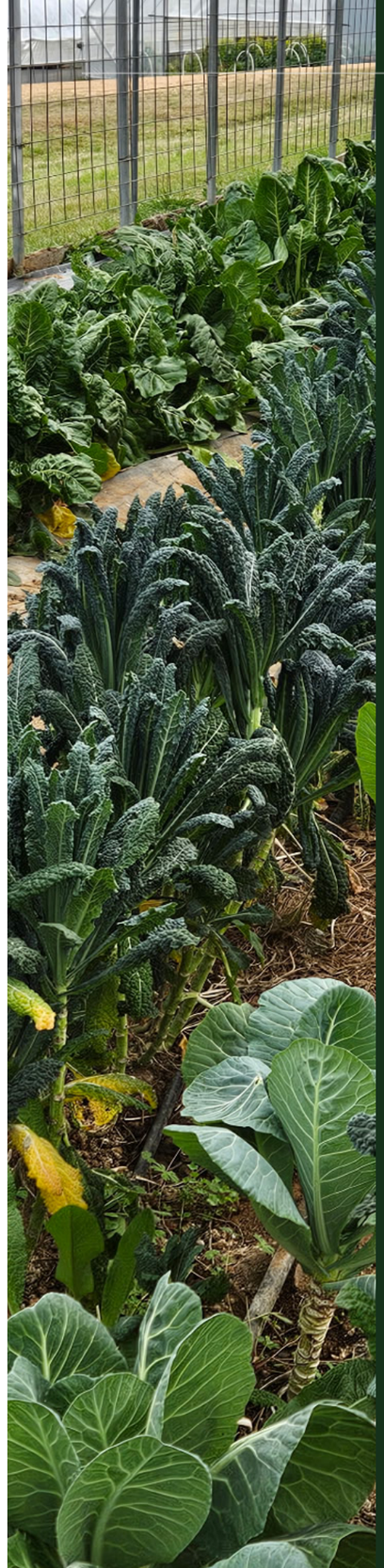
Workforce Development Needs Assessment for the Organic Industry

2025

Prepared for:

The Transition to Organic Partnership Program

Contents



About this Report

The Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) is a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)–funded program that seeks to support transitioning and existing organic farmers. The program is funded through the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and administered through the National Organic Program (NOP). Through cooperative agreements with USDA, partner organizations of TOPP provide technical assistance, training, education, mentorships, and resources that will support the continued growth of the organic industry and market.

This report was developed with support from Nexight Group—a consulting firm specializing in collaboration with public- and private-sector leaders to develop tailored solutions to complex technical and management challenges.

This needs assessment is based on a combination of desktop research, surveys, and interviews of organic certification and training professionals. Desktop research entailed the examination of materials related to organic inspection and education and workforce development created by USDA AMS, NOP, the International Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA), the Accredited Certifiers Association, the Organic Farmers Association (OFA), and TOPP. Although the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) does not collect specific data on organic inspectors or reviewers, this report uses data gathered on Agricultural Inspectors, which are catalogued by the BLS under Standard Occupation Code 45-2011, and Compliance Officers, catalogued under Standard Occupation Code 13-1041.

Surveys were disseminated to and completed voluntarily by a sample of organic inspectors, certification reviewers, and certification bodies across the industry and country. Interviews were conducted with organic inspectors, certification reviewers, and certification bodies, as well as the NOP Accreditation Division, the IOIA, the National Organic Coalition, and the OFA.

Executive Summary

Consistently strong consumer demand for domestically produced organic products has propelled the growth of the U.S. organic industry and created significant marketing opportunities for American farmers and business owners—in 2024 alone, the industry brought in a record $71.6 billion in sales, a 2.7 percent increase over 2023.[1] However, the industry is currently facing a major challenge that could prevent its future success.

The shortage of highly qualified organic inspectors, certification reviewers, and other certification professionals is threatening the continued growth of the U.S. organic industry.

These organic professionals serve as front-line defenders of the organic label and help keep American farms and businesses profitable and competitive. Development of a larger and more skilled organic certification workforce is needed to protect organic integrity, sustain consumer trust, and provide continued economic opportunity for Americans.

To address the growing shortage of qualified organic certification professionals, the Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) commissioned this 2025 Workforce Development Needs Assessment for the Organic Industry. This assessment aims to:

1. **Assess** the current state of the organic inspector and reviewer education and workforce landscape
2. **Identify** challenges to and recommendations for developing a larger, more skilled organic inspector and reviewer workforce

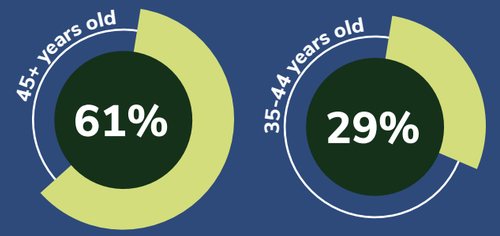
The pages that follow contain a summary of the findings of this assessment, including four key areas of coordinated, industry-wide action to address the shortage of qualified organic inspectors and certification reviewers.

[1]2025 Organic Market Report, Organic Trade Association, April 2025, https://ota.com/OrganicMarketReport.

ORGANIC INSPECTORS

Travel to an operation, observe the operation's practices and systems, and write an inspection report

Age Demographics



KSAs

- Adaptability
- Basic math skills
- Communication
- Curiosity
- Flexibility
- Observation
- Technical knowledge

41% of inspectors work full-time

3 IN 4 of inspectors are independent contractors

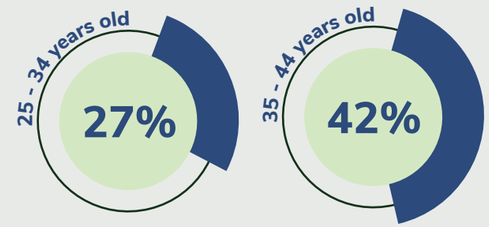
Experience > Education

85% of inspectors have completed a mentorship, internship, or apprenticeship

ORGANIC CERTIFICATION REVIEWERS

Review inspection reports to determine an operation's compliance with the organic standards

Age Demographics



KSAs

- Communication
- Cultural awareness
- Inspector experience
- Regulatory knowledge
- Research skills

1 IN 3 reviewers are former organic inspectors

83% hold a 4-year degree or higher

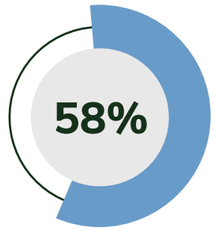
71% have previous agriculture experience

92% of reviewers work full-time

WORKFORCE NEEDS

82% of organic certification bodies lack enough inspectors to effectively fulfill their certification role

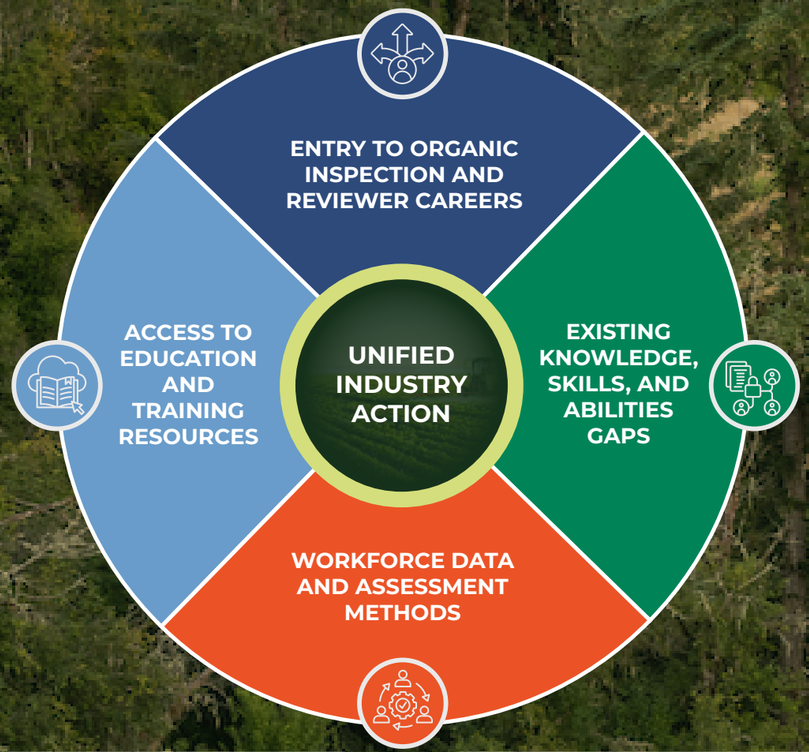
The top hiring challenge is finding applicants with the right skills, experience, and geographic availability



of the current workforce will change occupations in the next five years*

*All agricultural inspectors, including organic inspectors

Key Areas That Require Coordinated Industry Action



LARGER AND MORE CAPABLE ORGANIC INSPECTOR AND CERTIFICATION REVIEWER WORKFORCE

Entry to Organic Inspection and Reviewer Careers

Several factors make it difficult for new talent to join the inspector and reviewer workforce, including the high cost and limited availability of training, restrictive hiring practices, and limited outreach to the workforce.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Develop alternative training
- Offer training through universities and colleges
- Refocus hiring on essential skills
- Promote careers in organic inspection

Existing Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Gaps

Once employed, inspectors and reviewers often still lack critical competencies, requiring additional training and education to bring them up to speed.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Provide more on-site and applied training experiences
- Bolster agriculture and supply chain knowledge
- Cross-train inspectors and reviewers

Access to Education and Training Resources

The organic industry has created many educational resources and training opportunities, but they are spread across many organizations, not well advertised, and not easily accessible for inspectors and reviewers.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Host a central resource library
- Increase availability of mentorships
- Facilitate networking and information sharing

Workforce Data and Assessment Methods

A lack of organic-specific data, the absence of widely accepted education standards, and the difficulties of assessing region-specific gaps further limit the ability of the industry to pinpoint and collaboratively solve challenges.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Develop methods to collect critical workforce data
- Develop competency models
- Assess region-specific needs

Organic Inspectors and Reviewers: Education and Workforce Landscape

To develop a baseline of what the organic inspector and reviewer education and workforce landscape looks like today, this needs assessment draws on desktop research as well as surveys and interviews with audiences critical to the organic industry:

Inspectors and reviewers described their backgrounds, the factors that drew them to the industry, their training experience(s), and the skills critical to their roles.

Certification bodies (or "certifiers") described the current state of their workforce and their considerations when hiring reviewers and inspectors; their ability to provide geographic and scope coverage; and how they provide training to inspectors and reviewers.

Key stakeholder organizations provided a fuller picture of organic inspection and reviewing careers. Nexight conducted interviews with the NOP Accreditation Division, the International Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA), the National Organic Coalition, and the Organic Farmers Association.

Organic inspectors and reviewers who work for certification bodies are critical to the organic inspection process. USDA-accredited **certification bodies** are responsible for certifying individual organic farms and businesses. The certification process includes an on-site inspection to verify that the operation is adhering to the USDA organic standards. An inspection is conducted during the initial certification process and once annually thereafter. See the graphic below for an overview of the review process.

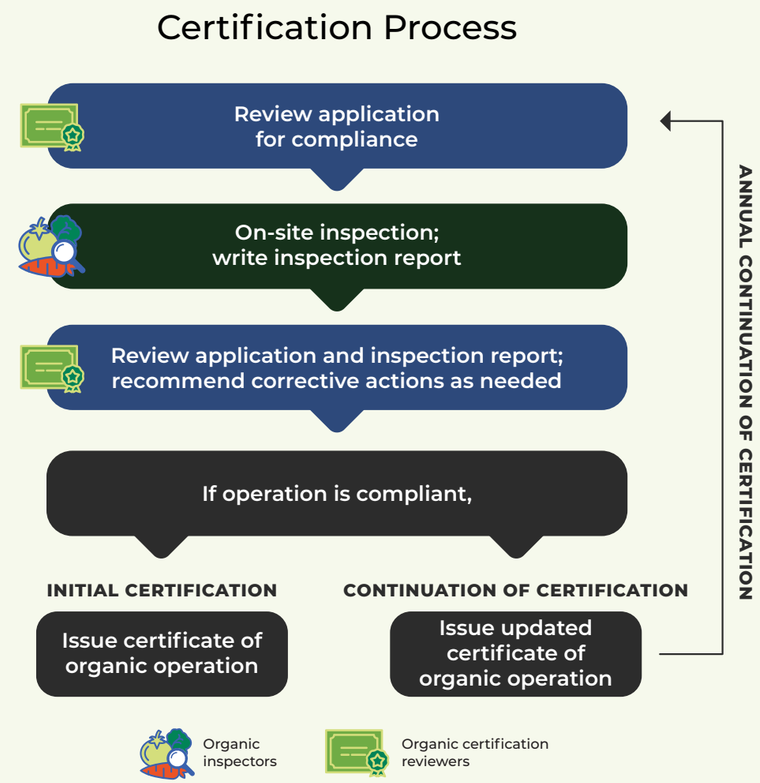
An **organic inspector** travels to an operation, observes the operation's practices and systems, and writes an inspection report.

An **organic certification reviewer** then uses the inspection report to determine the operation's compliance with the standards.

> Certification bodies must conduct inspections of each operation they certify at least once per calendar year.

Inspectors and reviewers are key players in the certification process: they are responsible for observing, reporting, and evaluating an operation's compliance. They are also often the only people who engage directly with current and prospective organic operations on behalf of certification bodies.

As part of the initial application process, inspectors conduct an on-site visit to assess whether the operation can comply with organic regulations; to verify that the Organic System Plan (OSP) submitted by the operation accurately reflects its activities; and to ensure that prohibited substances are not in use. Inspectors review



every production unit, facility, and site where the operation produces or handles organic products. They also examine records documenting farming practices such as invoices and records of material applications.[2] Reviewers then evaluate the inspector's report as part of their assessment, after which the certifier will issue their recommendation for certification, non-compliance, or denial.

Certification bodies must conduct inspections of each operation they certify at least once per calendar year. Similar to the initial process, an inspector travels to the operation and issues a report. A certification reviewer then assesses these findings, along with an annual update from the operation that describes any changes from the previous year, to determine the operation's compliance. This process of annual inspection and compliance is central to the organic certification system, as it determines if an operation may remain certified, must correct minor issues, or must have its certification suspended or revoked. **Organic inspectors and reviewers are therefore among the most critical experts in the organic system**, as they directly ensure that organic farms and businesses are upholding the organic standards.

[2]For further detail on what is included in an inspection, see "The Organic Certification Process," National Organic Program, Agricultural Marketing Service, US Department of Agriculture (USDA), March 20, 2024, https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/2601.pdf; "Organic 101: Ensuring Organic Integrity through Inspections," USDA, February 26, 2014, https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/blog/organic-101-ensuring-organic-integrity-through-inspections.

Organic Inspectors

Workforce Data

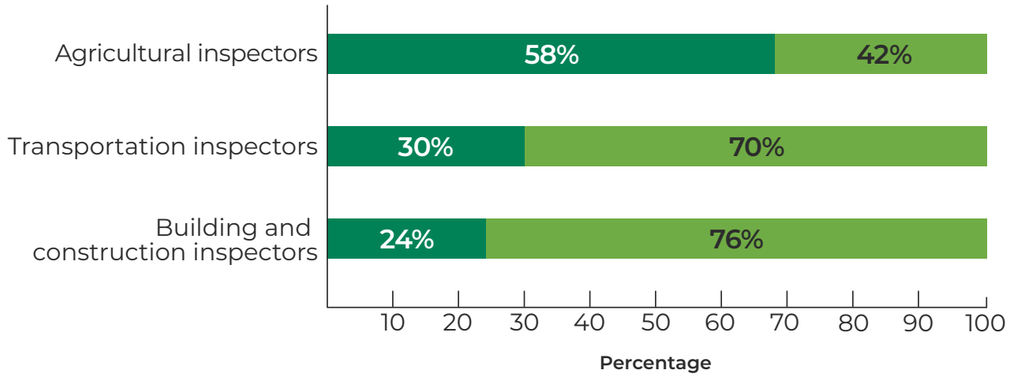
A significant challenge in analyzing the makeup of the organic inspector workforce is a lack of data. NOP does not gather information on inspectors from certification bodies, nor do certification bodies publicly and voluntarily provide proprietary information about their employees and contractors. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) classifies agricultural inspectors as a unique occupation for the purposes of data collection, defining them as workers who "inspect agricultural commodities, processing equipment, and facilities, and fish and logging operations, to ensure compliance with regulations and laws governing health, quality, and safety."[3] It does not, however, separate organic inspectors from the larger group, nor is there always a clear distinction in practice between organic and non-organic agricultural inspectors as some conduct both types. **Government data on the agricultural inspector data thus provides limited information on the makeup of the organic inspection workforce**.

An anticipated **58%** of the current workforce will change occupations in the next five years and need to be replaced.

Size and Trends

There were **12,676 agricultural inspectors in the United States** as of the second quarter of 2024, which includes an unknown percentage of organic inspectors. The agricultural inspector workforce has shown one percent annual growth in the last five years and is expected to continue growing over the next decade, though at a slower rate of 0.4 percent.[4] With the organic industry continuing to flourish due to growing consumer demand for organic food, the demand for organic inspectors specifically is likely to grow as well.

Anticipated Workforce Transfers in the Next Five Years



[3]"Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2023: 45-2011 Agricultural Inspectors," Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), accessed February 12, 2025, https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes452011.htm.
[4]US Census, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, imputed by Chmura.
[5]BLS, Employment Projections 2023–2033, imputed by Chmura.
[6]"Inspector Retention Working Group Report," Version 1, International Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA) and Accredited Certifiers Association (ACA), September 12, 2022.

Both the organic inspector workforce and the larger set of agricultural inspectors show a high rate of attrition, which further increases the demand for new inspectors. An anticipated 7,400 agricultural inspectors—58 percent of the current workforce—will change occupations in the next five years and need to be replaced. This turnover rate is noteworthy; in comparison, 30 percent of the transportation inspector workforce and 24 percent of the building and construction inspection workforce are forecasted to change occupations over the same time.[5] Although there is no precise organic inspector workforce data, the agricultural inspector numbers track with the 2022 "Inspector Retention Working Group Report," which found that "there has been a significant exit of experienced inspectors from the organic sector."[6]

The high percentage of young agricultural inspectors suggests the existence of an untapped pool of potential organic inspectors.

