

# Certification Issues in Organic Soil Fertility Management

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# Role of the Organic Inspector

- Review the Organic Systems Plan for soil/crop fertility management



- Role of office staff = plan compliance
- Role of on-site inspector = farm operations compliance



# On-Farm Inspection Concerns

- Office staff review OSP once; annual inspections required to monitor crop production practices
  - Does the Plan adequately address soil and nutrient management?  
Must maintain or improve physical, chemical and biological properties.
    - Heavy crop foragers
    - Light soils
    - Run-off potential
    - Etc.



# Grower Fertility Requirements

- Manage fertility through:
  - Crop rotations
  - Cover crops
  - Application of plant & animal material (raw, composted)
- One of the above options must be practiced in a manner that doesn't contaminate crops, soil or water by plant nutrients, pathogens, heavy metals, or residues of prohibited materials





# Compost

- Animal manure/products – normally composted (ex. Foster Farms bedding)
  - Can be applied without pre-harvest restrictions if meet all composting requirements
- Plant materials – normally composted (ex. Feather River Organics green waste)
  - County green waste with contaminants removed
  - Generally considered “mulch” with no restrictions on use or production (CCOF)
- OMRI approved materials



# Crop Rotation

- Defined as using sod, cover crops, green manure crops, etc. to:
  - Maintain or improve OM
  - Provide for pest management – soil borne pests
  - Manage deficient or excessive nutrients – salt tolerant forages, legumes
  - Provide erosion control



# Soil Testing

- Testing program must be described yet it doesn't need to be annual, only “regular”
  - Specific nutrient levels not tracked but,
  - Inspector should confirm documented soil deficiencies (micronutrients)
- Crop monitoring is most common
- Tissue testing optional



# Growers Are Largely Self-Regulating

- Cost – benefit of fertility inputs
- Supply/quality reliability
- Economic sustainability





# **NOP Biodiversity Concern**

**(incorporated in CCOF inspections in 2008)**

- Do production activities impact the presence of riparian areas, sensitive natural resources or wildlife habitats?
  - Need to maintain or improve these and other natural resources of the grower's operation
  - Natural resources = physical, hydrological, biological features of an operation including soil, water, wetlands, woodlands & wildlife





# International Considerations

- Future New Canadian Grower Standards:
  - Manure from “landless” operations or “factory farms” prohibited
  - Grower should use all available on-farm manure before purchasing additional supplies
  - Chilean nitrate prohibited
- IFOAM:
  - Steam soil sterilization prohibited
  - Primary ecosystems cannot be cleared for production



# Final Considerations

- Inspectors don't make certification decisions; they write reports that are evaluated by office staff
- There are differences in interpretation between inspectors within the same ACA and between ACAs
- The National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances is straightforward
- The organic tool box grows annually

