

SOE Implication Snapshot for Organic Produce: Storage and Cooler Facilities

The Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) final rule supports the continued growth of the organic market and improves oversight at critical links in the supply chain. The new regulation represents the biggest change to organic regulations since the creation of USDA's National Organic Program. SOE enforcement begins March 19, 2024, and there are many implications for the organic network.

Does your storage facility or cooler need to be certified? It depends.

Under SOE, the only certification exemption for storage or cooler facilities is for the handling of produce packaged in sealed, tamper-evident package(s). If facilities store produce packed without tamper-evident packaging, they need to be certified by March 19, 2024. Failure to use a certified storage or cooling facility will render organic produce no longer organic.

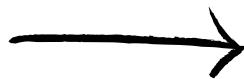
The distinction for certification comes down to whether the produce is sealed in a tamper-evident package or not. See below for examples of common packaging scenarios, and how that packaging determines organic certification requirements.

Broccoli in a carton



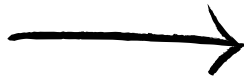
REQUIRES CERTIFICATION

Broccoli in a plastic wrap



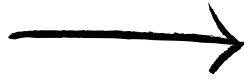
DOES NOT REQUIRE CERTIFICATION

- > Berries in a clamshell without a tamper sticker



REQUIRES CERTIFICATION

- > Berries in a clamshell with a film closure, or a clamshell sealed with a sticker



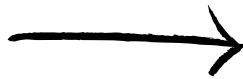
DOES NOT REQUIRE CERTIFICATION

- > Apples in a mesh bag that you tear to open



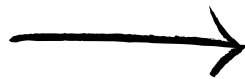
DOES NOT REQUIRE CERTIFICATION

- > Apples in a carton



REQUIRES CERTIFICATION

- > Unwrapped Lettuce in a reusable plastic crate (RPC)



REQUIRES CERTIFICATION

- > Wrapped lettuce in a RPC



DOES NOT REQUIRE CERTIFICATION