Demographics

While the largest ten-year age bracket for agricultural inspectors is young at 25–34 years old (31.5 percent), the next largest age bracket is 55–64 (23.9 percent).[7] Among the organic inspectors surveyed, the largest group fell in the 35–44 age bracket (29 percent), and another 61 percent were 45+ years old. Aging organic inspectors, alongside their peers who are leaving for different occupations, will need to be replaced.[8] However, while the IOIA and Accredited Certifiers Association (ACA) lament the "dearth of new inspectors entering the [organic inspection] industry," the high percentage of young agricultural inspectors suggests the existence of an untapped pool of potential organic inspectors.[9]

Qualifications

Work Experience

The organic regulations require all inspectors to have a minimum amount of work experience relevant to their role and duties. Many, but not all, of the organic inspector interviewees and survey respondents have experience in the agriculture industry.[10] This provides an entry point into the organic inspector role as well as valuable background knowledge for that role. Two-thirds of survey respondents identified a "personal connection" as one of the factors that sparked their interest in pursuing a career as an organic inspector; the second most selected factor (56 percent) was "work experience." When asked to provide more detail on that work experience, 63 percent selected "organic farming experience," while 22 percent selected organic certification reviewer, compliance expert, auditor, or other types of agricultural inspection. Four of the six organic inspector interviewees had a background in agriculture and chose their inspection career to continue working within the agriculture/food system. The other two interviewees were drawn into the industry because of relatives involved in organic inspection. This data strongly suggests that **experience in the broader agriculture industry is a key entry point for prospective organic inspectors**.

[7]Data modeled by Chmura based on the US Census American Community Survey, 2018–2022.
[8]The IOIA's and ACA's collaborative report on workforce retention cites several reasons for the high attrition rate among organic inspectors, including compensation, working conditions, and challenges accessing high-quality training. See IOIA and ACA, supra, note 6.
[9]Id.
[10]"National Organic Program (NOP); Strengthening Organic Enforcement," National Organic Program, Agricultural Marketing Service, US Department of Agriculture (USDA), January 19, 2023, https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/01/19/2023-00702/national-organic-program-nop-strengthening-organic-enforcement#p-541.

In addition to exposing individuals to organic inspection as a potential career, **work experience in agriculture provides useful background knowledge** for that career. Farming basics are rarely covered in formal coursework for organic inspectors, but interviewees spoke of its importance when inspecting operations, citing as examples the need to understand the difference between annual and perennial crops or row crops and permanent crops. Several interviewees also explained that an agricultural background helped them better connect with the farmer whose operation they were inspecting. Their background enabled them to understand the decisions, motivations, and challenges experienced by organic farmers, and it contributed toward building the trust and respect critical for open dialogue between inspector and operator. As one survey respondent explained, "If it wasn't for my farming background, I think I would have struggled with being an inspector. Living on a farm and understanding the true way agriculture works is something no class can teach."

Education

From the perspective of the interviewed and surveyed organic inspectors, **educational experience prior to organic inspector training is not a significant factor in sparking interest in an organic inspector career or providing critical background knowledge**. Approximately half of the inspectors surveyed have a bachelor's degree, and another quarter have a graduate degree. Of those, fewer than half received a degree relevant to agriculture or food systems. In comparison, 55 percent of all agricultural inspectors have a bachelor's degree or higher.[11]

There is little indication from survey respondents and interviewees that their educational background had a significant impact on their decision to pursue a career as an organic inspector. Only 22 percent of survey respondents identified it as one of the factors shaping that decision, and no interviewee cited it as their inspiration. One interviewee acknowledged that while they rarely thought of their degree (biology), it did provide foundational knowledge in soil and plants that they would not otherwise have accrued.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

The knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) needed to perform a specific job are commonly separated into technical or cognitive KSAs and "soft skills," which generally entail things such as professionalism, oral and written communication, teamwork and collaboration, and critical thinking and problem-solving.[12] Although technical knowledge of organic regulations and operations is essential to being a good inspector, interviewees more often emphasized the importance of new inspectors' non-technical skills based on their own experiences and their observation of other inspectors.

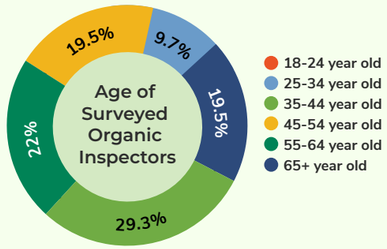
A list of KSAs that interviewees commonly mentioned include:

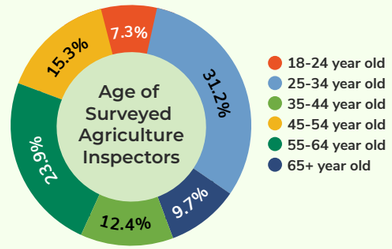
- **Technical knowledge:** Knowledge of organic regulations is important not only to conducting inspections but also for instilling confidence in farmers that the person reviewing their operation is competent. Several interviewees also stressed the value of having a holistic understanding of organic farming operations to understand the farmer's processes in context.
- **Basic technology skills:** As inspections move away from paper to digital documentation, the ability to use a certification body's technological systems, such as scanning and uploading systems to send farm records from the field, is a small but critical part of the inspector's job.

[11]US Census Educational Attainment and BLS data modeled by Chmura.
[12]"Soft Skills: The Competitive Edge," US Department of Labor, access February 12, 2025, https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/publications/fact-sheets/soft-skills-the-competitive-edge; David J. Deming, "The Value of Soft Skills in the Labor Market," The Reporter, January 5, 2018, https://www.nber.org/reporter/2017number4/value-soft-skills-labor-market.

Survey results:

Age of organic inspectors vs. all agricultural inspectors





- **Basic math skills:** Inspectors must have a strong command of basic math to complete tasks such as mass-balance audits, reading and interpreting farm records, and verifying livestock dry-matter intake calculations.
- **Observation, curiosity, and attention to detail:** Inspectors benefit from a general inquisitiveness that leads them to observe details and ask questions, enabling them to spot errors or fraud in the field. Inspectors with these characteristics are also motivated to develop as professionals, which could include honing their inspection skills and/or taking on additional scopes.
- **Communication:** Verbal communication skills were frequently mentioned as critical for inspectors to build trust with farmers, ease concerns about the inspection process, and understand farmers' descriptions of their operations. Written communication skills, along with basic editorial ones, are important for communicating findings clearly to the reviewer at the certification body.
- **Flexibility and adaptability:** Inspectors must apply uniform regulations to unique operations and engage with different farmers on a regular basis. Their ability to enter these situations with confidence, thick skin, empathy, and patience are important factors in completing their work professionally and competently.
- **Organization and multitasking:** Inspectors must be able to keep up with farmers as they show their operation, engage in conversation while taking notes, and maintain distinct sets of records for each operation they inspect.

Question

How did you become interested in pursuing a career as an organic inspector?

27
Personal connection

24
Work experience

17
Work on/for a certified organic operation

9
Educational background

7
Agricultural organization

4
Other

2
Workforce program

1
Job/career fair

N=41, with 22 respondents who selected multiple answers

Sources of Training

Coursework

Interviewees and survey respondents alike indicated that the IOIA is the primary provider of organic inspector training in the United States. Over three-quarters of survey respondents received training from the IOIA, and each of the six interviewees specifically received their introductory training from them. Two-thirds of inspectors have received training from at least one certification body, and some certification bodies indicated that they provide their own introductory training in lieu of the IOIA's.

Inspectors have also received training from other organizations, particularly USDA, which hosts the Organic Integrity Learning Center (OILC) online, and the ACA. However, no organization comes close to supporting the respondents as much as the IOIA and certification bodies have. Fewer than three respondents per category indicated receiving training from a state agency, a non-profit, an independent educational/training organization, a cooperative, or an educational institute. This could suggest a lack of awareness about these organizations' offerings, but it may also suggest that their training options are limited relative to the organizations most directly involved in the industry.

Survey respondents indicated that they have participated in both in-person (90 percent) and online (93 percent) training. In addition, most inspectors have also completed on-the-job training (80 percent). Among the interviewees, five of the six took part in the IOIA's weeklong in-person training, while one took the IOIA's online coursework due to COVID restrictions. **Interviewees and survey respondents alike noted the high cost of the IOIA's in-person training; interviewees calculated the cost of their initial training between $3,000-5,000**, inclusive of travel and accommodations. However, one of the interviewees specifically noted that in-person was the best choice for their learning style because of the complexity of the work and the opportunity to ask questions on the spot and be directly engaged with the learning material. Another interviewee studied processing online and found the long hours in front of a computer to be difficult.

Organic Inspectors and Reviewers: Education and Workforce Landscape

When asked whether participants felt their initial training prepared them well for their role, 69 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, while 31 percent of respondents either felt neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed. Respondents criticized their training's sole focus on regulations over the actual inspection process. One survey respondent stated, "IOIA training was only book learning, not practical." Another concurred, saying, "The initial 'classroom' training did not adequately prepare me to be able to competently execute an inspection from prep through report."

Interviewees and survey responses provided some nuance to their evaluations of initial inspector training. First, several interviewees reported that **they felt trained to a reasonable extent before heading out on their own, but ultimately there was no substitute for experience**, particularly after experiencing the variety of organic operations and the unique processes each entailed. One interviewee reported that it took about a year before they had seen enough to feel truly comfortable and confident in their work. Second, survey respondents were only asked about training in general, but both they and interviewees noted that some scopes were easier to learn than others. As one survey participant explained, "Following my crop training I felt prepared but not so much after my handling training. [It] did not give me the depth which I felt would have better prepared me." For the interviewees, crops were often the entry-point scope and the easiest to learn, while handling and livestock were more challenging and added on later.

Interviewees calculated the cost of their initial training between **$3,000-5,000.**

Mentorships and Apprenticeships

Both interviewees and survey participants indicated that mentorships and/or apprenticeships are essential to the initial training experience, and indeed most certification bodies require them. 85 percent of the survey respondents have participated in a mentorship, internship, or apprenticeship experience, one of whom clarified its importance: "I did a weeklong apprenticeship with [an inspector] where I shadowed him on several inspections, then conducted a few of my own while he observed me. That was where I really learned how to be an inspector…"

Although mentorship experience is common among inspectors, the style and length of experiences vary. Most commonly, inspectors in training shadow a more experienced inspector and then lead three to five inspections while being observed by the experienced inspector. Several survey respondents expressed a desire to have had more of these experiences prior to being sent out on their own.

Inspectors reported a mix of experiences in their mentorship/apprenticeships, with some praising their mentors for preparing them to work solo and others learning what not to do based on their mentor's behavior. For their part, some certification bodies recognize that being a mentor is itself a skill, and some larger certifiers have train-the-trainer programs to help inspectors learn how to teach new peers. This, however, requires both time and money to create, which may not be feasible for smaller certifiers.

Although survey respondents and interviewees indicated that mentorships/apprenticeships are essential to their initial training experience, accessing those experiences are a substantial challenge. Of the respondents who noted participating in a mentorship, internship, or apprenticeship, 55 percent of them said their participation was set up by an organization. The remaining 45 percent had to set up their experience themselves, which they noted as a considerable challenge. Interviewees reported similar experiences. In some cases, certification bodies set them up with an in-house inspector, but in other cases they had to rely on a personal connection in the industry or cold call names from an IOIA-provided list to find someone willing to mentor them in the field. Some respondents found this to be a frustrating early hurdle in their inspection career.

Continuing Education

Interviewees described mixed experiences in their ongoing education journeys while working as organic inspectors. Several noted that although they had to pay for their initial training before being hired, certification bodies were willing to support their professional development in additional scopes, either by funding IOIA training, providing time for them to take OILC courses, or offering in-house training. Interviewees reported that their certification bodies adequately prepared them for the implementation of the Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) rule (which requires continuous education). One interviewee noted being disappointed when their certification body dropped its monthly office hours, which provided an opportunity for all inspectors to pose questions.

Question

What organization(s) provided your training?

32
International Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA)

27
Certification body

11
U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

7
Accredited Certifiers Association, Inc. (ACA)

3
State agency

3
Non-profit

3
Education/training organization

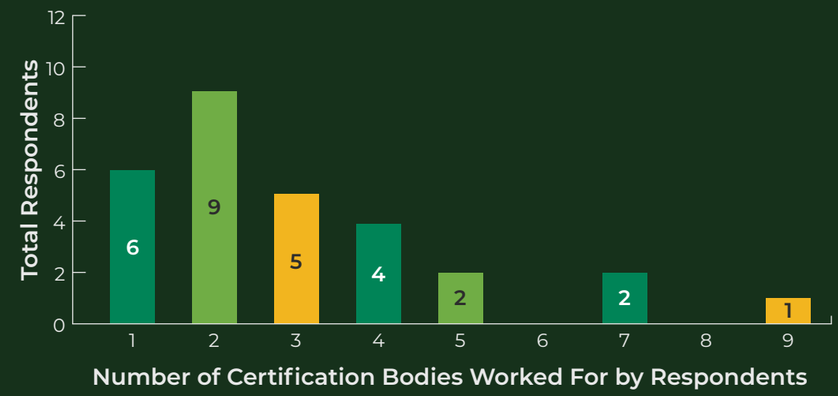
2
Cooperative

1
Educational institution

N=41, with 28 respondents who selected multiple answers. Responses include training both before and after hiring and employment

Question

If you are a contract inspector or a member of an inspector cooperative, how many certification bodies have you completed work for in the past three years?



Working for Organic Certification Bodies

Independent Contractor vs. Staff

Interviewees and survey respondents indicated the prevalence of independent contractors in the organic inspector workforce. Nearly three-quarters of the survey respondents identified themselves as contract inspectors, compared to 27 percent who were salaried and one who belonged to an inspector cooperative.[13] Of the 29 who identified themselves as contract inspectors or members of an inspector cooperative, 24 indicated that they worked for four or fewer certification bodies in the last three years, and almost a third had only worked for two in that time. While contractors may work for multiple bodies, the data suggests that they rarely work for more than a few at a time. **One factor that discourages contract inspectors from working for multiple certification bodies is the unique forms and processes that each certifier requires**.

Both forms of inspectors—staff and independent contractors—offer unique benefits and challenges that may or may not work for individuals depending on what they are looking for in a job. All six interviewees began their organic inspection careers as contractors, but four of them moved into full-time staff inspector positions when such a role became available or when their certification body shifted toward using more staff inspectors. Several interviewees celebrated contract work for the flexibility it provided, while one interviewee who shifted to a staff inspector role was pleased with the consistency of work that came with it.

[13]Inspector cooperatives are member-owned and operated for their benefit. For more details, see IOIA and ACA, supra, note 6, 21–22.

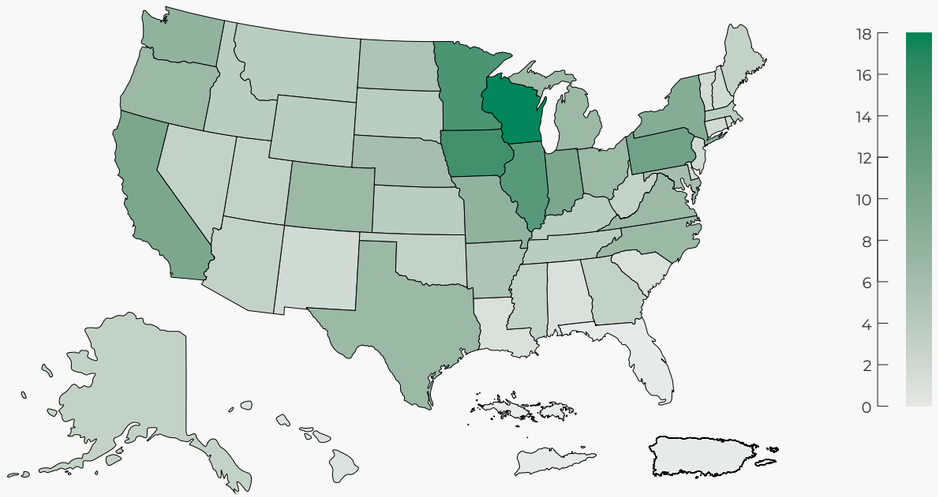
Both current independent contractor interviewees had concerns about their relationship with their certification body/bodies. One worried that asking clarifying questions would cause the certification body to doubt their abilities, while another lamented being left out of meetings held for full-time staff both for the information they miss and for the lack of camaraderie. This sentiment was echoed by a survey respondent: "Being an independent inspector, some certifiers don't include you in trainings, company emails, or meetings, so there is a great deal of self-learning and study required." Interviewees among inspectors and certification bodies alike **noted that making inspectors, including independent contractors, feel like part of the team was an important factor in retention**.

Geographic Regions and Scope Coverage

Geographic coverage by the organic inspector workforce is vital knowledge for the industry, but the lack of data limits the conclusions that can be reached about that coverage, such as where the greatest needs are. Of those surveyed, the majority of inspectors have conducted inspections in the Northeast, Midwest, and West Coast, with fewer, but still significant, numbers completing inspections in the Plains and Mid-Atlantic. Surveyed inspectors completed the fewest inspections in the Southeast, West/Southwest, Hawaii, Alaska, and Puerto Rico. Caution should be exercised, however, in assessing national organic inspector coverage from this data, as it is not comprehensive.

Survey data indicates that many respondents completed inspections across multiple scopes. The most inspected scope was crops (93 percent), which inspectors and certification bodies identified as a common entry-point for inspectors. A significant number of respondents also completed livestock inspections (71 percent), while fewer inspected handling (59 percent) and wild crops (56 percent).

Number of Respondents Who Have Conducted an Inspection by State



Organic Certification Reviewers

Workforce Size and Demographics

Size and Trends

As with organic inspectors, the industry lacks concrete data about the organic certification reviewer workforce. This is exacerbated by industry amalgamation in the BLS classification. Reviewers fit best in the category of "compliance officers," who "examine, evaluate, and investigate eligibility for or conformity with laws and regulations governing contract compliance of licenses and permits, and perform other compliance and enforcement inspection and analysis activities not classified elsewhere."[14] Unlike agricultural inspectors, who are classified separately from inspectors in other industries, "compliance officers" as a category cuts across all industries. With nearly 400,000 such workers in the United States, the classification is too broad to be helpful in drawing conclusions about the organic certification reviewer workforce.

44% of respondents indicated they have previously been employed or are currently employed as an inspector.

Demographics

Organic certification reviewers surveyed for this report are in the early-to-middle stages of their professional careers. 42 percent of respondents are in their first or second year as a reviewer, while only 17 percent have ten or more years of experience in that role. The largest age demographic is 35–44 years old (42 percent), followed closely by 25–34 years old (27 percent), marking them as a younger group than the surveyed inspectors.

Qualifications

Work Experience

In contrast to surveyed inspectors, work experience had a greater influence on the surveyed and interviewed organic certification reviewers who chose to work in the organic industry. When asked to select the factor(s) that led them to their job, most survey respondents (71 percent) cited previous work experience, compared to interest from a personal connection (53 percent) or previously working on/for certified operations (47 percent). Of those who selected work experience, 19 individuals had previous work experience on a farm, 14 of which were organic.

