

NOP Import Certificates for Imports of Organic Products into the USA

Important: The following information reflects the current state of knowledge (as of February 2024) and may be subject to change. Please be sure to always double check for recent updates.

Abbreviations

NOP-IC	NOP Import C ertificate	Special type of transaction certificate for organic imports into the USA
OID	O rganic I ntegrity D atabase	Online platform / database of the USDA
CB	C ontrol B ody	Organic certification body
AWB	A ir W aybill	Official air transport document
B/L	B ill of L ading	Official maritime transport document
SWB	S ea W aybill	Official maritime transport document
CMR	C onvention Relative au C ontrat de T ransport I nternational de M archandises par R out	Official road transport document
ETD	E stimated T ime of D eparture	With regard to NOP-IC applications, meaning the day when the goods are going to depart from the country of export

1. Introduction

Starting **March 19, 2024**, the Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) of the National Organic Program (NOP) will be implemented.

(NOP SOE publication: [Federal Register :: National Organic Program \(NOP\); Strengthening Organic Enforcement](#))

Amongst other amendments, it determines that all organic products imported into the USA will require an NOP Import Certificate (NOP-IC) as a mandatory part of import documentation.

This change expands the use of the NOP-IC. In the past, this special COI/TC type was only used for sales under specific equivalency agreements and was issued via a word or pdf template provided by the USDA.

With the implementation of the SOE, the USDA makes **NOP Import Certificates mandatory for all organic imports into the US**, to improve oversight and traceability. This new type of NOP-IC is to be issued via a new Import Certificate Module within the OID (Organic Integrity Database = online database of the USDA).

NOP Import Certificates are only mandatory for organic imports into the USA, not for any sales under NOP to other countries or products which are only transferred via the USA to a different final destination (e.g. Canada).

2. How it works

Step 1	<p>Exporter sends NOP-IC application (application form as well as all required documents) to the responsible COI/TC department of their CB.</p> <p>This must be done well in advance before departure of the shipment, in accordance with the CB's general handling times!</p>
Step 2	<p>COI/TC department checks the documents and prepares the NOP-IC on the OID (Organic Integrity Database of the USDA)</p>
Step 3	<p>If everything is found to be correct and complete, the CB issues the NOP-IC on the OID and sends the NOP-IC number to the exporter (who in turn provides the NOP-IC number to the importer).</p> <p>The NOP-IC must be issued before departure of the goods!</p>
Step 4	<p>The product is exported.</p> <p>The exporter must provide all final documents to their CB as soon as these are available. CERES provides the NOP-IC PDF once all final documents are received and all pending details updated. (The exporter provides the NOP-IC PDF to the importer.)</p>

3. NOP Import Certificate (NOP-IC) issuance – procedure and timeline

In the following, we will summarize the most important aspects regarding NOP-IC applications (according to the current state of knowledge as of February 2024):

- a) The NOP-IC is **mandatory for organic imports into the US that depart from the country of export on or after March 19, 2024, and must be issued via a new module within the OID (Organic Integrity Database).**
- b) The **NOP-IC must be issued BEFORE the goods leave the country of export.** **IMPORTANT:** Once the goods have left the country of export/origin, we will not be able to issue an NOP-IC for this shipment, seeing as this would not comply with the NOP SOE requirements. It is the responsibility of the exporter to make sure that the shipment does not leave the country of export before the NOP-IC is issued.
- c) Seeing as the NOP-IC requires some specific details that are unique to this COI/TC type, there is a separate application form specifically for NOP-ICs.
As always, a general list of required documents is included in the annex of the application form. CERES may ask for additional documents to complete traceability. (Depending on the individual sales and production chain etc.)
- d) The exporter must **apply for the NOP-IC as early as possible with enough time for CERES to check the documents and rule out any doubts before the shipment.**
Please take into account our regular handling times for COI/TC applications and, in case an application cannot be submitted with sufficient time in advance, also consider using the EXPRESS service option that we offer for all national sales as well as international shipments by vessel or train (NOT applicable for international air- and land freight; generates additional costs, see our price list).

