Verification of Certification:** Verify the certification status of potential suppliers by reviewing their organic certification documents and accreditation from recognized certifying bodies. Confirm compliance with international organic standards such as USDA Organic, EU Organic, and JAS (Japan Agricultural Standards).
2. **Assessment of Reputation:** Evaluate the reputation and credibility of potential suppliers by researching their track record, client testimonials, and industry affiliations. Assess online reviews, ratings, and feedback from past clients to gauge satisfaction levels and identify any red flags or concerns.
3. **Background Screening:** Conduct thorough background checks on potential suppliers to assess their financial stability, legal standing, and operational capabilities. Review corporate profiles, financial statements, and regulatory compliance records to ensure alignment with your organization's risk tolerance and due diligence requirements.

#### C. Requesting Samples and Product Specifications

1. **Sample Requests:** Request samples of the desired products from potential suppliers to evaluate quality, consistency, and adherence to specifications. Assess product samples for sensory attributes, nutritional content, and overall **suitability** for your intended applications.
2. **Product Specifications:** Obtain detailed product specifications, including ingredient lists, processing methods, packaging requirements, and shelf-life considerations. Clarify any specific customization or formulation requirements to ensure alignment with your organization's quality standards and product specifications.

#### D. Evaluating Supplier Communication and Responsiveness

3. **Communication Channels:** Evaluate the communication channels and responsiveness of potential suppliers in addressing inquiries, providing updates, and resolving issues. Assess the clarity, professionalism, and timeliness of communication to gauge the supplier's transparency and customer service excellence.
4. **Accessibility and Availability:** Determine the accessibility and availability of key contacts within the supplier organization for ongoing communication and collaboration. Clarify expectations regarding

communication protocols, response times, and escalation procedures to facilitate effective relationship management.

Researching potential suppliers requires diligence, discernment, and attention to detail to identify partners that align with your organization's values, objectives, and quality standards. This way, you can mitigate risks, foster productive partnerships, and secure reliable sources of certified organic products.

### CONCLUSION

The process of selecting a foreign certified organic supplier is a multifaceted endeavor that requires careful consideration of numerous factors, from certification standards and transparency in sourcing to quality assurance and pricing considerations. In an increasingly interconnected global marketplace, businesses must deal with complex supply chains and regulatory landscapes to identify partners that uphold the principles of sustainability, integrity, and consumer trust.

Throughout this whitepaper, we have explored the essence of organic certification, examined the various types of certified organic products, and outlined key factors to consider when evaluating potential suppliers. From understanding the nuances of organic standards to conducting thorough research and due diligence, businesses have gained actionable insights to streamline the supplier selection process and establish robust partnerships that align with their sustainability goals and quality standards.

Organic certification serves as a hallmark of excellence and integrity within the organic industry, providing consumers with assurance regarding the authenticity and purity of organic products.

As businesses strive to meet the evolving demands of conscious consumers and regulatory requirements, the importance of selecting reputable and reliable certified organic suppliers cannot be overstated.

In the dynamic landscape of the organic industry, collaboration and innovation are key drivers of growth and transformation.

The journey to selecting a foreign certified organic supplier is not merely a transactional process but an opportunity to forge partnerships that enrich communities, safeguard ecosystems, and promote the well-being of present and future generations.

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