Certification reviewers also showed an inclination toward transferring into that role from others in the industry. **44 percent of respondents indicated they have previously been employed or are currently employed as an inspector, and two of the six interviewees followed that specific career path**. Another interviewee worked in an administrative role at a certification body before shifting into the reviewer role. For inspectors who find the travel-heavy lifestyle challenging, the reviewer role offers an opportunity to stay in the industry and utilize their knowledge in a setting better suited to their lifestyles.

[14] "Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2023: 13-1041 Compliance Officers," BLS, accessed February 12, 2025, https://www.bls.gov/oes/2023/may/oes131041.htm.

Education

Like inspectors, the majority of interviewed and surveyed reviewers (83 percent) have a four-year degree or higher. Unlike inspectors, most respondents and interviewees (over 70 percent) received a degree in a field relevant to the organic industry such as agriculture, horticulture, or related sciences (e.g., biology, chemistry, and animal/veterinary sciences). Despite the tendency for reviewers to have a background in a related field to organic, fewer than half of the respondents indicated that their educational background was the reason for their interest in a career in organic certification review.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

Certification reviewer interviewees **emphasized the importance of technical skills to a greater degree than their inspector counterparts,** particularly knowledge of the NOP regulations and familiarity with more general regulatory language. However, soft skills remain important, especially around client communication, which often involves issuing and discussing non-compliance.

The KSAs commonly identified by reviewers as important to their role include:

- **Regulatory knowledge:** Understanding NOP regulations and their intent are important for certifying operations and identifying specific regulatory issues in non-compliance reports. Experience in regulatory work outside the organic industry is helpful for knowing how to apply broad regulations to specific circumstances like those seen in organic operations.
- **Farming/agricultural knowledge:** Knowledge of agricultural systems provides helpful context when analyzing inspector reports about organic operations and interpreting NOP regulations.
- **Inspector experience:** Reviewers who have experience as organic and/or agricultural inspectors are better equipped to understand inspector reports, particularly the inspector's process and the challenges they face in the field. It also familiarizes them with relevant language and terms, which can be helpful when discussing compliance issues with farmers.
- **Research skills:** Reviewers need to ensure they have gathered all the information available to them before issuing compliance decisions and granting certification.
- **Communication:** Written and verbal communication skills are vital to the reviewer role. Reviewers are the primary party responsible for communicating certification or non-compliance to farmers, which requires the reviewer to clearly articulate the reasons behind that decision and manage that potentially challenging conversation.
- **Cultural awareness:** Understanding the unique challenges and needs of specific farming communities (e.g., Amish or non-native English speakers) is important for interacting with those communities and understanding the choices they make on their operations.

Sources of Training

The initial training experience of reviewers differs considerably from that of inspectors. Every interviewee and 75 percent of survey respondents indicated they received training from the certification body for which they worked. Interviewees who had not first been inspectors indicated that their initial training came through their certification body. Additionally, survey respondents have taken training from the IOIA (62 percent), USDA (47 percent), and the ACA (43 percent). Interviewees identified the same organizations as sources for additional training in new scopes or more specific topics, usually funded by their certification bodies. Notably, few respondents and interviewees had received training from a state agency, an educational institution, or a non-profit educational organization other than certification bodies.

Survey respondents went through multiple training modalities, including in-person (87 percent), online (91 percent), and on-the-job training (87 percent). Interviewees identified in-person training as ideal because it creates a space for questions and immediate feedback on their work. One interviewee noted a dilemma produced by the post-COVID shift to remote work: while this opened the hiring pool to more qualified applicants outside of the certifier's immediate location, it also eliminated the in-office peer collaboration that was critical to their own professional development.

As with their inspector peers, survey respondents reviewed their initial training positively. Most reviewers (73 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that their initial training prepared them well for their job, 22 percent felt neutral, and only 3 disagreed or strongly disagreed. And like their inspector peers, **reviewer interviewees reported that their training was sufficient to start, but they had to gain real-life experience to become comfortable with their work.** They attributed this primarily to the challenge of applying regulations to unique organic operations. One reviewer said, "So much of what is done in review work is based on applying policy to operations with such a broad range of variety," while an interviewee stated, "[The] biggest challenge is the ability to assess how the organic standard is applied differently to each farm." Another reviewer suggested that it would be helpful during training to engage with the type of uncertainty they face in practice: "More examples or case studies where there are grey areas in the regulations that certifiers need to make an internal decision on."

Reviewer training programs vary considerably between certification bodies. Interviewees reported engaging in a mix of self-training via a review of internal resources and policy manuals, while others had personal training with supervisors or peers who they could observe conduct reviews, and who in turn then shadowed their own work. **Several interviewees noted the benefit of going into the field and shadowing inspectors to better understand their experience and how it informs their reports.** Notably, interviewees explained that while these opportunities are offered by certifiers, none that they have worked for require this, nor do they require inspectors to sit with reviewers while they complete their review. Additionally, survey responses suggest that some reviewers do not have access to the opportunity to cross-train although they would like it.

While some certification bodies have the resources to develop and utilize a robust certification reviewer training program, this is not the case across the board. Several survey respondents lamented the absence of a formal training program, or the insufficient support their certification body's training program provided. As one noted of their own experience, "new certification officers (COs) are trained on this critical job function by senior COs who themselves have had no training in how to educate others. This lack of consistency results in the work being completed to all different levels and puts the company at risk of being out of compliance." **Both interviewees and survey respondents expressed frustration at the lack of formal reviewer training courses outside of their certification body.**

Question

How did you become interested in pursuing a career as an organic certification reviewer? Select all that apply.

32
Work experience

24
Personal connection

21
Work on/for certified operation

16
Educational background

7
Agricultural organization

7
Other

2
Workforce program

2
Job/career fair

N=53, with 31 respondents who selected multiple answers

Organic Inspectors and Reviewers: Education and Workforce Landscape

Working for Organic Certification Bodies

Full-Time vs. Part-Time

Across survey respondents, most reviewers work full-time (93 percent). This is a stark contrast from inspectors, who are more likely to work part-time in the industry (59 percent). This reflects the prevalence of contract workers in the inspector workforce as compared to reviewers, who are primarily staff employees.

Scope

Like the surveyed inspectors, most certification reviewers evaluated operations across multiple scopes, and no scope was covered by fewer than half of the reviewers. Nearly all of the reviewers evaluated crops (92 percent), after which the coverage dropped substantially for livestock (62 percent), handling (53 percent), and wild crops (62 percent).

The Organic Certification Body Perspective

Workforce Needs: Inspectors

Certification bodies who participated in surveys and interviews work with more inspectors than certification reviewers and report a greater need for the former as well. Of the certifiers who took part in the survey, 15 of 28 (54 percent) worked with 20 or fewer unique inspectors over the last three years, 10 worked with 21–40 inspectors, and another three worked with over 60. **Most survey respondents (82 percent) indicated that they currently do not have a sufficient number of inspectors in their workforce to adequately fulfill their role as an organic certifier, though a majority of that group (62 percent) reported that they needed only 1 to 5 more inspectors to be adequately staffed**. Large certification bodies may have an employee dedicated to recruitment, but this was rare among the interviewees; job postings, word of mouth through current staff and contractors, and interactions with clients are more often relied upon to find job applicants.

Survey respondents reported working with a significantly smaller number of staff inspectors than contract inspectors; only 3 of 28 certifiers reported working with more than 10 staff inspectors over the last 3 years, compared to 3 who reported working with over 50 contract inspectors. The benefits of working with full-time staff include familiarity with their work, the ability to train them in specialized areas over time, and leveraging them for additional tasks like in-house mentorship, but this all comes at the price of higher overhead costs. Contract inspectors give certifiers flexibility for covering geographic or skills gaps, but they may not be available when needed. Moreover, interviewees reported that because contractors are paid per inspection, they do not always have the time to produce robust inspection reports.

Additionally, **certification bodies named finding organic inspector applicants with the right skills/experience and geographic availability as the top hiring challenges** for that group. Finding sufficient applicants in general ranked fifth. This sentiment was echoed by interviewees. Several of them noted a persistent demand for inspectors given the workforce's high turnover, but they also cited specific needs for regional coverage (discussed in detail below) and knowledge of specialized skills (e.g., familiarity with mushrooms and seaweed).

Workforce Needs: Reviewers

The reviewer workforce is smaller than the inspector workforce, with a majority of certification bodies reporting that they have employed 15 or fewer unique reviewers in the last three years. A slight majority of certifiers (54 percent) reported lacking a sufficient number of reviewers, and most of those certifiers (13 of 15) reported needing only 1 to 5 more to be adequately staffed.

As with inspectors, **certification bodies reported that their primary challenge when hiring reviewers is finding applicants with the right skills/experience**. This was by far the most common selection though, with compensation and benefits coming in second and a sufficient number of applicants trailing close behind. Notably, the number of applicants in a geographic region was fourth, presumably because reviewers do not need to be on location to complete their job responsibilities, unlike inspectors, who cannot conduct their work remotely.

Desired Skills

Certification bodies tend to agree with inspectors and reviewers on the skills necessary to perform these roles well. One certification body, describing the subtle difference between the two roles, explained that inspectors need to be able to ask questions, while reviewers need to interpret the answers. Certifiers look for inspectors with skills such as investigation, critical thinking, communication, and subject matter expertise. Certifiers are particularly interested in seeing farm experience for crop and livestock inspectors, and food safety, auditing, and/or quality assurance skills for handling inspectors. Additionally, mass balance and traceability came up repeatedly as a deficient area in new inspectors' technical knowledge. The expectations for reviewers are similar: critical thinking, communication skills, and subject matter expertise. **Inspectors who are looking to stay in the industry but leave their current occupation are thus ideal candidates for reviewer positions**.

Some certification bodies have additional qualifications they assess during the hiring process. Most certifiers who participated in interviews indicated that they desire candidates with a four-year college degree. While some certifiers prefer a degree in a field related to agriculture or food systems, others are more flexible and accept any degree. One agency stated that if a candidate did not have a four-year degree, they expect them to have five to ten years of experience.

Several certification bodies noted that it can be challenging to find job candidates that meet the SOE rule's additional inspector qualifications. This includes at least 2,000 hours (equivalent to one year of full-time work) of relevant experience and 50 hours of initial training, which can include (but is not limited to) courses, webinars, shadowing, and onboarding. The SOE rule's more specific qualifications are reflected in certification bodies' heightened expectations and the level of qualification they look for in inspector candidates.

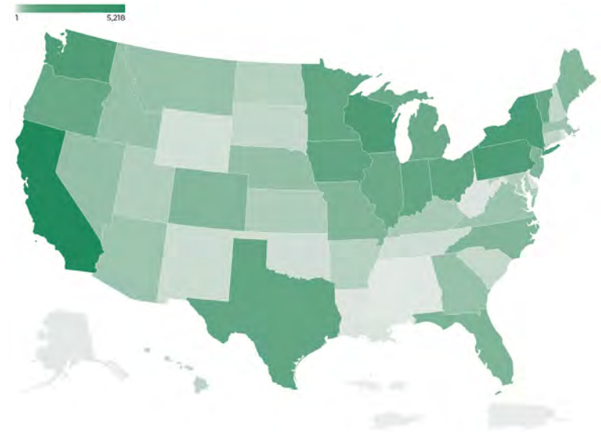
> Inspectors and certification bodies reported that their primary challenge when hiring reviewers is finding applicants with the right skills/experience.

Geographic Coverage

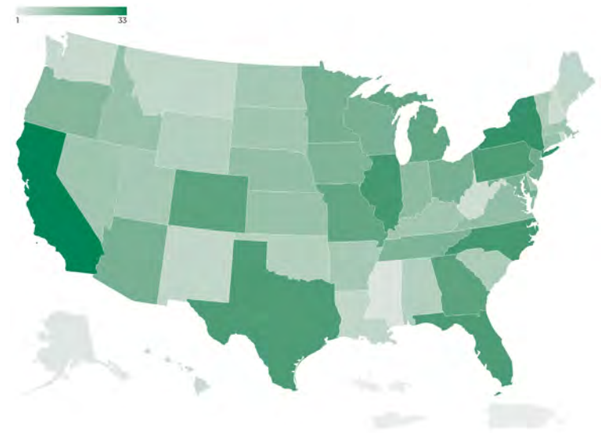
Ensuring that certification bodies are able to inspect organic operations in all regions is crucial to the success of the industry but, as noted above, data about inspector coverage is largely unavailable to the public. Although not a perfect measure given the size variation among certifiers, information is available on both the geographic distribution of organic operations and the states and territories where certifiers operate.

A comparison of organic operations and certifiers' geographic coverage shows that **Alabama, Delaware, and Alaska have the most organic operations per certification body active in the state (i.e., each certifier must inspect and certify more operations), while Washington, California, and Wisconsin have the fewest**.[15] This provides a rough sense of where the demand for certifying operations are, though again, it does not incorporate any sense of certifier scale. Interviewees flagged the following regions and specific states as areas they have struggled to have inspector coverage: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, the Northeast, the Rocky Mountains, and the West Coast. They also cited more specific needs, such as livestock inspectors in California and inspectors in the New York/New Jersey area who are willing to travel into New York City.

Number of Organic Certification Bodies Operating in Each State or Territory



Number of USDA-NOP Certified Organic Operations by State or Territory



Fewest Organic Operations per Certification Body in the United States			
State	**Organic Operations**	**Organic Certification Bodies**	**Organic Operations per Certification Body**
US Virgin Islands	1	1	1
Puerto Rico	8	5	1.6
District of Columbia	8	3	2.7
Alabama	32	11	2.9
Delaware	49	14	3.5
Alaska	16	4	5
Louisiana	42	9	4.7
Tennessee	89	19	4.7
Mississippi	25	5	5
Rhode Island	49	8	6.1

Most Organic Operations per Certification Body in the United States			
State	**Organic Operations**	**Organic Certification Bodies**	**Organic Operations per Certification Body**
Washington	1,279	8	159.9
California	5,218	33	158.1
Wisconsin	1,663	20	83.2
Vermont	835	12	69.6
New York	1,893	29	65.3
Pennsylvania	1,640	26	63.1
Maine	511	9	56.8
Indiana	941	17	55.4
Iowa	982	19	61.7
Ohio	1,007	20	50.4

Training Offerings

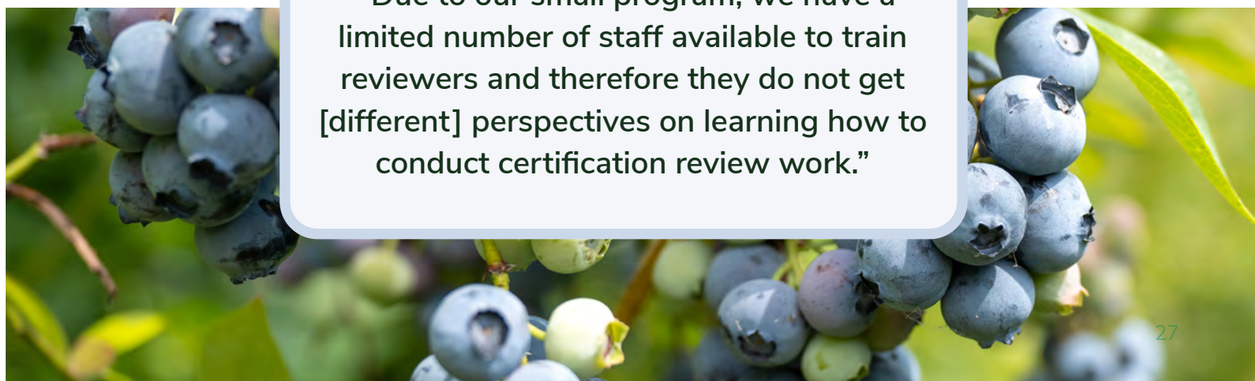
Certification bodies reported that inspector training involves collaboration with other organizations, but reviewer training is primarily handled in-house. 63 percent of certifiers said they had worked with another organization to provide inspector training, but only 30 percent said the same of reviewer training. Most certification bodies who have worked with another organization cited the IOIA as their primary collaborator.

IOIA training is the gold standard for inspectors, and in some cases, this is the only training inspectors may receive outside of onboarding by their certification body. However, 79 percent of surveyed certifiers offer training, mentorships, and/or apprenticeships to inspectors. This can range from an informal mentorship with inspection shadowing and a review of the latest NOP regulations to full-scope in-house training and financial coverage of IOIA training. Some certifiers offer training to staff inspectors only or compensate staff inspectors (but not contractors) for training with an outside organization (e.g., additional scope training with the IOIA).

Some certification bodies have developed their own internal training to replace that offered by the IOIA. In describing why, they expressed the desire to be free of the timing constraints imposed by the IOIA's limited offerings, as well as a desire to have greater control over content. While they praised the IOIA for its coverage of regulations, certifiers want to offer more opportunities for on-site experiential learning, which they deem critical to inspector success. **However, cost and time is a significant consideration for developing and offering such training and likely limits it to larger certification bodies**. Some certifiers also expressed hesitance to offer their own substantive training out of concern that the inspectors they train will leave for another certifier or another industry, thus wasting the resources the certifier put into their training.

Certifying bodies are even more likely to train reviewers themselves (93 percent of survey respondents), particularly as there is no reviewer-specific training offered by the IOIA or the OILC. However, the extent of the training varies, as the size of the certifier can be a determining factor as to whether in-house training or more expansive mentorship programs are available for reviewers. One agency said, "Due to our small program, we have a limited number of staff available to train reviewers and therefore they do not get [different] perspectives on learning how to conduct certification review work." Another concurred: "We train them on our system and on the regulations we offer. Generally, due to our smaller size though, we are looking for reviewers who already have experience."

"Due to our small program, we have a limited number of staff available to train reviewers and therefore they do not get [different] perspectives on learning how to conduct certification review work."



Entry to Organic Inspection and Reviewer Careers

Several factors make it difficult for new talent to join the inspector and reviewer workforce, including the high cost and limited availability of training, restrictive hiring practices, and limited outreach to the workforce.

Challenges

There is a high cost of entry for prospective organic inspectors due to a shortage of certifier-approved training options, their associated costs, and their limited availability.

The shortage of training providers and the cost to pursue that training restricts the number of certified inspectors and reviewers entering and progressing in the field. Training provided by the IOIA is considered by most to be the gold standard, and it is often considered the only acceptable source for entry outside of what is provided in-house by certifiers. IOIA training typically costs $2,575 with additional costs for in-person training (e.g., travel and lodging) and additional scopes.[16] Completing all three scopes could cost up to $12,000 (depending on the learning module).[17] One survey respondent stated, “IOIA training is very expensive. I would like to take more courses from them, but I cannot justify the expense. I think the return on investment is not high enough for me.”