For **international vessel (and train) shipments** the application should be sent **at least 6-10 working days prior to the shipment. International air- and land freight** should be submitted **at least 2-5 working days before the shipment** and need to be **marked as Flight/AWB or Truck/CMR in the subject line of the email** so that they can be handled with priority. (“Working days” do not include weekends and national holidays.)

Please **carefully check our General guidance for COI / TC applications** (available on our website under Documents > COI/TC) for a summary of the most important aspects regarding COI / TC applications (all types) as well as an overview of handling times and service options. **This is crucial to avoid unnecessary delays and misunderstandings.**

In case the official waybill (B/L, CMR or AWB) and commercial invoice are issued only after the departure of the goods, **we also accept draft versions of the waybill (or booking confirmations) and proforma invoices for NOP-IC issuance.**

In case it is actually impossible to provide a (draft) waybill (B/L, CMR or AWB) and/or (proforma) invoice in time for the application, we will accept the application without this document.

Once the original waybill (B/L, CMR or AWB) and commercial invoice are available, they must be sent to us immediately.

CERES will not be responsible for any delays in entering the missing data or availability of the NOP-IC PDF in case these documents are not provided in time. This needs to be an automatic process without the need for CERES to send reminders. **If we do not receive the relevant documents even after sending a reminder, we may stop issuing new COI/TC/NOP-IC.**

In case of **changes between application / proforma / draft and original (final) version** of invoice or waybill (B/L, CMR or AWB), **it is the responsibility of the exporter to actively inform CERES about this when sending the final documents.**

- e) The **NOP-IC number is shared immediately after issuance of the NOP-IC.** We have been informed that the importer needs the NOP IC number to complete the necessary entries in the CBP’s system (CBP = Customs and Border Protection) before departure of the goods. However, the **PDF of the NOP-IC will only be shared after receiving the final documents.**
- f) The NOP SOE final rule determines that **one NOP-IC can always only cover one product / HTS Code ([Harmonized Tariff Schedule \(usitc.gov\)](https://www.usitc.gov)).** This means that, if a shipment contains various products, we will have to issue various NOP-ICs for this shipment. However, **it is possible to include various lots / batches of one product into one NOP-IC, even if these batches are different variations of the product. The only condition is that it must all be the same product / HTS Code.**
- For example, one NOP-IC could be issued for the general product “100% Organic Green Tea” and include several lots of varying packaging (small packages, green tea bags, green tea in bulk) quality grades etc.
- In any case, the product name on the NOP-IC must, of course, match the labelling. Further instructions form OID manuals: *“Product as Labeled - for raw products, enter the common name of the product(s) (e.g. lemons or limes). For packaged products, enter the name shown on the principal display panel (front of the package).”*
- Make sure to take this into account when filling in the application form.

Also, **one application can still include various products**, same as for other COI/TC types. We will generally issue one NOP-IC per product as listed in the application form. **(As always: Maximum one shipment per application.)**

- g) **One NOP-IC may include several shipments (of the same product, same final handler and for the same importer).**

The SOE determines that it is entirely up to the issuing Control Body (CB) to decide whether they apply this option, depending on risk assessment, individual control systems and general procedures.

CERES will generally allow to include up to 15 shipments within a period of max. 3 months into one NOP-IC.

This rule may be updated at any time, for all clients or individual operators, due to individual circumstances (including but not limited to residue cases, alerts, suspensions, risk detection etc.) or general changes of CERES procedures.

(Also, due to the limit of maximum characters per box of the NOP-IC template on the OID, it may in some cases not be possible to include the details, references etc. 15 shipments in one NOP-IC (due to this technical limitation). In these cases, we must, of course, issue a new NOP-IC even if the limit of 15 shipment within 3 months has not been reached yet.)

IF you wish to include a product into an existing, valid NOP-IC (that was issued for a previous shipment of the same product, same final handler and for the same importer less than 3 months before departure of the new shipment), the corresponding **NOP-IC number must be included in the application form** (in the appropriate box within the Product Details section).

Regardless of whether a product is included in an existing NOP-IC or if a new NOP-IC is issued, the **application must always be sent well in advance BEFORE departure of the goods**, with sufficient time for the document check, clarification of any potential questions and issuance / update of the NOP-IC **in time before departure of the shipment**. Please make sure to take into account our general handling times (see General Guidance for COI/TC applications on our website under Documents > BIO > COI/TC).

