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As the Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak continues to create travel restrictions which may impact organic certification, the Accredited Certifiers Association (ACA) and the International Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA) are today releasing an industry-wide pandemic contingency plan, *Contingency Plans for Verifying Compliance When On-Site Inspections are not Possible*. This “Best Practices” document, which can be found on the [ACA Website](#), is the result of collaboration of over 125 participants, representing organic certifiers, independent organic inspectors, and other stakeholders.

The ACA and IOIA’s foremost concern is the health and safety of our staff, inspectors, individuals at the operations we certify, and their families. We are also mindful that consumers seeking organic foods rely on us for continued trust in the integrity of the organic label. Fortunately, there are many tools, based in regulatory text and guidance, that we can use to verify organic compliance while travel restrictions are in place and on-site inspections may not be possible. The Best Practices we developed are based on critical thinking to develop a set of general guidelines, tools, and practices that are consistent and credible, while remaining flexible to allow certifiers, inspectors, and operations to use critical thinking on a case-by-case basis to develop and document specifics for each situation.

Our general recommendations include:

- Certifiers should use a risk-based assessment to determine what combination of remote inspection and records audit should be used to verify compliance for each existing (already certified) operation. When on-site inspections are possible, certifiers should also use a risk-based approach to prioritize.
- For existing operations who are seeking the addition of new products, land, or facilities, certifiers should evaluate whether a remote inspection can be sufficient to assess compliance.
- New applications for certification should be prioritized for on-site inspections once they become possible, as new operations cannot obtain initial certification without an onsite inspection.
- Accredited certifiers are urged to communicate regularly with their clients, including sharing directly the contingency plan for inspections.

- Certifiers, inspectors, and operations should continue to remain inspection-ready and maintain good documentation of their procedures.

The Best Practices document also includes resources for ACAs and inspectors including:

- Specific recommendations on how a remote inspection or desk audit should be conducted, including options for operations with limited access to technology.
- Opportunities to support inspectors - who are a critical piece of the organic community and whose livelihoods are dramatically impacted by the inability to conduct on-site inspections during this pandemic.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to develop, we will monitor and evaluate the state of organic inspections and the implementation of these Best Practices.

We recognize this continues to be a challenging and unprecedented time with constantly changing conditions. Certified organic producers and operations in the process of applying for certification should reach out directly to their accredited certifier with any questions about the effects of COVID-19 on their organic certification process.

We hope you, your employees, and your families stay safe and healthy. The health and safety of our organic community remain at the center of all decision making.

We encourage everyone to monitor WHO and CDC resources for the most up-to-date announcements and information about the virus:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>

About Accredited Certifiers Association, Inc.

The Accredited Certifiers Association, Inc. (ACA) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization created to benefit the accredited organic certifier community and the organic industry. We envision a world in which the USDA Organic label is always trusted and valued. Our primary mission is to ensure consistent implementation of USDA Organic Regulations through collaboration and education of accredited certification agencies. Purposes include, developing uniform criteria for implementation of the USDA National Organic Program, certifier training, support and networking opportunities and being a forum for discussion of issues impacting organic certification.

About International Organic Inspectors Association

The International Organic Inspectors Association is the professional organization of organic inspectors and offers training and networking world-wide for crop, livestock, and processing inspectors. Incorporated in the USA as a nonprofit, IOIA operates globally with nearly 250 inspector members in more than a dozen countries. Supporting membership is open to individuals, businesses, and organizations that support IOIA's goals.