The IOIA offers alternatives to in-person training such as online and self-guided training, which come with lower registration fees and no travel expenses. Their online training has become popular due to these savings as well as their accessibility. However, **the IOIA believes that in-person training is significantly better for learning than online coursework** because it offers time for on-the-spot questions, group learning, and a deeper dive into the application of standards. Inspector interviewees echoed this sentiment.

In addition, **the IOIA noted that their limited number of trainers restricts their in-person trainings to only a few sessions per year**. One certifier noted, “It is HARD to find trainings all year around that will fit our needs and not cost a fortune,” while another said, “We have the ability to on-board new inspectors and reviewers quickly without IOIA training holding up the process! IOIA creates significant delays due to lack of offerings and scheduling.” The limited number of trainers also constrains the number of participants as the IOIA wants to ensure each student receives ample support and attention from their trainer. However, expanding the IOIA’s availability of trainer-led programs would require a significant influx of money.

While the IOIA has developed a self-paced training approach to add an additional learning style to their offerings, they have found that few people have utilized it. The IOIA trains over 300 unique domestic students and 700-1,000 total students annually, but they reported that having more than 30 unique students take the self-paced training in a year would be exceptional. **This lack of participation in the self-paced format has rendered it unprofitable** for the IOIA.

Outside of IOIA training, certifiers generally provide in-house training, or inspectors utilize the OILC trainings from NOP. But these are typically not viewed as viable alternatives to IOIA training on their own, except for the rare case when a certifier already has a robust in-house training program. As a result, many certifiers require and/or prefer new hires to either have an IOIA certification or take IOIA training prior to employment. In addition, **smaller certification bodies struggle to develop their own in-house training due to the associated costs to create them, thus fully relying on the IOIA to provide initial training**.

Job seekers are not aware that organic inspection and review are career options, and certifying bodies often do not conduct outreach to advertise careers.

Investigation revealed that inspectors and reviewers rarely sought out a career in organic certification intentionally; instead, they often happened upon the opportunity by chance. A majority of surveyed inspectors and about half of surveyed reviewers pursued a career in the organic industry as a result of a personal connection or encounter with the industry. This indicates that the organic certification industry is missing an intentional, targeted recruitment strategy, despite the need to keep pace with growing demand. The current approach that the industry takes does not widely promote awareness of career opportunities among potential workers, which hampers recruitment efforts.

Educational institutions are one potential entry point for the organic industry to engage with prospective workers. It is during secondary and post-secondary education where many people select a subject of interest to pursue in hopes of gaining related employment. However, inspectors and reviewers rarely cited their educational background as the source that sparked interest in the organic field. This suggests a lost opportunity for the industry to use connections to educational institutions to find potential workers.

Other industries often utilize job fairs at educational institutions, career centers, or community centers to spread awareness about job opportunities in their field. However, this is less common in the organic industry. One certifier explained that they have shared information with students at some educational institutions, but it does not make sense for them to go to a job fair when they may not have many, if any, jobs available at the time.

When hiring, certification bodies often focus too much on technical skills, educational background, and/or agricultural experience, which may exclude good candidates.

Certification bodies indicated that one of their greatest challenges is finding candidates that meet their job descriptions and minimum qualifications. **Certifiers often list specific technical skills or educational requirements in job descriptions, despite their admission that soft skills are often more important than technical skills**. For example, certifiers often look for candidates that have at least a four-year degree, if not a higher level of education, as well as agriculture-specific technical experience. While these qualifications are certainly advantageous to an inspector or reviewer, an ardent focus on technical skills and education alone may (1) unintentionally disqualify or discourage candidates that may be a good fit due to their soft skills or translatable, non-agriculture experience and (2) result in hiring candidates that meet technical requirements but lack the practical skills needed to be successful.

Many interviewees reiterated the importance of soft skills. Both inspectors and reviewers stated that their soft skills are often more valuable in their roles than their education and/or agricultural background. The majority of interview and survey responses said that **the most essential skills for inspectors and reviewers include critical thinking, problem-solving, and client communication**.

Interviewees did state that a relevant background (be it through education or previous work experience) did provide knowledge that they would not receive in training otherwise. However, **most noted that a relevant background was not necessary to perform their role**. One interviewee even noted that despite her background in agriculture, she still did not have all the information needed to assess the variety of operations she saw when she first began her career.

Survey participants agreed that background experience is helpful but not always essential or useful. As one survey participant said, “The BA degree from [educational institution] is good, but it does not prepare students for organic certifier inspector roles. It prepares them for research/continued education roles and for running their own organic farm.” A candidate with a four-year degree relevant to agriculture or food systems may possess more relevant skills than others but that does not indicate that they are necessarily more prepared for an inspector or reviewer role at an organic certifier.

Moreover, **non-agricultural work experience can often provide the skills necessary to be a successful inspector or reviewer**. For example, while someone in logistics may not initially understand the nuances of organic operations, they may have the critical thinking skills that stakeholders highlighted as important to the inspector and reviewer roles. One interviewee previously worked in consulting and explained that their experience working with federal regulations prepared them to apply organic regulations in their job as a reviewer.

Yet, when asked what they look for when hiring inspectors and reviewers in terms of skills, **certifiers list a four-year degree (whether relevant or not) and/or a background in agriculture as essential**. One certifier stated, “We currently require a degree - per our company policy. This also allows us to train all auditors to the NOP...” This requirement trended across other bodies. However, the same certifier noted, “I believe there are qualified, competent individuals that may not have the degree.”

By primarily focusing on specialized education, skill, and experience in agriculture—which are already in short supply—certifiers unintentionally shrink the pool of potentially qualified inspectors and reviewers. Certifiers could help expand the pool of applicants without sacrificing quality by deprioritizing a focus on four-year degrees and direct experience in agriculture and instead search for and consider candidates who have other transferable skills that match the needs of the inspector and/or reviewer role. As one interviewee shared, a career counselor told her she would be a good fit as a police officer because of her detective and investigative skills; however, she found a better career match in organic inspection where she was able to use those skills while also working in an industry for which she was passionate.

Recommendations

Develop alternatives to IOIA training and build acceptance and use of these alternate standards to reduce barriers to entry.

- Develop a standardized “baseline” curriculum that covers all essential skills and training required for entry-level inspectors and certification reviewers.
  - Leverage existing resources such as the ACA’s “Guidance on Organic Inspector Qualifications.”
  - Create a list of approved courses or trainings that meet specific parts of the curriculum, allowing each trainee to choose the materials that meet their individual needs.
  - Utilize subject matter experts from the ACA, IOIA, universities, and community colleges to construct coursework.
  - Utilize and expand on existing sources of training from certification bodies, the ACA, and NOP’s OILC.
- Crowdsource and review alternative training materials from organic certifiers and other educational institutions to create a repository of training options. For instance, the Organic Regulations Trainings provided by Vermont Tech (part of Vermont State University), which costs $300 per course.
- Provide alternative low- or no-cost training materials or courses and make them accessible to all audiences by hosting training in a publicly available format and location.
  - Consider possible platforms to host training: the USDA, AMS, OILC, or TOPP websites; or independent websites maintained by certification bodies.

Hire candidates that demonstrate essential soft skills and abilities and provide them with organic-specific technical training to fill gaps in knowledge.

- Seek out and hire candidates that have demonstrated strong proficiency in “hard-to-teach” skills such as observation, attention to detail, communication, adaptability, self-organization, cultural competency, and research and information gathering.
- Once hired, provide training in specific technical topics relevant to the employee’s role (e.g., mass-balance audits, dairy production, regulatory knowledge, risk-based assessments).

Entry to Organic Inspection and Reviewer Careers

Collaborate with agriculture-focused universities, community colleges, and technical colleges to develop organic inspector certificate programs to allow quick entry into the industry following graduation.

- Use and build upon existing curriculum handbooks, such as “Training for Organic Agriculture Professionals: Model Curricula, Syllabi, and Strategies” developed by the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) and the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA).
- Partner with two-year agriculture programs at junior colleges to develop organic training coursework within a degree program that will allow students to obtain inspector or reviewer training as they pursue their degree.
- Collaborate with academic institutions offering organic farming certificate programs to adapt programs for inspectors and reviewers (e.g., the Organic Farming Certificate Program at Delaware Valley University, the “Organic Farming Systems” undergraduate certificate from Oregon State University, and the “Organic Farmer Certificate Course Online” at IAP Career College).

Develop role-specific handbooks for certification bodies that outline best practices for hiring and outreach to inspectors and certification reviewers.

- Offer best practices for hiring and outreach including sample job descriptions and outreach and marketing materials (e.g., drafted social media posts).
- Share industry-approved training offerings and curricula that certifiers can share with new hires to begin training and/or expand upon their current offerings.

Increase awareness of opportunities in organic inspection and reviewing among the current, emerging, and future workforce.

- Develop an outreach campaign to reach farmers and others in related fields to encourage them to consider careers in organic inspection.
  - Other related fields may include (but are not limited to) non-organic agricultural work, inspections for other certification schemes (e.g., non-GMO, humane certified), logistics and shipping, regulatory compliance, food and beverage manufacturing, and food safety.
- Conduct outreach at secondary schools to increase awareness of careers in organic inspection and reviewing at an earlier age.
  - Utilize existing organizations such as 4-H and Future Farmers of America to spread the word about careers in the organic industry.
- Conduct outreach with universities, community colleges, and technical colleges through career fairs and presentations to classes in agriculture departments to raise awareness about career opportunities.
  - Individual certifiers as well as representatives of industry groups such as the ACA, TOPP, or the Organic Trade Association (OTA) should share information about job openings across organizations.

Update job requirements and descriptions to better balance the need for technical and non-technical soft skills for both inspectors and reviewers.

- When evaluating inspector and reviewer candidates, consider qualifications such as work experience, education experience, and other non-technical skills.
  - Consider previous work experience outside of agriculture that is translatable to organic inspection and review skills.
  - Consider candidates without four-year degrees but who have relevant skills and/or experience.
  - Write job descriptions that focus on required or “must-have” soft skills, while still including more technical or niche skills as preferred, but not mandatory.
- Update industry guidance on essential qualifications (such as the ACA’s “Guidance on Organic Inspection Qualifications”) to reflect recent changes in organic regulation and help certification bodies develop job listings that focus on the most critical skills, knowledge, and experience.

Entry to Organic Inspection and Reviewer Careers

Existing Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Gaps

Once employed, inspectors and reviewers often still lack critical competencies, requiring additional training and education to bring them up to speed.

Challenges

Inspectors and reviewers often lack real-world experience because training focuses on organic regulation but not applied experience focused on conducting inspections.

Inspections demand both technical knowledge and soft skills on the part of the inspector. They must first prepare by reviewing the operation's Organic System Plan (OSP) that describes its operation. Once on the farm, inspectors must interact with a farmer, review and understand their documentation, take adequate notes, and ask questions. Each farm, business, and inspection are unique, with differences in their local environment, processes, record-keeping, and more. Because of this, there are many nuances that an inspector must notice, analyze, and describe in a written report. **These nuances are difficult to teach in a classroom and are often obtained only through practical experience.**

The IOIA, OILC, and other training providers are essential to training inspectors on standards and regulations for properly analyzing and evaluating OSPs and organic operations. However, inspectors across the industry noted that while technical knowledge is critical to performing their jobs, conducting an actual inspection is not intuitive and requires its own training.

While inspectors learn what is allowed or disallowed by the organic standards during their initial training, a majority of inspectors stated that **training courses do not offer the experience of completing a real inspection.** One survey participant noted that the initial classroom training did not adequately prepare them to conduct a complete inspection, from preparation to report. Others concurred, stating they had to independently learn and train themselves to feel prepared to complete an inspection in person. To quote an inspector, "IOIA is led by wonderful, dedicated people, but I left my week of IOIA with a great theoretical understanding of what inspection is, but literally no clue how to actually do an inspection in the real world."

Inspectors and reviewers struggle with the technical aspects of farms and operations–particularly techniques, procedures, and equipment used across different operations–and require additional specialized training after hiring.

To quote a survey participant, "If it wasn't for my farming background, I think I would have struggled with being an inspector. Living on a farm and understanding the true way agriculture works is something no class can teach." Another participant stated, "If you have not farmed commercially or operated a processing facility or livestock operation, there will be significant gaps in understanding that will impact what questions are asked. The ability to assess [an operation] plus respon[d] to questions...to determine if there are systemic issues is informed by experience."

These observations highlight the criticality of understanding how farms and facilities operate. However, **interviewees and survey participants both felt that their training did not adequately teach them the technical aspects of farming.** Those who have previous experience with farming or an educational background in agriculture tend to have fewer initial struggles understanding organic operations, but even they cited the need for additional training on farming and agriculture basics such as dairy farm operations, styles of crops, and livestock. This includes reviewers who, even though they do not often step foot on a farm or facility to fulfill their role, said that they would appreciate more agriculture-focused training.

Complex operations, such as livestock operations, are more difficult for inspectors to master and require dedicated training opportunities to improve inspector abilities.

Across the industry, stakeholders noted the more complex an operation is, the more difficult it is to inspect and review. In the survey, **multiple certification bodies stated that the ability to conduct complex operations was a pressing gap in inspector training and education.** Interviewees made similar remarks, particularly noting the difficulty of inspecting and reviewing livestock operations.

As compared to crops or handling inspections, livestock inspections require a greater amount of investigation. For one, livestock operations are home to living animals. These operations require knowledge of animal health and feed sources, which in turn require detailed investigation into recordkeeping of sales, products purchases, veterinary records, and more. Additionally, NOP regulations (i.e., the Organic Livestock and Poultry Standards rule) mandate certain specifications for living conditions and outdoor access. All of these are components that must be explored thoroughly to accurately assess their alignment with the standards.

Inspectors of all levels struggle to conduct mass balance calculations and traceability audits.

Across the surveys and interviews, inspectors and certification bodies commented on the difficulty of mass balance calculations and traceability reporting. **Certification bodies noted that these skills have become more necessary, but also more difficult to master now that the SOE rule is fully implemented.**

Mass balance calculations tend to be difficult because they require math skills—something individuals well past their school years may be out of practice with. They also require investigation and critical thinking skills when reviewing operation reports to ensure that enough product or crop was purchased, produced, and/or harvested in line with sales and production records.

Similarly, conducting traceability exercises requires a detailed review of paperwork to track purchased ingredients for the farm, ingredients found on the farm, and products sent to the consumer. Each farm collects and stores their documentation differently. One survey participant stated, "It is always surprising how many ways operations have to record their activities. I still struggle a bit to translate some operators' documentation into standard inventory information." For each of these processes, inspectors must learn to review a variety of paperwork to accurately assess if a facility meets NOP requirements.

Inspectors and reviewers lack awareness of each other's roles and responsibilities, leading to inefficiencies in certification and renewal processes.

Reviewers are dependent on inspectors and the quality of their reports, and cross-training is a useful means of building understanding between both groups of workers. However, **few reviewers mentioned that they had cross-training experience unless they had employment in both roles, and less than half of inspectors surveyed indicated that they had experience working as reviewers.**

For inspectors, understanding what a reviewer needs to see to issue a final recommendation on certification helps them focus their efforts during their inspection and when writing up their report. As one survey participant stated, "How do you know you are hitting the high points if you aren't familiar with the high points from a review perspective?" Without this knowledge, inspectors may neglect to note key details in their reports, leading at best to delays in the review process as reviewers track down missing information, and at worst resulting in misinformed certification decisions.

Likewise, understanding the process of conducting an inspection is important for reviewers as they analyze reports. One interviewee noted that it was helpful to have previously been an inspector prior to being a reviewer because they understood how certifiers assigned inspections, the necessary preparations for an inspection, and the difficulties of conducting an inspection. Because of this perspective, they are better able to communicate with inspectors when issues arise. As one survey participant observed, "How do you know not to give an inspector a hard time about things if you have never had your boots on the ground?"

Recommendations

Offer on-site training opportunities and inspection walkthroughs to teach inspectors skills beyond the organic production standards, including reviewing OSPs, paperwork collection and review, client communication, etc.

- Encourage and provide in-the-field experiences early in training to provide inspection-related experience from the outset.
- Create a guide of key experiential skills and opportunities in role-specific handbooks.
- Offer group training opportunities to provide hands-on experience to more inspectors while minimizing the number of necessary trainers and fostering collaboration among trainees.
- Collaborate with universities, technical colleges, high schools, and youth development organizations to offer and host training opportunities.

Offer communications training to help inspectors and reviewers communicate more effectively with clients of different backgrounds and improve inspection outcomes.

- Assess local and regional farming practices, techniques, and preferences of farming communities; train inspectors and reviewers to build awareness of these unique factors.
- Train all inspectors and reviewers on how site-specific conditions and cultural and community factors may impact their inspections and review processes. For example, it may be more difficult to connect with Amish communities by phone or email.

Existing Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Gaps

Develop “Farming 101” training materials on a variety of farming practices to improve inspectors’ and reviewers’ technical knowledge of agricultural operations.

- Create a repository of existing resources, including online courses provided by universities and extensions (e.g., “Ag101: Introduction to Agriculture” from Penn State Extension and courses from the Cornell Small Farms Program).
- Provide handouts or other resources on basic terms, techniques, procedures, and equipment used on farms and facilities.
- Consider possible platforms to host training: the USDA, AMS, OILC, or TOPP websites; or independent websites maintained by certifiers.

Use continuing education opportunities to teach and improve technical skills such as mass balance, traceability, and use of technology in the field (e.g., document scanning software).

- Organizations such as the ACA, TOPP, or NOP could offer monthly or quarterly virtual skills sessions.
- Recommend that certification bodies offer virtual office hours for staff and contract inspectors and reviewers to ask questions in a free and open learning environment.
- Publish a calendar of continuing education opportunities that inspectors and reviewers can reference and use to help pick training opportunities.

Cross-train inspectors and reviewers so that each understands the role, expectations, and experiences of the other to improve inspection reports, certification decisions, and soft skills.

- Require inspectors and reviewers to shadow/observe across roles.
- Offer on-the-farm training to certification reviewers.
- Offer inspectors shadowing experiences with certification reviewers (e.g., require new inspectors to shadow the reviewer of their first several inspection reports).

Access to Education and Training Resources

The organic industry has created many educational resources and training opportunities, but they are spread across many organizations, not well advertised, and not easily accessible for inspectors and reviewers.

Challenges

There are many effective education and training materials available for organic inspectors, but a lack of awareness of these resources and/or access to them limits their usefulness.

