



## Small-Scale Certification

### The Self-Declaration Model

The Self-Declaration model of Organic Certification is a model based on trust and the integrity of farmers who use organic principles as a statement of their values.

Producers pledge their adherence to the Canadian Organic Standards through both an online format and in their direct-to-consumer marketing efforts. With this Organic Pledge, producers open up their farm and practices to the scrutiny of their customers and other farmers.

- Only produce sold directly to the final consumer by the farmer (and/or their employees) can be identified as “Organically Pledged.” Restaurants, retailers and processors are not final consumers, and thus 3<sup>rd</sup> party certification is necessary when marketing organic products to them.
- Farmers using the Organic Pledge must prove understanding of the current Canadian Organic Standards (COS) and identify all the Standards that pertain to their businesses. This may be done through an in-person or online workshop. They must maintain their knowledge of the standards as the standards are updated. Once the farmer has successfully completed such a workshop, they must list at least 2 organic farmers (who are either 3<sup>rd</sup> party certified organic or approved to use the organic pledge) who can serve as mentors when needed.
- A farmer who wants to use the Organic Pledge must complete a Self-Assessment which identifies and describes their farm operation as well as cross-reference the relevant sections of the COS to show an understanding of the COS and how it applies to their operation. This must also include reasonable predictions of what types of inputs will be required, where they will come from and that they are permitted in organic systems. Any purchased inputs used should be listed on the OrganicInputs.ca website or have an organic certification seal.
- Farmers using the Organic Pledge will need to pay an annual renewal fee to cover the costs of administration and have an up-to-date pledge (for the current year) on display at their marketing sites as well as on-line (through, for example, their website if they have one). The content of the pledge is public (including the farm’s Self-Assessment and mentors) and the list of all farmers who have signed the pledge is public.

- Ideally, a website would be created called “Canada Local Organically Grown” (or if under a provincial regulation “Province Local Organically Grown”). This Program could be maintained by a coalition of existing organic organizations within a province or across Canada or provincial government organization or a federal government organization. Whoever operates the program will share the responsibility as well as offer a clear access link from their own websites.

Any complaint toward a Local Organically Grown farm must not be anonymous. In the event of a complaint Local Organically Grown Farmers from the region or an inspector from a Certifying Body will be invited to inspect the farm and submit a written report which will be available and transparent on the website. If the farmer or inspector are unwilling to sign a report saying the farm in question has every intention to maintain organic integrity, said farm will be removed from the Local Organically Grown system. This model is one based on trust, the goal is that the farmers in question will learn/change practices to address any issues that are identified. (Need to clarify and determine level of exposure of the person filing the complaint - how have enough to prevent malicious anonymous filings but not so much to create bad blood amongst neighbours)

A checklist will be available on the website for farmers and customers to use as a guide when visiting Local Organically Grown farms.

All farmers using the pledge must be able to back up their practices in case of complaints/questions of their organic integrity with receipts or records (such as input purchases).

The Pledge will make clear that it cannot replace third party certification/inspection and that no products associated with this system can be resold using the words Organic or Organically grown.

The Pledge will be revisited every five years by member farms for inclusion of new criteria or amendments to existing criteria if necessary. They will also be able to participate in the regular revision process of the Canadian Organic Standards.

One of the goals of the Local Organically Grown is to promote our local and organic food system.

Below is a sample pledge that has been used successfully in various states in the USA (this one used in Michigan):

### **A Michigan Farmer’s Pledge**

#### **On our farm we ...**

Promise to build and maintain healthy soils by using acceptable crop rotations, cover and green manure crops, compost and manure where appropriate and available, and natural mineral supplements when needed.

Vow to protect the soil, water and air by preventing erosion and reducing pollution through the most responsible farming practices we can implement.

Promise to use environmentally friendly farming methods and refrain from using synthetic insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, synthetic fertilizers, chemically treated seeds, irradiation, sewage sludge and toxic materials, choosing to rely on materials that are acceptable for use on organic farms.

Pledge to use traditional methods of plant and animal breeding and reject the use of animal cloning and genetic modification or engineering (GMO or GE) of seeds, and other inputs using this technology.

Promise to treat all livestock humanely and provide access to the outdoors and fresh air, preferably as pasture, to all animals on the farm and to use no antibiotics, hormones or GMOs in feed.

Will conserve the nutritional value of food and feed by careful handling during and after harvest.

Promise to use health and environment friendly processing methods.

Treat family members, volunteers and farm workers with respect, ensure their safety on the farm, provide a challenging and comfortable work environment, and pay them as well as the situation permits.

Cooperate with other farmers to preserve farmland and farming knowledge.

Cooperate with community leaders and members to create the most local food system possible in our area and a more sustainable way of life for all.

Practice conservation of energy whenever possible.

Support agricultural markets and infrastructures that enable small farms to thrive.

Encourage biodiversity and practice its conservation on our farms.

Maintain the land in healthy condition for future generations of farmers.

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