

## Complying with SOE: Importing Organic Fiber and Textiles

- **What is SOE:** On March 19, 2024, the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) final rule on Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) rule came fully into effect. SOE is the biggest change to organic regulations since the creation of the National Organic Program. The rule closes gaps in the current regulations and builds consistent certification practices to detect and prevent fraud, improve the transparency and traceability of organic products across the supply chain, and protect organic integrity to support continued growth of the organic market.
  
- **How does SOE impact imports?** With the implementation of the SOE rule, food and fiber certified to the USDA organic regulations or to an equivalent [trade partner's](#) organic standards must have an NOP Import Certificate to be sold in the U.S. Exporters and importers handling USDA organic products must be certified. However, current USDA organic enforcement does not extend to textile products that are certified to private third-party standards. Therefore, some specific fiber or textile products as well as the importers and exporters and those who handle them may not require an NOP Import Certificate.
  
- **What types of organic fiber products are impacted?** The SOE rule does not change how organic fiber products have historically been regulated under the USDA NOP organic regulations. The regulations do not include processing or manufacturing standards for textile products. USDA has taken a two-prong approach to organic claims on fiber and textiles:
  - Any textile product produced in full compliance with the NOP regulations may be labeled as USDA certified organic and display the USDA organic seal.
  
  - Alternatively, the NOP allows the use of the term “organic” in the labeling of textile products that are certified under third-party certification bodies as long as all of the fibers identified as “organic” in these textile products are produced and certified under the NOP regulations. Textile products that are produced in accordance with the [Global Organic Textile Standard \(GOTS\)](#) may be sold as organic in the U.S. While USDA guidance only mentions GOTS by name, it can be inferred that other organic content standards such as [Textile Exchange Organic Content Standard \(OCS\)](#) or [OEKO-TEX Organic Cotton Standards](#) would be similarly allowed as long as all of the fibers identified as “organic” in these textile products are produced and certified under the NOP regulations. **In all of these third-party certification examples, the product may not refer to NOP certification or display the USDA organic seal.**



## Raw fiber

Must be certified to the NOP if it carries an organic claim.



**SOE Requirement:** Raw fiber imported into the U.S. requires an NOP Import Certificate and the exporter and importer must be certified.

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## Finished product if the product is making a USDA certified organic claim

Must be certified to the NOP regulations if it carries an USDA organic claim or uses the USDA organic seal.



**SOE Requirement:** For products meeting this definition imported into the U.S., an NOP Import Certificate is required and the exporter and importer must be certified.

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## Finished product certified to GOTS or making a content claim under the Organic Content Standard, OEKO-TEX® ORGANIC COTTON, or similar

If specific fibers in the finished product are certified organic but the product on a whole is not certified (e.g., clothing with less than 70% organic fibers, synthetic fibers or dyes), the label may claim the specific fibers are organic and state the percentage of organic fibers. Textile products that meet the GOTS standard may carry an organic product claim and be sold as organic in the U.S., while those with organic content meeting Textile Exchange OCS, OEKO-TEX or similar content standard may carry an organic content claim. Unless the finished product is certified to the NOP regulations, product labels may not state or imply that the finished product is USDA organic or use the USDA organic seal.



**SOE Requirement:** Finished products that are currently outside the scope of USDA organic enforcement **do not require an NOP Import Certificate**, nor must the exporter or importer be certified due to SOE (check with your third-party standard for certification and label requirements). NOP Import Certificates are not available or required for textiles not certified to the NOP or equivalent trade partner's standards.

## ➤ Additional Resources

[Strengthening Organic Enforcement Frequently Asked Questions](#) | See [Organic Imports and Import Certificates](#) for fiber and textile-specific info

[USDA Electronic Organic Import Certificates](#) | Summary of NOP Import Certificate process

[NOP Strengthening Organic Enforcement Final Rule Primers](#) | Condensed version of regulatory text with plain-language description of what the text means; Primer Document 3 covers NOP Import Certificates

[NOP Policy Memorandum 11-14 Labeling of Textiles That Contain Organic Ingredients](#)

[OTA Fiber Council & Fiber Resources](#)