Across interviews and surveys, there was a consensus that there are **gaps in the training materials and programs available to all inspectors and reviewers.** However, some training materials have already been developed to address these gaps. For example, in partnership with NOP and its Human Capital Capacity Building Initiative, a group of stakeholders, including certification bodies and universities, developed an extensive training document that provides model curricula, syllabi, and strategies for training inspectors. The Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA), with the support of TOPP, is developing other training materials. The curriculum and materials are still being developed but are intended to be extensive.

With the notable exception of tools like USDA's OILC, **the extensive pool of organic inspection resources is spread across many locations and not easily accessible to many organic professionals.** In some cases, stakeholders have created useful resources, but these have failed to gain exposure among the organic certification community. For example, the Human Capital Capacity Building project materials mentioned above were submitted to NOP, but their authors are unaware of any public release of the materials, and no one who participated in surveys or interviews (outside of the authors) knew of the existence of this work.

These are just two examples of detailed training materials created or being created across the industry. **Expanding training opportunities and resources may not require developing novel products. Instead, the industry can save time and resources by tracking and consolidating what already exists and sharing it across the national certification body network.** This will help support certifiers who seek to develop their own training materials and highlight the gaps in knowledge that can then be filled with new, targeted training materials.

> New inspectors often find it difficult to independently initiate mentorship or apprenticeships, despite recognizing that mentorships and apprenticeships are incredibly valuable and provide essential field experience.

Inspectors and certifiers alike identified experiential learning through mentorships and apprenticeships as critical to developing competent organic inspectors. In addition, the SOE rule requires real-world experience. One survey respondent explained, “After covering the fundamentals in the IOIA class, the most valuable training was shadowing inspections. I would want to shadow with more inspectors (to see how other people do it) at a greater variety of operations (to have a greater variety of issues come up to learn from).”

However, **educational providers rarely facilitate such mentorships or internships, instead requiring inspectors to set them up on their own, and certification bodies typically require prospective inspectors to already have this experience.** The IOIA provides a list of contacts for newly certified inspectors to contact for mentorship, but inspectors reported that they did not always receive a response from individuals on this list and often had to use a personal connection as a mentor. One inspector noted, “It’s expensive and actually a dead end if you can’t find an inspector to mentor you or any apprenticeship…” The IOIA has attempted to break down this barrier by providing an apprenticeship program and offering field training separate from their regular coursework. However, apprenticeship offerings are limited, and for the IOIA to break even on their extra field training, they must charge $1,000 per person for a two-day workshop, a cost that acts as another barrier to mentorship.

Participating in mentorships or apprenticeships is particularly challenging for contracting inspectors, who are likely to receive less support, if any, from certifiers, including pay for any required shadowing experiences. **Without pay for conducting required inspections while shadowing or providing mentorship to others, inspectors are less likely to participate in programs and may struggle to enter the industry entirely.** With a large portion of the workforce acting as contractors, this leaves a large gap in mentorship opportunities and may also dissuade contractors from participating in mentorships without pay.

In addition to the difficulty in arranging a mentorship or apprenticeship, another barrier is the **lack of training courses for trainers and mentors**—most educational providers and most certifiers do not provide such training. As a result, the quality of mentorship experiences can vary, and inspectors who might otherwise participate do not. Several surveyed inspectors said that they have not offered to provide mentorship because they are not confident that they are qualified, even with their experience; the ability to take a course on how to provide mentorship while working with a new inspector would help bridge this gap.

Access to Education and Training Resources

Recommendations

Create a centralized database of organic resources across the industry to increase awareness of and access to existing materials.

- Conduct a needs assessment of currently available organic resources, identifying what is needed, what is currently available, what needs to be developed, and what formats may be best for individuals and organizations to access.
- Evaluate the accuracy and usefulness of available resources and approve valuable resources for general use.
- Curate and organize the resources by audience/user, topic, etc. so that inspectors and reviewers can easily find resources that fit a specific need.

Facilitate opportunities for mentorships, internships, and apprenticeships for inspectors and reviewers.

- Use the TOPP farmer mentorship program as a model for an inspector and reviewer mentorship and/or apprenticeship program.
  - Develop and/or build upon existing websites to create a database for networking, connecting mentors to mentees and interested candidates to apprenticeships. Encourage inspectors and reviewers to create profiles on the site and interact via online forums.
  - Use existing mentorship guidance and instruction manuals created for the Human Capital project and other existing materials, such as the CCOF mentorship guide, to provide resources such as job descriptions, curriculum for mentors and mentees, sample agreements and memoranda of understanding (MOUs), guidance on pay and compensation, and more.
- Partner with technical and community colleges to provide apprenticeship opportunities for student credit.

Access to Education and Training Resources

Offer resources to increase the willingness and capability of senior inspectors and reviewers to mentor newer employees, particularly contract workers who may not be required or have the means to participate in mentorship programs.

- Offer “train the trainer” sessions to share training techniques and resources with smaller organizations to help them develop their own training programs.
  - Improve training outcomes by teaching organic inspection trainers techniques that support different learning styles.
  - Standardize key learning objectives to ensure training is consistent.
  - Utilize other mentor training materials, such as the TOPP Mentor Training Series, as a guide.
- Provide financial incentives to increase the number of experienced inspectors willing to provide mentorships.

Help inspectors and reviewers network and share lessons learned and best practices.

- Encourage attendance at industry-wide and regional conferences.
- Use presentations and panels to share best practices.
- Ask conference attendees to report out lessons learned from conferences—including industry updates, best practices, and new resources—to coworkers.

Workforce Data and Assessment Methods

A lack of organic-specific data, the absence of widely accepted education standards, and the difficulties of assessing region-specific gaps further limit the ability of the industry to pinpoint and collaboratively solve challenges.

Challenges

There is no central source of workforce data specific to the organic industry.

Data is essential to establishing the current state of an industry and developing robust workforce programs that target specific industry needs. While the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the National Center for Education Statistics provide general data on agricultural jobs and post-secondary educational programs, they do not collect workforce data specific to the organic industry. This creates an a**bsence of comprehensive, robust data on organic inspectors and reviewers.**

This report was able to gather more general information on the agriculture industry and related education fields, as well as organic-specific information from stakeholders through interviews and surveys. However, general labor and workforce data do not offer precise insight into the organic inspector and reviewer workforce, while information gained from stakeholder engagement in this project provides only a snapshot based on the select certifiers, employees, and contractors who responded.

Without sufficient data on the number of inspectors, reviewers, their average salary, demographics, geographical location, type of employment, etc., **it is difficult to provide a full picture of the organic certification workforce and specific employment gaps.** Additionally, the lack of data makes it difficult to measure change over time, thus, rendering it nearly impossible to objectively identify areas that have improved or areas that may require further development.

Certification bodies struggle to find qualified inspectors to work in certain geographical areas or scopes, leaving gaps in some areas of the country.

While there is a general shortage of qualified inspectors across the country, most certification bodies agreed that specific regional gaps create a larger problem. They indicated that there are either not enough inspectors in specific regions, and/or not enough inspectors with a specific skillset needed in a region (e.g., experience with livestock operations). These regional and scope gaps can increase costs and reduce efficiency (e.g., inspectors with in-demand expertise may need to travel longer distances, increasing travel costs and passing on higher certification costs to organic operations).

Although many certifiers can pinpoint their individual needs, the industry as whole has struggled to characterize larger regional trends and needs. This challenge—the struggle to understand the nature and extent of gaps in capability and capacity—limits the industry's ability to respond to regional shortages and ultimately burdens all businesses in the organic industry. **Coordinated action is required to help identify and fully characterize these detrimental gaps** and ensure the industry has the inspection and certification expertise needed to continue to support the market.

Geographic Coverage

Most certification bodies reported that they currently do not have a sufficient number of inspectors to conduct their business and need between one and five more inspectors to adequately fulfill their role as certifier. However, when asked about their challenges in finding inspectors, **23 (of 28) certifiers could not find a sufficient number of applicants in a specific geographic area or region.** Across interviews, certifiers indicated they had clients in certain regions but no inspectors there, creating gaps in service across the country.

Based on data collected during this needs assessment, certification bodies in Alabama, Alaska, and Delaware have the most operations to inspect per agency. While this is not a perfect indicator of overwork, given that some operations may be small or may utilize certifiers outside of their own state, it may indicate that some certifiers in these states are overloaded. Other regions and states specifically noted as having inspector shortages include Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, the Northeast, the Rocky Mountains, and the West Coast. These states and regions cover a large portion of the country, suggesting the potential for large gaps in inspector coverage.

Lack of Region-Specific Expertise

Beyond physical capacity, **a lack of inspectors in a specific region leaves a knowledge gap regarding what is farmed in those regions and how.** Certain regions may farm different products or use different farming techniques. For example, Florida is more likely to grow produce whereas corn is likely grown in the Midwest. Moreover, identical products are grown differently across regions (e.g., farming wheat in Maryland is very different than how it is farmed in eastern Washington state due to differences in soil type, topography, rainfall, average temperature, weed and pest management, fertilization, etc.). Thus, taking an inspector who is familiar with one region and sending them to another may result in an inaccurate inspection report due to their lack of knowledge of the regional differences.

Additionally, certifiers have noted that even if they do have enough inspectors, they still may not have enough to cover a specific scope within a region (such as livestock inspectors in California). Not only does this make business more difficult for certification bodies, but the gap in inspectors is also costly, increasing prices for certifiers and farmers who need to have inspectors travel far to conduct an inspection.

The organic certification industry lacks widely accepted competency models for organic inspectors and reviewers.

Interviews and survey results across all stakeholders highlighted that organic inspection and review are complex jobs that require a specific set of specialized KSAs. Despite this, certification bodies often find it challenging to identify specific KSAs beyond general regulatory requirements. Some certifiers have developed detailed guidance that applies to their organization specifically, but there is no industry-accepted standard for essential KSAs (also known as a competency model) for inspectors and reviewers. The lack of a competency model makes it difficult for certifiers to know what KSAs to focus on as they hire new talent and upskill current talent. **More importantly, lack of consistent, widely accepted competency standards limits the industry's ability to collaboratively build a robust pipeline of skilled certification professionals.**

Since implementation of the SOE final rule, the organic regulations describe minimum qualifications for inspectors and reviewers. However, these qualifications are very general and are intended primarily to assist NOP in enforcement of the industry. This means that the organic regulations only provide the most basic, high-level framework; they do not provide enough detail to help the certification industry make targeted enhancements to the workforce.

The certification industry has developed frameworks that describe essential KSAs—including the ACA's "Guidance on Inspector Qualifications" document. However, this guidance may be outdated, as it was written in early 2018, before NOP published multiple rules that significantly updated the organic regulations. Additionally, it is unclear how much of the industry has accepted and used ACA's guidance. As a result, individual certifiers outline their own requirements, which are often different from other certifiers in the industry. These inconsistencies lead to varying inspector and reviewer skillsets across the organic sector—which may contribute to low retention within the industry and may confuse new applicants as they attempt to understand the requirements to be an inspector or reviewer.

Survey responses support the need for industry-accepted standards that describe critical KSAs (e.g., a competency model). One inspector stated that "...[it] is very difficult to even know HOW to become an inspector much less then completing the steps. We need to make it more accessible for the next generation." Others recognize the need for collaborative action to develop a solution that meets the needs of the entire industry: "ACA is a great resource and the intentional cooperation that is fostered is greatly needed in this disparate industry. The age of the NOP program necessitates a more cohesive design needed in order to move forward."

Recommendations

Conduct an industry-wide collection of workforce and employment data and update it every three to five years.

- Develop a survey to collect essential workforce information including number of employees, employee type, demographic information, wages, etc. using individual identifiers to avoid information duplication.
  - Identify organizations within the certification industry who can lead this effort. Ideally, this would be a well-respected organization that is accustomed to working with certification bodies and is trusted to conduct fair and independent assessments that benefit all. This may also require additional expertise to collect and analyze data. Ideally, this could be provided by an impartial organization outside of the certification industry, who has experience in workforce development, the organic industry, data collection and analysis, and measurement development and evaluation.

Contact BLS and suggest adding new occupation codes for organic industry positions to improve data collection in the future.

- BLS periodically revises the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes to reflect changes in the economy and the nature of work. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has not shared when the next revision will occur, but BLS anticipates its release in 2028.

Workforce Data and Assessment Methods

Develop, design, and implement an outreach plan to secondary and post-secondary educational institutions, the agriculture industry, and relevant industries in geographic areas in need of additional organic inspector coverage.

- Collaborate with certification bodies to identify the geographic areas in need of additional organic inspectors and reviewers, both in general and with specific scope or niche skills.
- Conduct targeted outreach in line with other recommendations identified in this assessment.

Develop standardized competency models for inspectors and reviewers that describe essential KSAs and serve as accepted “baseline” qualifications.

- Develop competency models that are detailed enough to help certification bodies target and evaluate talent, but flexible enough to allow use across the industry and the country.
- Develop competency models that are accepted across the certification industry by including stakeholders in the process: seek input from across the industry; share drafts and incorporate feedback; communicate the use of competency models and secure buy-in from the industry.
- Leverage existing resources such as the ACA’s “Guidance on Organic Inspector Qualifications” as a potential model.

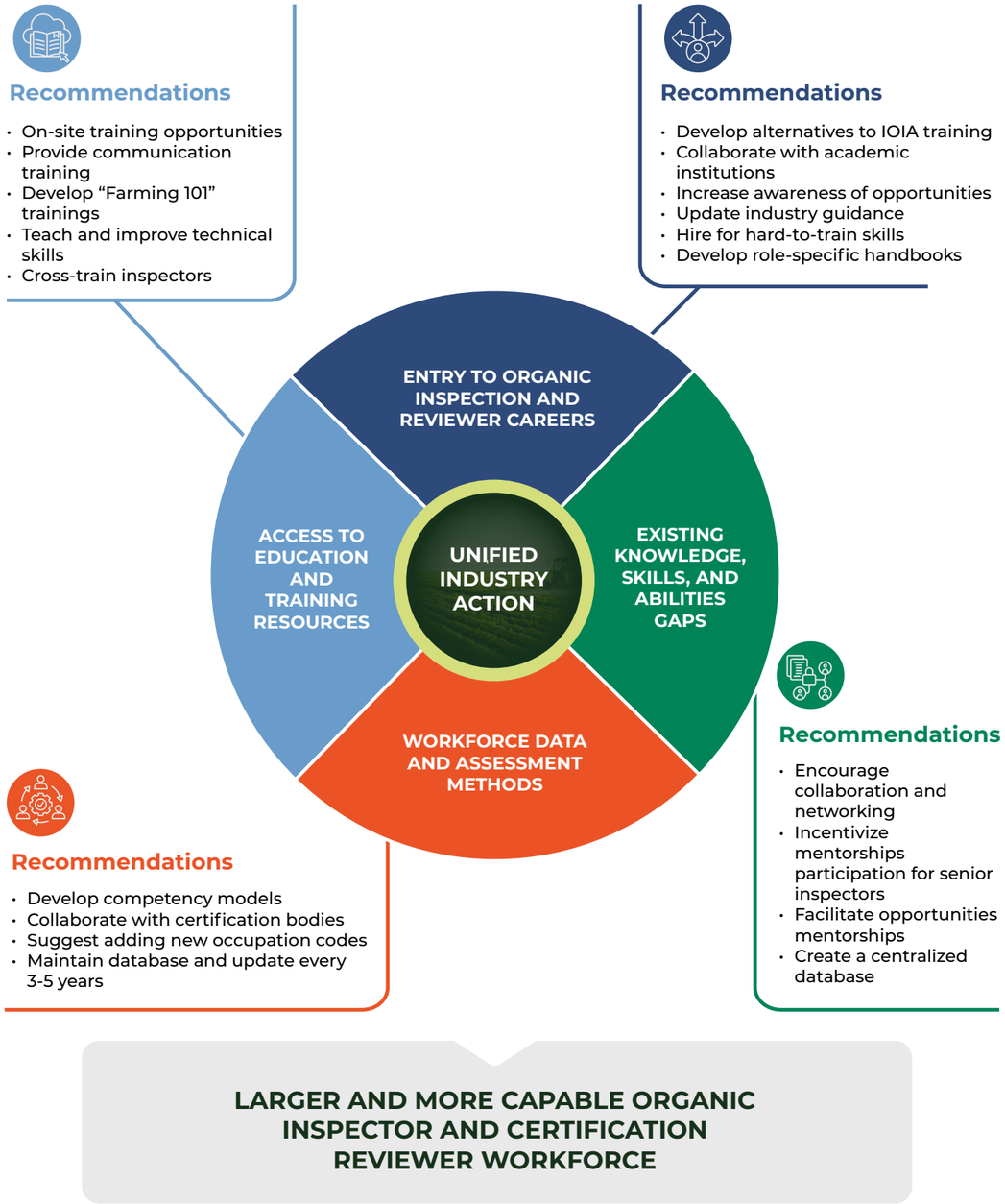
Conclusion

To keep up with the booming demand for organic products, the industry requires a competent and fully staffed inspector and certification reviewer workforce to accurately certify operations. However, the industry currently faces a shortage of workers and gaps in its training and outreach strategies. Although these challenges are complex and broad in scope, **the organic industry has the opportunity to create a larger and more capable organic inspector and reviewer workforce through enhanced education and training. Realizing this will require a unified strategy and coordinated action across the spectrum of certification professionals.**

Next Steps and Implementation

Implementing the recommendations outlined in this report will help secure a strong certification workforce to support future organic market growth. However, successful implementation will require careful planning, coordinated action, and a way to evaluate and measure success. To ensure successful implementation, the organic certification industry should seek to:

- **Assemble a task force** or working group responsible for coordinating implementation of this report's recommendations.
- **Identify stakeholders** responsible for implementing individual recommendations; engaging stakeholders to secure buy-in and commitment.
- **Develop an action plan** and roadmap that translates recommendations into individual projects, outlines responsibilities, and sets timelines and milestones.
- **Establish goals** for each project and parameters for participants to measure and demonstrate success; establish methods to measure the effectiveness of each project once implemented.
- **Manage the execution and implementation** of all recommendations; monitor, evaluate, and report progress; manage and assure quality of work.
- **Evaluate the success** of each project and measure the overall impact on the industry.
- **Close out projects** that have met goals; establish maintenance efforts as needed; revise and continue initiatives that require additional effort.



Appendix A: Survey Results

Inspector Survey Results

Total Respondents for the Inspector Section: 43

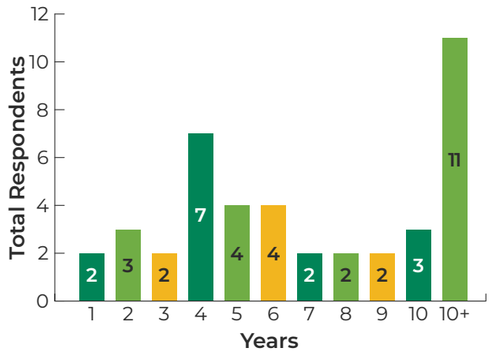
Question

What is your job title?

