


Short introduction: Steps to Organic Certification

(This summary applies to all the organic certification programmes CERES works with. In some cases, additional requirements are defined in specific documents for the respective programme)

*Steps marked with an asterisk are applicable only in the indicated cases!

	Procedure	Applicant or client	CERES
1	Request	Commonly, applicants present a first general request, asking about requirements, procedures, prices for certification	The applicant receives from CERES a first package of information, by e-mail, mail, or fax, often combined with individual additional information by phone. This package includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the present document, • a company profile, • a brief information concerning requirements in the respective area (e.g. crop production, beekeeping, wild collection, processing), • and an application form.
2	Formal application	Client completes application form	CERES reviews application. In case we can offer the requested service, the application is approved.
3	Offer		Based on our daily fees and the size of the unit to be certified, we calculate the certification fees. We submit the applicant a written offer. Normally this is a flat fee, meaning that the applicant knows definitively how much the procedure will cost, independently from how long the inspector stays on the holding. As per NOP requirements, we also provide an approximate estimate of travel expenses. For other certification programs, costs for travelling and accommodation are usually not included in the offer. Together with the offer, we submit a certification contract.
4	Contract	Once the applicant and CERES have agreed on the fees, the applicant signs the contract. By doing so, he/she is committed to fulfilling the organic standards.	CERES sends back a counter-signed copy of the contract.
5	Pre-payment	The client pays the agreed advance payment.	CERES submits the client a second package of information, including, among others: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relevant CERES policies, • relevant standards, • standard inspection program(s) • the organic management plan.
6	Working out the organic management plan	The client fills in the organic management plan (OMP). Going through the OMP is also helpful for identification of any noncompliance and correcting it. Clients, who have been certified by other certifiers before, are obliged to submit, together with their OMP, any Notice of noncompliance or Denial from	

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		the previous certifier, and evidence of correcting the non-compliances.	
7	OMP Review		CERES reviews the OMP and informs the client about the result of this review. This step is essential for NOP certification, not for other organic certification programs.
8	Corrective actions	*If noncompliances are detected during review of the OMP, these should be corrected even before the first inspection takes place. Example: Establishment of a clear separation system between organic and conventional products in processing companies.	
9	Scheduling inspection	Inspector and client schedule a date for the inspection. If plausible reasons exist, the client has the right to reject an inspector and ask CERES to assign a different person.	
10	Inspection	The responsible persons must be present, records must be prepared. The inspection report is signed by the client or an authorized representative.	The inspector verifies, whether the management plan is consistent with the reality, and identifies any findings
11	Inspection report		Immediately after the inspection, the inspector finishes his/her report and submits it to the CERES headquarter.
12	Evaluation	The client receives a copy of the inspection report. The client proposes corrective actions for non-conformities found	The report is reviewed by the responsible evaluation officer. *Often, additional questions must be clarified with the inspector. *Whenever non-conformities are found, these normally must be corrected before a certificate can be issued.
13	Final invoice	Payment of the remaining fee according to the offer, plus travelling cost.	Issues the invoice
14	Certification decision		CERES makes the certification decision, normally within 4 weeks after the inspection, maximum 6 weeks. There are basically three possibilities:
			a) Client complies with the standard → Certificate is issued and sent to client
		Client corrects noncompliances and sends evidence to CERES →	b) Client has non-compliances which need to be corrected. This may include missing documents, or more substantial things. → CERES issues Notice of Noncompliance. Certificate is issued once CERES has evidence of correction of non-compliances (in some cases, this may involve an additional inspection).
		c) Client has major noncompliances which cannot be corrected in the short term →	CERES issues a Denial of Certification letter.

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	Procedure	Applicant or client	CERES	
		For Bulgaria: Certificate is issued after receiving final harvested amounts, but not later than 31 October of the current year for agricultural and livestock operations or 31 December for processing, trade and wild collection operations.		

Please be reminded that, in addition to this routine procedure, CERES may conduct unannounced inspections at any time. Clients for unannounced inspections may be selected risk based, or randomly. Since conducting such unannounced inspections is compulsory for CERES, the costs are charged to the client.

This whole procedure is apparently very long and complicated. Nevertheless, many steps, which are presented here one after the other, in reality often take place at the same time. Clients can contribute to **acceleration** by:

- paying on time
- filling in immediately and thoroughly the necessary forms, contracts etc.
- implementing immediately necessary corrective actions.

Concerning special requirements of **JAS** certification (for the Japanese organic market) or **NOP** (for the US organic market) please refer to our documents "Brief Info JAS" (3.2.11), and "Brief Info NOP" (3.2.10).

Please be aware that companies **outside the European Union**, after issuing the certificate, have to obtain a transaction certificate (also called "certificate of inspection") for each shipment of organic products to the EU organic market. This is issued by CERES (Please refer to our "Brief Info Import", 3.2.8)

During all of the process from application through certification and the annual renewal process, the client has the right to file complaints or appeals to CERES. They will be handled according to CERES internal rules and the respective standard and the client will be informed of the outcome of the complaint assessment.