- h) All NOP-ICs have a start and end date to define the effective period of the NOP-IC. After the end date, the NOP-IC status becomes invalid. **The NOP-IC must be valid at the time of departure of the product from the country of export (for all included shipments)**, i.e. departure of the goods must take place before the end date of the effective period. This is essential.

If the shipment reaches the US after the NOP-IC end date, i.e. the NOP-IC becomes invalid while the goods are in transit, this is acceptable (as long as the NOP-IC was valid at the time of departure of the shipment).

- i) The following details can be updated after issuance of the NOP-IC.
(Errors or changes regarding any other details will require a replacement NOP-IC.)
- Certificate End Date
 - Total Net Weight in KG
 - Total Number of Containers
 - Shipping Identification (which may include Flight or Vessel Number, Container Number, Lot Number, etc.)
 - Remarks

4. NOP-IC content and notes

1. CERTIFIED TO [XXXXX] ORGANIC STANDARDS: Standard under which the goods are imported into the US as organic (NOP or equivalent)
2. CITY AND STATE OF PRODUCT DESTINATION: Autopopulated based on the entry for Recipient (box 7)
3. DATE: Start and End Date of the effective period of the NOP-IC
4. IMPORT CERTIFICATE NUMBER: Serial number of the NOP-IC, assigned by OID. The NPO-IC number length is a minimum 21 digits with dashes (123-1234567890-123456). The first three digits are the country code of the CB issuing the NOP-IC. The next 10 digits are the certified Exporter or Final Handler NOP Operation ID that the NOP-IC is issued on behalf of by their CB. The next two digits are the last two digits of the year when the import certificate is issued. The last four digits are an incremental number based on the number of certificates issued for the Exporter or Final Handler operation. That number resets every year on Jan 1. If more than 9,999 certificates are issued for a single operation in one calendar year, the certificate number will be extended to 22 or more digits (123-1234567890-1234567).
5. EXPORTED BY (NAME AND ADDRESS): Individual or business that is exporting the product to the U.S. If the best contact information for international trade issues for the operation is different from the primary contact listed in the OID, it is possible to enter alternate exporter contact information (contact first name, last name, phone number and email).
6. PRODUCT EXPORTED FROM: Country of export
7. RECIPIENT IN U.S. (NAME AND ADDRESS): Importer of the goods. If the best contact information for international trade issues for the operation is different from the primary contact listed in the OID, it is possible to enter alternate importer contact information (contact first name, last name, phone number and email).
8. CERTIFYING BODY ISSUING CERTIFICATE (NAME AND ADDRESS): CB who issues the NOP-IC
9. TOTAL NET WEIGHT: Total net weight of all goods covered by the NOP-IC
10. TOTAL CONTAINERS: Total number of air or vessel containers carrying the goods covered by the NOP-IC
11. PRODUCT AS LABELED: Name of the product covered by the NOP-IC. (Every NOP-IC can only cover one product. For raw products, enter the common name of the product (e.g. lemons or limes). For packaged products, enter the name shown on the principal display panel (front of the package).)
12. HARMONIZED TARIFF CODE AS APPLICABLE: Harmonized Tariff Schedule (HTS) code for the product. HTS codes are listed at <https://hts.usitc.gov/>
13. SHIPPING IDENTIFICATION: Identification / reference numbers of the shipment(s), for example lot / invoice / waybill / container number etc.

14. FINAL HANDLER: Can be identical with the exporter or different. Final Handler is the operator who performed the last activity of production or preparation (processing, packaging, labelling). If the best contact information for international trade issues for the operation is different from the primary contact listed in the OID, it is possible to enter alternate Final Handler contact information (contact first name, last name, phone number and email).
15. CERTIFYING BODY OF FINAL HANDLER: Autopopulated based on Final Handler NOP ID
16. REMARKS AND ATTESTATIONS: Attestation applies to products certified under Trade Partner programs. Remarks can include other additional details that could not be entered in any other box.
17. SIGNATURE OF CERTIFYING BODY
18. DATE: Date of issuance of the NOP-IC (in case of update after first issuance, this date changes accordingly)