Job Title	Total Respondents
Contract Inspector	9
Inspector	9
Organic Inspector	5
Independent Organic Inspector	3
Organic Inspector	2
Agricultural Inspector Biologist, Auditor, Contract Auditor, Contract Organic Inspector, Independent Contract Inspector, Independent Contract Crop and Poultry Inspector, Inspector Program Coordinator, Inspector 2, Inspector Final Reviewer, Inspector/Consultant, Organic Contractor Inspector, Organic Independent Inspector, Senior Inspector, Staff Inspector	1 each

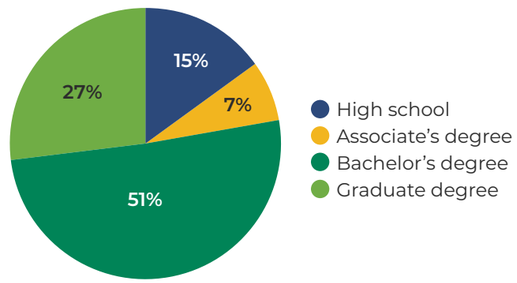
Question

How many years have you worked as an inspector?



Question

What is your highest level of education?



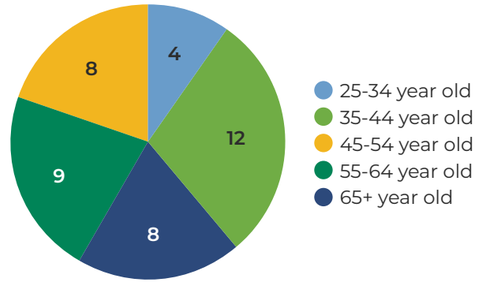
Question

If you have received a bachelor's degree or higher, please list your major(s).

Degree Relevant to Agriculture or Food Systems	Total Respondents
Yes*	14
No	18

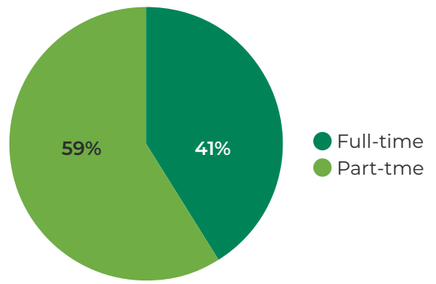
Question

What is your age?



Question

Is organic inspection a full-time or part-time job?



Question

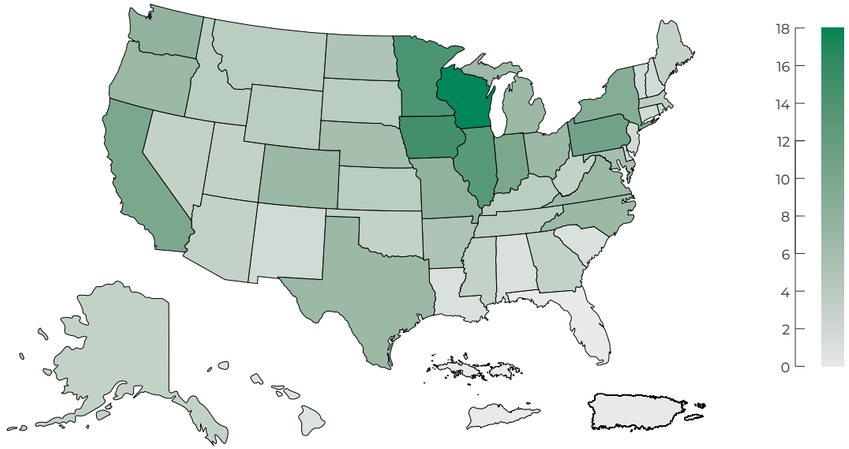
If organic inspection is part-time, what other occupation(s) do you currently have?

Occupation	Total Respondents
Farmer	7
Retired	5
Consulting	5
Certification agency	1
Other	1
Food/agriculture supply chain or retailer	1
Organic expert, other than inspection	1
Agricultural inspector or compliance officer (non-organic)	1

Question

In what states/territories have you conducted inspections?

Number of Respondents Who Have Conducted an Inspection by State



Question

What scope(s) do you currently inspect? Select all that apply

Scope	Total Respondents
Crops	38
Handling	29
Livestock	24
Wild crops	23

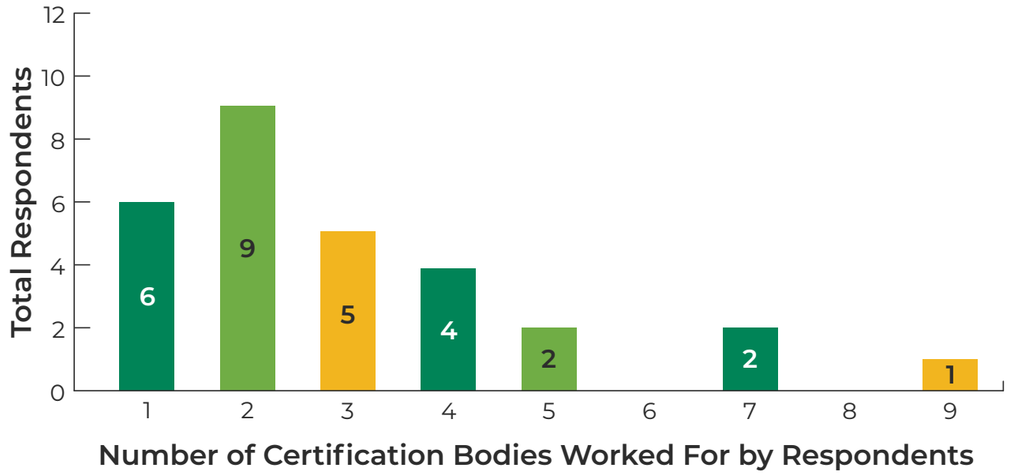
Question

Are you a contract inspector, certification body staff inspector, or a member an inspector cooperative?

Response	Total Respondents
Contract inspector	29
Certification body staff inspector	11
Member of an inspector cooperative	1

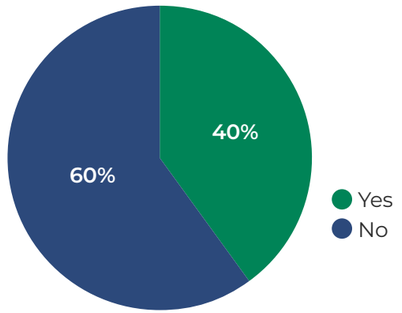
Question

If you are a contract inspector or a member of an inspector cooperative, how many certification bodies have you completed work for in the past three years?



Question

Have you previously been employed or are you currently employed as a certification reviewer?



Question

How did you become interested in pursuing a career as an organic inspector? Select all that apply. If you selected work experience, please describe.

Response	Total Respondents
Personal connection	27
Work experience	24
Working on/for a certified organic operation	17
Educational background	9
Agricultural organization	7
Other	4
Workforce program	2
Job/career fair	1

"Work experience" Descriptions	Total Respondents
Organic farming	15
Compliance expert, auditor, or other agricultural inspection	6
Food and beverage manufacturing	4
General agriculture	3
Food/agriculture supply chain or retailer	3
Farming	3
Organic certification reviewer	3
Agricultural education	1
Conservation/sustainability	1

"Other" Responses
Interest in community and learning about organic agriculture
Choice to expand my impact on and advocate for organic agriculture

Question

What type of training have you participated in? Select all that apply.

Training Type	Total Respondents
Online	38
In-person	37
On-the-job	33
Hybrid	16

Question

What organization(s) provided your training?

Organization	Total Respondents
International Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA)	32
Certification agency	27
U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)	11
Accredited Certifiers Association, Inc. (ACA)	7
State agency	3
Non-profit	3
Educational/training organization	3
Cooperative	2
Educational institution	1

Question

Have you participated in a mentorship, internship, or apprenticeship?

Question

Did you participate through an organization direct contact with an individual?

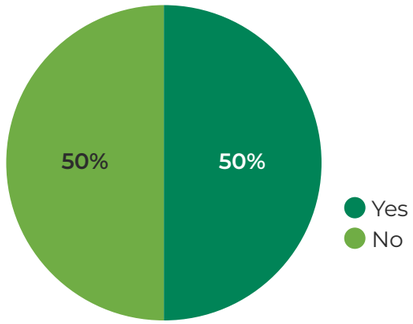
Question

If you participated through an organization, which one?

Organization Type	Total Respondents
Certification body	12
IOIA	4
ACA	2
State agency	2

Question

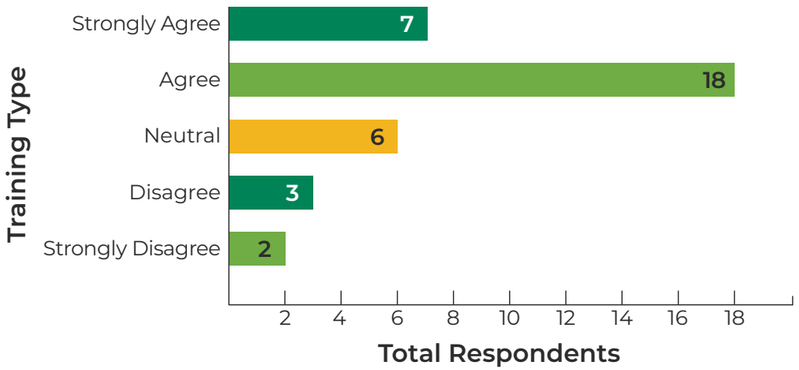
Have you participated in a mentorship, internship, or apprenticeship as a trainer/mentor? Please explain why or why not.



Why/Why Not	Total Respondents
No: Not confident that I'm qualified	5
No: Never asked	4
Yes: Want to share knowledge/give back	4
Yes: Part of my job role	2
No: Lots of work for not enough pay	1

Question

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "My initial training prepared me well for my role."



Question

Was there anything you felt was missing from your training?

Response

- No. It was super thorough and cost me nothing—I was very spoiled in the route I take.
- Job opportunities
- Not really. It is always surprising how many ways operations have to record their activities. I still struggle a bit to translate some operators' documentation into standard inventory information.
- Training was too quick. And although it helped me with understanding regulations, it does not teach how to inspect.
- Training
- **Real life practicality. Audit practice.**
- **More observational exposure at different points in the beginning (not just prior to conducting any inspections on my own). General auditing training (for example, when I took the ISO 19011 recently, I thought, "Wow, I wish I had taken this earlier in my career!").**
- **Not really.**
- **This is difficult, as I began this journey before the industry was even really established. Longer than the NOP has existed. I had been working for an agency managing the certification review team when** [certification agency] received their initial NOP certification. When I learned, it was mostly on-the-job learning!
- **The initial 'classroom' training did not adequately prepare me to be able to competently execute an inspection from prep through report.**
- **No.**
- **IOIA training is lacking in complexity and stuck in outdated ways of trainings with folks that aren't that relatable. It feels like it's time for something new and more hands on. I appreciated my mentorships as talking with seasoned inspectors was more helpful.**
- **Basic decency and kindness were missing from mentorship #1. One main thing missing from the contractor training was checking the full-time box if you wanted full time work. They did not explain the timing of how assignments would work but did say they had plenty of work for everyone and to say what you needed. I asked for 100 inspections a year because 2 a week would be enough to make a living. They sent me 10% of what I asked for the first year with no explanation. I would have liked the mentorship to consist of at least 5–10 shadow assignments and be given the full inspection packet and finished report of the mentor for each. I received a finished report from one of the mentors one time. Going out 3 times, never seeing a finished report, and then being expected to prepare a full report was hard.**

- **IOIA provided the most rigorous and intense training with the right tone regarding diligence, accuracy, ethos, and imperative**
- **I felt like I had to make my own way, both in figuring out how to get into the organic inspection industry, and also with getting myself trained well enough to feel like I could actually complete an inspection. The "traditional" pathway that I was put onto was to take the IOIA course, then somehow find myself a mentor, and then do just 3 inspections with that mentor, and then somehow I was supposed to be prepared to do this job??** IOIA is led by wonderful, dedicated people, but I left my week of IOIA with a great theoretical understanding of what inspection is, but literally no clue how to actually do an inspection in the real world. But I was well practiced in how to find the precise citation from the regulations for "issues of concern"! Which has almost nothing to do with the actual skill of conducting an organic inspection. I connected with [certification agency], who had also recognized the major weakness of the inspector training pipeline and had taken it upon themselves to fill the gap. I did a weeklong apprenticeship with [inspector], where I shadowed him on several inspections, then conducted a few of my own while he observed me. That was where I really learned how to be an inspector, even then it felt like a bit of baptism by fire when I was on my own at first. We have a long way to go as an industry in 1) developing a clear pathway for qualified people to enter the inspection industry and 2) providing useful, real-world training.
- **Yes! Feedback & follow up once I was launched out to inspections. Review of checklists, ATE's, exit interviews especially.**
- **Not really. There were many nuances in procedure and interpretation that I had to learn on the job.**
- **Hands on experience. I received my initial training during covid and it was difficult to understand some of the concepts because I am a hands on learner.**
- **On site experience.**
- **IOIA training with [**trainers]. The training was well rounded and enhanced my understanding as a certified organic producer already familiar with the organic standards, practices and procedures.
- **How to handle scheduling/ billing for multiple certifiers.**
- **No, a lot of the job is learned by actually doing it on your own.**
- **With my previous experience, the training filled in the gaps. I think if I had not had my extensive background, I would have had a steeper learning curve as an inspector.**
- **No.**
- **These questions should be separated for each scope. Following my crop training I felt prepared but not so much after my handling training. The Handling/processing [**training] did not give me the depth which I felt would have better prepared me.
- **IOIA training was only book learning, not practical.**
- **I think it would have been much better to shadow an inspector on 5 or more inspections before going on my own**

- **No. I am very knowledgeable in agriculture and organic regulations. The IOIA training was intense, but I learned a lot. My apprenticeship was practical and long enough for me. It is important to have more inspectors with agricultural experience.**
- **Every inspection is different. It takes time and experience to become well versed in inspecting.**
- **After covering the fundamentals in the IOIA class, the most valuable training was shadowing inspections. I would want to shadow with more inspectors (to see how other people do it) at a greater variety of operations (to have a greater variety of issues come up to learn from).**
- [Inspector] was an excellent mentor
- **Being an independent inspector, some certifiers don't include you in training, company emails, meetings, so there is a great deal of self-learning and study required. There was little support from one of the two certifiers.**
- **Experience is collected hands on.**
- **Most of the inspector training programs these days do not present the logistics and the practical on-site inspection methods often needed to be a good inspector.**
- **No, my mentor did a great job preparing me to be on my own.**

Question

Is there anything else about your training and/or education that you would like to share with us?

Response

- I would not be an organic inspector had I not had the financial and personnel support I did working at [certifying agency]. We were a small certifier, but all staff were all scope inspectors, certification reviewers, and material reviewers. The experience was priceless and made me incredibly proficient at my job. I now work for a different certifier, and I supervise and coordinate contract inspectors, as well as speak to aspiring inspectors. The road to becoming an inspector for someone off the street with no certifier association is expensive and difficult, and I do everything I can to help people navigate it. The industry is very difficult to even know HOW to become an inspector much less then completing the steps. We need to make it more accessible for the next generation.
- **Expensive.**
- **If it wasn't for my farming background, I think I would have struggled with being an inspector. Living on a farm and understanding the true way agriculture works is something no class can teach.**
- **More information on how to actually get work, how the industry works, connections with current inspectors**

- When I completed my apprenticeship training the pieces fell into place. I think for each scope (crop, livestock, and handling) I have been mentored on three operations each before solo inspecting.
- It's expensive and actually a dead end if you can't find an inspector to mentor you or any apprenticeship, plus you commit to a certification agency for mentored inspections before you can figure out if you'd actually be a good fit with that agency.
- There need to be more pathways for scholarships to get young inspectors and marginalized communities/farmers transitioning into organic inspection. It took me years and the training going remote through IOIA for me to be able to use PTO at my desk job to be able to afford it. There also needs to be more options for inspectors other than needing to have IOIA training prior to being eligible for mentorship.
- Each certifier has had fatal flaws in the training which cause time to be wasted in learning to prepare and submit their style of reports. Being forced to spend many hours watching webinars [and] completing online courses to demonstrate I am "trained" seems punitive. Some webinars have been excellent but some are just busy work. It was very helpful to this day that mentor #2 was a retired dairy farmer. The others weren't farmers. The main way I have learned is reading the previous reports and trying different things in my own reports. It has been learning by trial and error the entire time.
- I do not see how the OID can prepare an uninitiated individual to complete inspections. It is great as a resource and platform for folks once begun to strengthen and expand their skills. Experience cannot be taught. I see significant gaps in actual applicable experience. IF you have not farmed commercially or operated a processing facility or livestock operation there will be significant gaps in understanding that will impact what questions are asked. The ability to assess observation plus responses to questions and evaluate those in the moment to determine if there are systemic issues is informed by experience. Check box inspectors seem to me to do a disservice to the community in that operators deserve to be inspected by someone who has solid foundational knowledge of what they are inspecting. The goal of inspecting is to see the operation in the context of the standards, reflect that to the operator via the process and report. Doing so provides a basis in fact that helps an operator make informed choices regarding compliance with the standards.
- IOIA training is very expensive. I would like to take more courses from them, but I cannot justify the expense. I think the return on investment is not high enough for me.
- Make trainings available more often. California has the most diverse state and agricultural practices are different than the rest of the country.
- From my personal experience, the best way to train is in person, accompanied by an experienced mentor. Equally valuable is file review. When I first started inspecting, I also did file review for 3 years. I learned an enormous amount from other experienced inspectors who were working in all parts of the country. I was introduced to growing and production techniques for wine, rice, chocolate fabrication; tomato processing; wild crops, etc. It gave me a very wide and varied education that prepared me for 20 years of inspecting.
- During the time I was inspecting full time (1999–2016) there were multiple on-site advanced inspector trainings in the Midwest. Later on there were fewer and fewer in person hands on trainings available and

limited on-line trainings. I have found the Integrity learning Center Database modules incredibly helpful. I wish the OLPS module had been available in January.

- IOIA does a great job of training. It's a lot to learn in a short time. There could be more training available on how to be prepared for an inspection and what to bring onsite. Training on how to handle the different variables at an inspection (like Amish clients who don't have electricity; or farms where there's an hour drive out to some fields.) Or training on dealing with different types of clients- ones that are really impatient or very disorganized.
- I have loved this work for 31 years. For the first 20 years I could hardly believe I was getting paid to do it.
- IOIA does a great job filling their classes with pertinent and helpful information but in the case of Handling/Processing and all the niche products we have to cover, a mentor/mentee program should be part of it or at least more practice inspections during the course.
- IOIA training does not prepare the inspector for reality in the field.
- Shadowing multiple mentors has been so vital to my learning, but I've had to take extra time and cost to seek that out.
- I will share that I was very overwhelmed with the task at first, and it very quickly became easy with practice. When I was going through the apprenticeship at the beginning, I felt like I needed it to be a lot longer, but I think I learned better by jumping in and doing it actually. I will say it would have been very helpful for the certifying agents to give lots more feedback in the beginning on the quality of the inspection reports so that I could more quickly refine my inspection practices.
- I think IOIA did an excellent job training me for my role as an inspector, and my son was the best at mentorship.
- I worked for 30 years in a corporate career, for part of that time I was the International Trade Compliance Officer. I also have been farming for the last 13 years which led me to a career at NOFA and to a career in organic inspection.
- My edu degree is in corporate training, content analysis, and curriculum design.

Reviewer Survey Results

Total Respondents for the Reviewer Section: 55

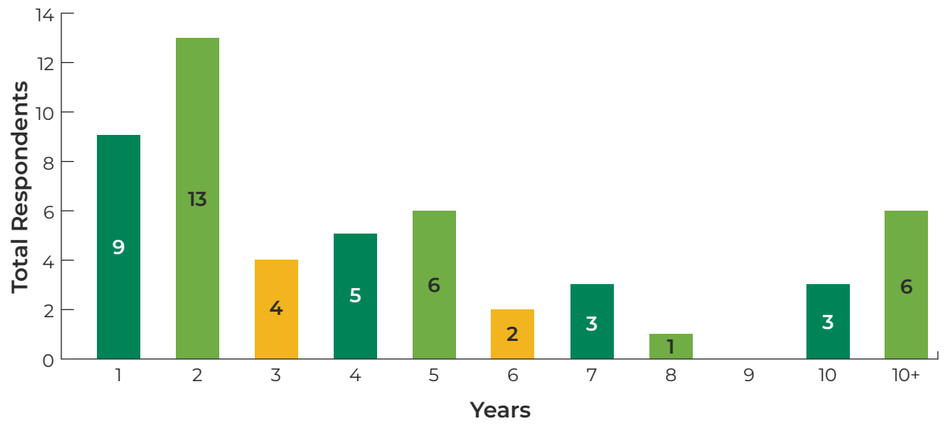
Question

What is your job title?

Job Title	Total Respondents
Certification Specialist	24
Senior Certification Officer	4
Organic Certification Specialist	3
Certification Services Supervisor	2
Program Manager, Certification Program Manager, Certification Team Lead, Certification Specialist and Client Services, File Reviewer, Certification Officer, Fiber and Textile Specialist, NOP Program Manager, Technical Associate I, Organic Handler Specialist, Certification Determination Officer, Handling Certification Coordinator, Innovation and Development, Initial Reviewer, Handler Investigation Specialist, Materials Review Specialist, Material Review, Crop Certification Reviewer, Livestock Certification Manager, Reviewer, Organic Compliance Specialist	1 each

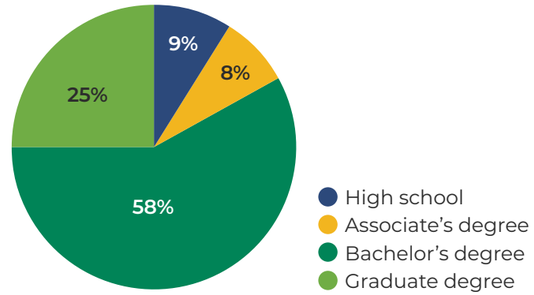
Question

How many years have you worked as a certification reviewer?



Question

What is your highest level of education?



Question

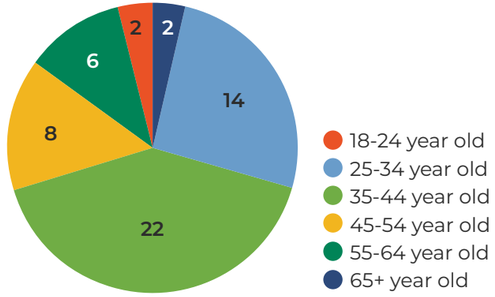
If you have received a bachelor's degree or higher, please list your major(s).

Degree Relevant to Agriculture or Food Systems	Total Respondents
Yes*	33
No	12

* Responses include Horticulture, Plant Science, Agriculture, Ecology, Livestock Science, Organic and Sustainable Agriculture, Environmental Science, Biology, Animal Science, Agroecology, Food Technology, Agricultural Trades, Agricultural Science, Animal Production Systems, Meat Science, Sustainable Development, Agricultural Operations Management, Agricultural Education, Animal and Veterinary Sciences, Dairy Science

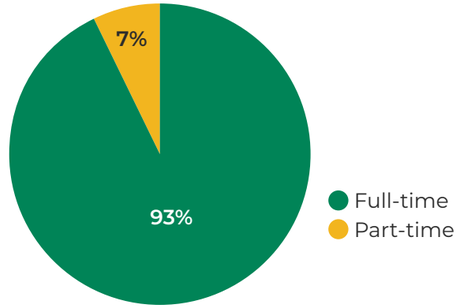
Question

What is your age?



Question

Is organic certification reviewer a full-time or part-time job?



Question

If organic certification review is part-time, what other occupation(s) do you currently have?

Occupation
Farmer
Organic consultant
Organic inspector
Education and sustainable development program coordinator

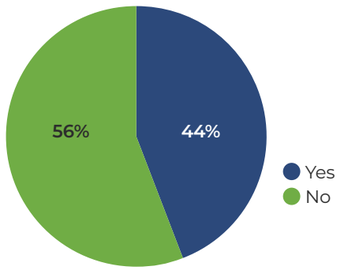
Question

What scope(s) do you currently review currently review? Select all that apply.

Scope	Total Respondents
Crops	49
Livestock	33
Wild crops	33
Handling	28

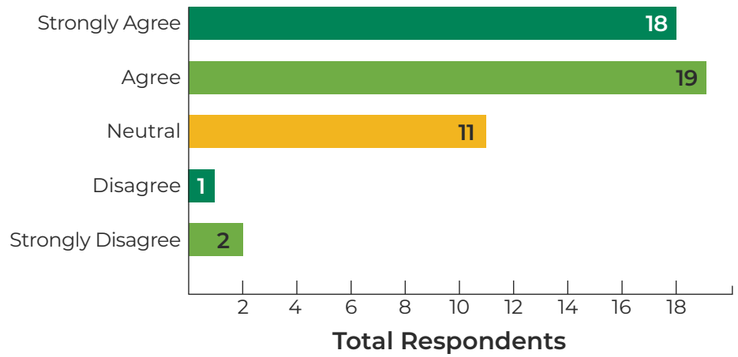
Question

Have you previously been employed or are you currently employed as an organic inspector?



Question

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "My initial training prepared me well for my role."



Question

What organization(s) provided your training?

Organization	Total Respondents
Certification agency	40
International Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA)	33
U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)	25
Accredited Certifiers Association, Inc. (ACA)	23
Non-profit educational organization	5
State agency	4
Educational institution	3

Question

How did you become an organic certification reviewer? Select all that apply.

Response	Total Respondents
Work experience	32
Personal connection	24
Working on/for certified operation	21
Educational background	16
Agricultural organization	7
Other	7
Job/career fair	2
Workforce program	2

"Work experience" Descriptions	Total Respondents
Organic farming	14
Farming	5
Inspector	5
Food/agriculture supply chain or retailer	4
Compliance or regulatory reviewer	3
Food manufacturing or processing	2
Organic expert, other than inspection	2
Agricultural education	2
Intern	2
Certifying agent administration	1

"Other" Responses
I was an organic inspector for ten years.
I was just looking for a job.
I had livestock and farmer's market experience.
I wanted to be in agriculture.
I needed healthcare.
I grew up in farming.

Question

What type of training have you participated in? Select all that apply.

Training Type	Total Respondents
Online	48
In-person	46
On-the-job	46
Hybrid	23

Question

Was there anything you felt was missing from your training?

Response

- More agriculture-based training, not just regulatory.
- On-farm experience.
- Inspection training teaches about the regulations but does not go into detail about what to do at a real inspection.
- Practical training.
- IOIA training had little on-farm practical exposure.
- No.
- No. Was a reviewer first and then trained to conduct inspections.
- Nothing from a technical side, but I really struggled starting out inspecting. It is really difficult to make a living working as a full-time inspector, and I wished that there was an aspect of training that was geared towards teaching people about how to make that happen.
- Explanation that the rules may be interpreted differently by each certifying agency.
- It would be nice if NOP offered a Certification Officer Academy. Or, if my employer had a defined training program and pipeline.
- The opportunity to practice writing noncompliances and reminders and have them evaluated for feedback by peers.
- A clear training pathway for new reviewers.
- I can tell you what I think is missing from OTHER people's training, hahaha. You can't train people to be good writers or to be curious. You have to hire people who can do that. But if you've hired someone who goes out on an inspection and comes back with an inspection report that is all checked boxes and fluff, you aren't getting good information, so having that part of inspections—and reviewing training is VERY important.
- You can't train people to be good writers or to be curious. You have to hire people who can do that. But if you've hired someone who goes out on an inspection and comes back with an inspection report that is all checked boxes and fluff... you aren't getting good information, so having that part of inspections - and Reviewing Training is VERY important.
- [Certifying agency] and IOIA did a great job. [Certifying agency's] training program could use some improvements. For reviewers, there is currently no training program at [certifying agency] for how to do final reviews, and new Certification Officers are trained on this critical job function by senior COs who themselves have had no training in how to educate others. This lack of consistency results in the work being completed to all different levels and puts the company at risk for being out of compliance. There is no functional quality control system in place to double check reviewer work, so the inconsistency in review work is exacerbated as we lose our more senior employees and scramble to backfill their places.

- Too many years of training to really have any valid input here. However, certifiers could/should implement a placement test/knowledge evaluation so that experienced new hires can avoid unnecessary repetitive training modules.
- Case studies.
- A guide or an outline would have been helpful. Additionally, there is not much training out there for how to be a reviewer or any kind of cross-training so that one understands the other.
- Up-to-date policies and procedures.
- The training program wasn't very clear, so it took a while before I felt competent.
- I felt that I could've benefited from more in-person, hands-on training.
- The IOIA training was good, but there is so much more to learn. I also shadowed other inspectors and that did help to cement the knowledge and better prepare me for doing inspections on my own.
- DEI.
- There is just a lot of information to learn and a lot of learning comes from experience.
- More examples or case studies where there are grey areas in the regulations that certifiers need to make an internal decision on. Also, how we should interpret risk-based reviews.
- IOIA was very thorough.
- My organizational was in major flux when I onboarded, and complete training was not available.
- No specific missing elements.
- So much of what is done in review work is based on applying policy to operations with such a broad range of variety. More focus on policy would have been helpful.
- Experience is the only way you can learn the MANY nuances of organic regulations and practices, but my initial trainer also left the organization before my training was complete.
- Deeper understanding and knowledge of the organic regulations. How to issue noncompliances or adverse actions.
- Policies and procedures for doing things, when an issue is a certification letter note and when it's a noncompliance.
- A consistent technical interpretation resource—a mentor with real life experience.
- Not at the time—training resources (internally to my organization and via OILC) have improved greatly and cover much more information currently.
- No.
- I feel that I am missing training about international equivalencies. It seems simple from the NOP, but there are a ton of nuances (regarding labeling or allowed practices) that are not clear and do not have any resources.

- Not really.
- Not sure yet—still training.
- Hard to say. I learned a lot though the training modules I completed, but the most effective training was once I actually started conducting reviews and going over questions I had about the work to my supervisor and colleagues.
- More real-life examples.
- No.
- No.
- Dairy training was lacking.
- No, it just takes time and practice to get comfortable in a certification reviewer role.
- So far, no.

Question

Is there anything else about your training and/or education experience that you would like to share with us?

Response

- NOP needs to stop with regulations that are hurting the small farmer. We are getting to the point where we are regulating organic farming out of existence.
- In the beginning of my work in managing an organic program for a grower/packer (circa 2008), I found it very difficult to find training materials. That is why I initially completed the IOIA training for inspectors. I wasn't really looking to be an inspector, I just needed something to help me understand the Standard. It was very useful in that regard. Now there seem to be many more resources, online and in person. I am constantly pointing young organic professionals to the OILC for free/on demand organic training opportunities. It does seem though that there could be more specific trainings for the different industry roles to develop the organic workforce.
- I think reviewers should have some inspection training or at least the opportunity to job shadow an inspection. This will provide valuable and practical experience.
- The BA degree from [educational institution] is good, but it does not prepare students for organic certifier / inspector roles. It prepares them for research/continued education roles and for running their own organic farm.
- IOIA should remove material review from their curriculum. Inspectors should not be involved in input evaluation except for whether it appears on the OSP, and submitting a photograph of the labels, and details about where and how it was used. To spend any time on that part of the regulation is misleading at best. It is a waste of time that could be used to focus on case studies or peer review of report writing.

- More in-person training opportunities would be beneficial
- I think there is A LOT of value in CROSS TRAINING inspectors and reviewers. My first boss wouldn't have it any other way. How do you know you are hitting the high points if you aren't familiar with the high points from a review perspective. How do you know not to give an inspector a hard time about things if you have never had your boots on the ground? I think that lots of inspectors are missing this part. Reviewers too.
- [Certifying agent] inspectors are given inconsistent requests from different teams within the organization regarding how and what they look at during inspection. There is a lack of communication between departments and a failure to provide the inspectors with the resources and tools they require. Inspectors are not trained on what the final reviewers need in order to complete their work, and as a result reports are often missing critical details. Reviewers are given a one-session crash course in how to review non-organic materials for organic use and inclusion in the database, they have three material reviews verified as correct, and then are set free. As a result, we have brand new employees who are submitting material reviews to the database without a quality control check for use and approval for both the company they reviewed it for, as well as any other company who decides they want to use the same material. As a result, there are likely many noncompliant non-organic materials in the database and in use. This is a major quality control hole in the current system.
- I would like to see life and actual relevant on-the-job work experience be truly valued as much as a four-year degree in unrelated fields. It seems like applicants that have a Bachelor's degree (in just about anything) tend to be hired & promoted more readily and paid the same or more than betterqualified folks who never got that scroll.
- I believe the best way to learn is on-the-job or experiential so trainings provided me with the vocabulary and general sense of the work flow but I have learned almost everything on the job.
- My dad's family farm (he didn't farm as an adult) is certified organic and I went to a boarding high school on a certified organic farm (though I do not believe it was certified when I was there). Experiences at these two places prepared me for an interest in organic agriculture.
- **It would be nice to have more group online trainings. We are a small certifier and can't necessarily send our staff out to in-person trainings.**
- **It would be fabulous if there was a core set of training USDA on-line classes that would give a new hire a good basic understanding of NOP fundamentals. Start with across the board Crop requirements as it seems everything builds off that.**
- **I would have appreciated more OILC course related to handling/processing organic certification.**
- **I also grew up on a farm, so I've been around farming and farmers for a long time. This experience is likely just as important as the formal work, education, and other training I've received.**
- **In-person training.**
- **I don't think that training alone can prepare you for this career. I think that direct agricultural experience, ideally on an organic operation, is necessary.**

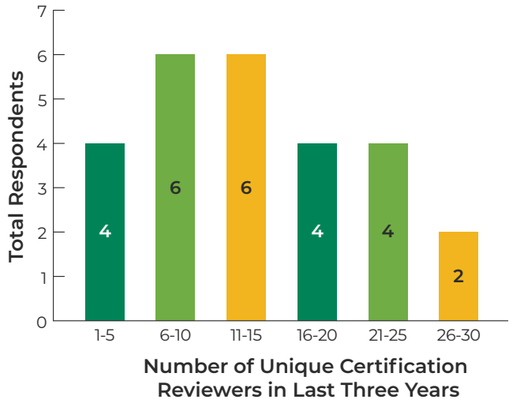
- Seems like the reviewer roles are well suited to part time/flexible/remote work - this opens up opportunities for a broader workforce, including older workers who want fewer hours
- Was asked to be a publicly speaker about organics to a variety of foreign and local organizations.
- I have a great supervisor and team that has been mentoring and training me.
- A strong mentorship program is critical to a new reviewer's success.

Certification Body Survey Results

Total Respondents for the Certification Body: 29

Question

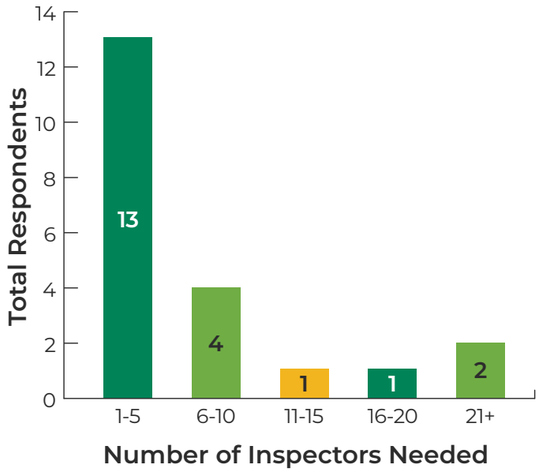
How many unique certification reviewers have you worked with in the last three years?



Question

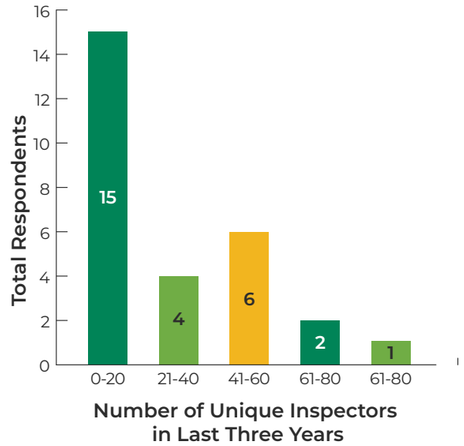
How many more inspectors do you anticipate needing to adequately fulfill your role as a certifier?

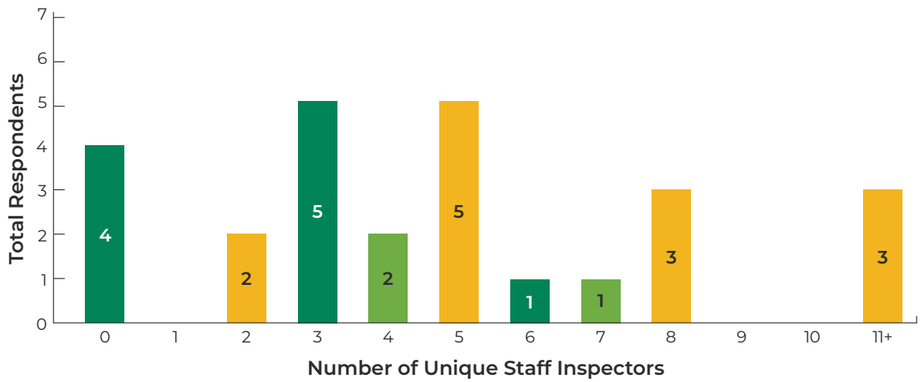
Other responses	Total Respondents
Location-specific need for inspectors	3
Scope-specific need for inspectors	2

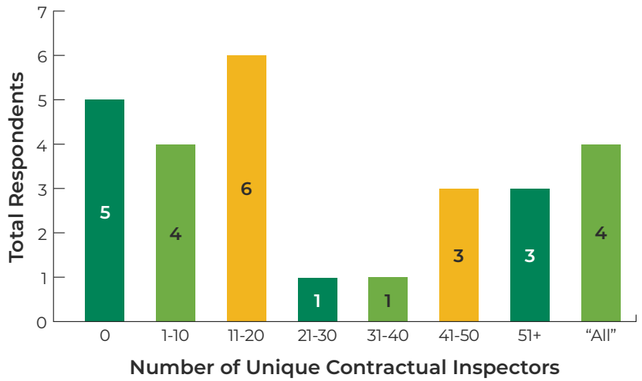


Question

How many unique inspectors have you worked with in the last three years? Of these inspectors, how many are on staff? How many are contractual?

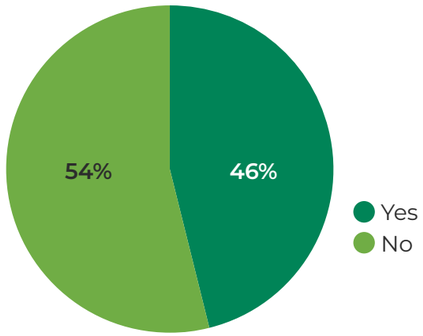






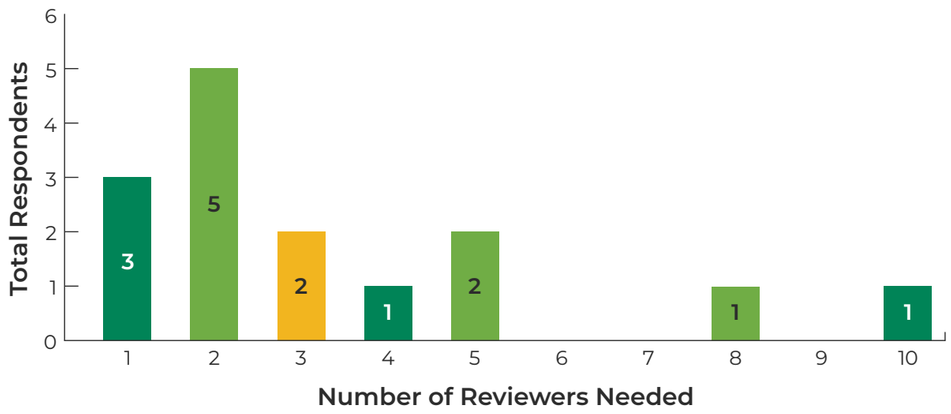
Question

Do you currently have a sufficient number of certification reviewers?



Question

How many more certification reviewers do you anticipate needing to adequately fulfill your role as a certifier?



Question

What challenges have you experienced with finding organic inspectors? Select all that apply.

Challenges	Total Respondents
Finding applicants with the right skills/experience	26
Sufficient number of applicants in a specific geographic region	23
Compensation/benefits	14
Ability to provide training	13
Sufficient number of applicants (in general)	21
Other	6

"Other" Responses
Multiple contractors are taking on significant loads of work with multiple certifiers and are struggling with timeliness; staff auditors are not interested in the travel demands during certain stages of life (family raising, etc.).
Has IOIA certification and 2,000 hours experience in necessary scope.
State agency hiring rules.
Ability to provide training
Scope qualifications and the number of inspections they will take.

Question

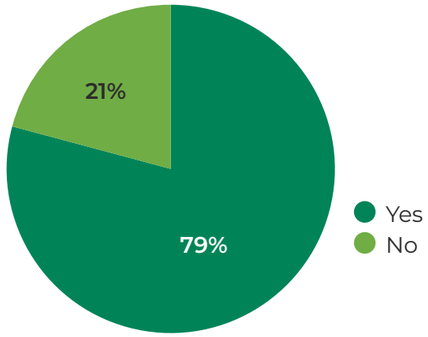
What challenges have you experienced with finding organic certification reviewers? Select all that apply.

Challenges	Total Respondents
Finding applicants with the right skills/experience	23
Compensation/benefits	13
Sufficient number of applicants (in general)	11
Sufficient number of applicants in a specific geographic region	8
Ability to provide training	4
Other	3

"Other" Responses
This has not been a challenge in the past 3 years. We have invested a lot of training and support into our current team; many of them came to us without certification experience.
State agency bureaucracy.

Question

Do you offer training, mentorships, and/ or apprenticeships to inspectors?



Question

If yes, please describe.

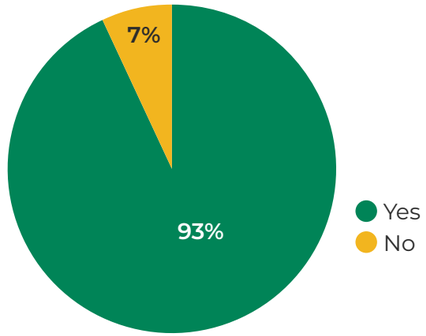
Response

- We support an apprenticeship model.
- At current certifier there is some onboarding training. At previous certifier there was full training on regulations, review, and inspections, including shadows.
- In-house training of our policies and procedures. We don't offer mentorship/apprenticeships-those we leave up to the inspector.
- We currently have an informal mentorship with experienced inspectors for new inspectors coming into the organization.
- We offer training and it is a mixed bag, meaning occasionally the inspectors leave for other certifiers after we have invested money in their training.
- We will train inspectors/reviewers in organic inspection/review, including IOIA courses, ACA/NOP trainings, and internal training programs.
- We provide scope training for all incoming inspectors without prior experience, this includes a mentorship with one of our senior inspectors.
- We provide them both on-site training, which is done by an experienced auditor in the field, and offsite training by explaining the up-to-date NOP regulation and the handbook including our relevant procedures before assigning them.

- Apprenticeships are offered, unpaid for contractors, paid for staff. Training was previously provided by IOIA, but we are now moving to a free model supported by the OILC. Mentors are available in our staff auditors and a community with live chats for questions and responses is available as well.
- Offer full training to applicable candidates based on our organizational needs.
- Mostly in house training for contract inspectors. Working on a mentorship program.
- We have the ability to on-board new inspectors and reviews quickly without IOIA training holding up the process! IOIA creates significant delays due to lack of offerings and scheduling.
- Apprenticeship, shadows, and online trainings.
- New Inspectors are required to attend IOIA training, and take additional QAI-specific training, and undergo an apprenticeship.
- This program is more defined for staff auditors. For contractors, we offer to line them up with other qualified auditors for shadow opportunities.
- It would be great to offer more; and to seek out candidates to train into our work.
- [Certifying agency] provides compensation of fees and paid time to attend IOIA trainings, allows OILC trainings with pay, pays attendance fees to ACA and NOP trainings with paid time to attend. We have an onboarding new staff training program to develop staff to meet qualifications.
- An inspector must carry out at least 5 accompanying inspections
- We have a self-paced modular training program that can be completed by staff or contract inspectors to learn the applicable sections of the regulations and the inspection process. Additionally, new inspectors must witness several inspections and be observed performing inspections before conducting inspections on their own.

Question

Do you offer training, mentorships, and/or apprenticeships to certification reviewers? If yes, please describe.



Question

If yes, please describe.

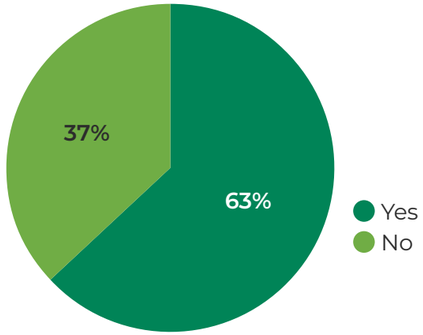
Response

- There's quite a bit of on-going training offered to reviewers.
- We train them on our system and on the regulations we offer. Generally due to our smaller size though, we are looking for reviewers who already have experience.
- More robust training on the regulations, certifier specifics, etc.
- In-house training.
- We train in-house.
- Training for certification reviewers is made up of recorded in-house trainings and OLC required trainings. Then they shadow/mentor with a senior staff member for multiple weeks before doing independent work. Training for inspectors is much less that we currently have.
- We will train inspectors/reviewers in organic inspection/review, including IOIA courses, ACA/NOP trainings, and internal training programs.
- They are trained by senior reviewers and supervisors.
- Generally we choose the certification decision candidates from our inspectors. In any case, we explain the certification decision process by telling them how an audit file should be reviewed what are the specific important points. Also, we provide up-to-date NOP regulation and Handbook training including our relevant procedures.

- On-the-job training.
- We will fully train a reviewer that is new to [certifying agent] and/or new to the NOP regulations. We have structured internal training for this. We occasionally offer apprenticeships or internships.
- [Certification agency] is able to on-board and train reviewers quickly and efficiently.
- Reviewers receive one-on-one training their first four to six weeks at [certification agency], and then they are QC'd by a more experienced reviewer until they are signed off as qualified. On-going training is provided either externally or internally as trainings are available. All reviewers are required to take specific trainings on the Organic Integrity Learning Center.
- This is part of our training and onboarding program.
- My role is crop certification manager so that involves training and mentoring a team of certification reviewers. I set goals for them and manage their output and quality of their work.
- We train well and adequately.
- [Certification agency] provides compensation of fees and paid time to attend IOIA trainings, allows OILC trainings with pay, pays attendance fees to ACA and NOP trainings with paid time to attend. We have an onboarding new staff training program to develop staff to meet qualifications.
- Reviewers undergo internal training and support from experienced colleagues.
- Self-paced modular training, OILC training, work instructions, checklist, and mentored reviews.

Question

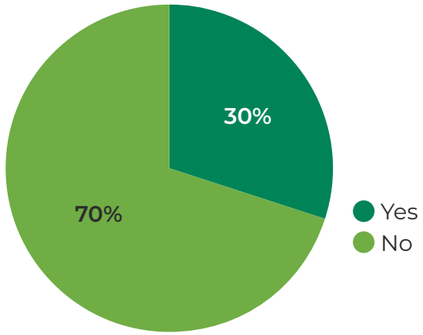
Have you worked directly with other organizations to provide training for inspectors you work with? If yes, please identify.



Organization	Total Respondents
International Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA)	12
National Organic Program (NOP)/ Organic Integrity Learning Center (OILC)	3
Accredited Certifiers Association, Inc. (ACA)	2
Certification agency	2
ANSI National Accreditation Board (ANAB)	1
Farm Alliance	1
National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	1

Question

Have you worked directly with other organizations to provide training for certification reviewers you work with? If yes, please identify.



Organization	Total Respondents
Certification agency	3
International Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA)	3
National Organic Program (NOP)/ Organic Integrity Learning Center (OILC)	2
Accredited Certifiers Association, Inc. (ACA)	1
Farm Alliance	1
National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	1

Question

What are the most pressing gaps in inspector training and education?

Response

- IOIA has opportunities to improve administration. I've spoken with multiple individuals who never heard back from IOIA when they reached out. We need another program so that there is more than one option for getting inspectors trained.
- Mass balance and traceability continue to be areas where skills are lacking. I think some inspectors could use some training on time management and scheduling.
- Scope qualifications (especially handling and 3/4 scope qualified), mentors (certifiers usually don't fund that process), and experience in the complexity of the operation they inspect.
- Inspectors are not adequately trained and ready to start inspecting immediately. Many times the information they have been taught is out of date or incorrect. They are not prepared for the amount of travel that inspecting requires.
- Funding, training, and education.
- Cost of training is prohibitive when inspectors do not always stay dedicated to one certifier. Standardization of training would be appreciated, especially with Strengthening Organic Enforcement.
- Real on-farm or on-facility exposure.
- Real-time experience in conducting inspections with a variety of experienced inspectors. Due to our program's size, we only have so many experienced inspectors to work with, and due to high turnover even our most experienced inspectors may only have 1-3 years of experience. Ability to shadow more experienced inspectors from other certifiers would be beneficial in this regard.
- Field experience within all inspection scopes, ability to conduct complex inspections
- Explaining specific technical parts.
- Being contractual for a small organization - it is hard to constantly training of our new practices or document changes - not so much learning gaps.
- Wild crops and livestock training.
- A continuous model, where one can be onboarded/start training at any time. The ability to train a 'handler' auditor to perform 'livestock or crop' audits (for example) even if they do not meet the 2,000 hours of experience in that scope.
- California-based inspectors; livestock inspectors.
- Getting adequate field experience and exposure to a variety of types of operations.

- Service offering about training lacking. Now that [certification agency] does not need to rely on IOIA only. We have drastically improved our onboarding process.
- Onboarding, certifications, training.
- Availability of trainings.
- Business management (not technical, but an often-overlooked gap for contractors). Import and export process (what happens at the border, what paperwork is processed through customs, etc.). Trade equivalency and recognition agreements risk management.
- Investigative work, mass balances & traceability audits.
- Livestock and it's our biggest area.
- NOP's 2000-hour experience relevant to the scope requirement is punitive for a certifier that has capable and willing new staff. Experience and ambition can also be better than relevant training and education. The most pressing gap is there are not enough independent and cheaper alternatives to IOIA, other than the OILC. There needs to be real life inspector trainings (How-Too training) that teach hands on inspector skills in addition to learning regulations and NOP requirements.
- Update on new regulations mass balance in multi-ingredient products.
- Writing good reports that are able to adequately convey what is observed at inspection to a reviewer who was not there and did not see the operation.

Question

What are the most pressing gaps in certification reviewer training and education?

Response

- None really.
- All training is done on the job if they have never done reviewing before. As far as I know there are no educational programs specifically for reviewers.
- Training is different at every certification body. Regulations change, but certifiers process the interpretations differently. So much is changing and the USDA and NOP do not seem to understand the full financial implication put on certifying bodies, and the clients.
- Detailed nuances that only come up once you are in the file. I.e. commercial availability sufficient, NOG ingredient vs processing aid, crop rotation practices sufficient, etc.
- Due to our small program, we have a limited number of staff available to train reviewers and therefore they do not get diverse perspectives on learning how to conduct certification review work.
- Regulatory experience with NOP.

- Explaining the specific technical parts.
- Finding qualified personnel.
- New SOE/OLPS requirements.
- Project management.
- The nuances of writing notices of noncompliance.
- Lack of qualified applicants.
- Availability of in-person trainings and quality of external trainings.
- Risk management. Legal entity and business structures. Trade export and import equivalencies and recognition agreements. Importer and exporter processes. Demystifying the operation – what happens on-site and how it relates to the regulations (shadowing inspections helps here)! Best practices when writing NCs and resolutions.
- Technical scope support, soft skills, risk-based approach to certification.
- I don't think there are specific areas that are gaps for all reviewers.
- Livestock
- NOP's 2000-hour experience relevant to the scope requirement is punitive for a certifier that has capable and willing new staff. Experience and ambition can also be better than relevant training and education. The most pressing gap is there are not enough independent and cheaper alternatives to IOIA other than the OILC. There needs to be real life inspector trainings (how-to training) that teach hands-on inspector skills in addition to learning regulations and NOP requirements.
- Update on new regulations, evaluation of commercial formulations of inputs.
- Oral and written communications skills. Critical thinking skills to apply regulations, policies, and guidelines to site specific and unique operations.

Question

Is there anything else about your workforce program with regards to hiring, training, and education that you would like to share with us?

Response

- The education/training requirements are very cumbersome under SOE, especially because most certifiers leave it up to inspectors to meet those requirements if they are contractors. For example contract inspectors aren't paid to mentor/mentee or to fulfill their annual education requirements. We had some inspectors drop scope qualifications due to the extra training hours per scope.
- ACA is a great resource and the intentional cooperation that is fostered is greatly needed in this disparate industry. The age of the NOP program necessitates a more cohesive design needed in order to move forward.
- It is HARD to find trainings all year around that will fit our needs and not cost a fortune. For inspectors it is VERY HARD to really pursue a candidate if they do not have the SOE required experience and we would LOVE to see an avenue that fosters young talent to be able to hire from.
- Inspector turnover is likely to continue due to demands of travel, often conflicts with personal commitments and desired life quality. This was ameliorated by the contractor model as schedule control could be maintained, but had other drawbacks such as lack of benefits, etc.
- Smaller organizations struggle finding good workforce.
- Our biggest challenge is that the job specification for MOCA includes qualifications for other, California mandated types of inspection work for agricultural commissioner's offices. It has made it very difficult to find and attract candidates that actually have organic training/experience, which highly specialized organic training/experience is now required due to SOE.
- We currently require a degree - per our company policy. This also allows us to train all auditors to the NOP, however I believe there are qualified, competent individuals that may not have the degree.
- Need more options on inspector training, not IOIA.
- It would be good to have a credentialed training program that tracks hours of training completed per participant, and even provide certificates of completion. It would be also very helpful if all certification staff and contractors were being taught the same thing.
- There are a lot of 'burnt out' Quality Managers/Quality Specialists/etc. in the manufacturing realm, and we have found that they're an exceptional fit for certification. As an industry, we should consider how we are marketing ourselves and training and jobs opportunities in organic to this sector.
- More inspectors who do a quality inspection are needed in our industry.
- Training on teamwork and social responsibility is required
- All around, critical thinking is the skill that seems to be most lacking and also the most difficult to train for.

Appendix B: Interview Results

Interview Synthesis

Total Number of Interviewees: 25

Breakdown: 6 Inspectors (Northeast, Northwest, Midwest, West/Southwest), 6 certification reviewers (Northeast, Plains, Northwest, Southeast, Midwest, West/Southwest), 5 certifying agencies (Plains, Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Southeast, West/Southwest), 1 IOIA, 1 NOC/OFA (4 people – 2 from each), 1 NOP

Connection to agriculture leads to interest in careers in inspection and certification review	• Previous work in farming and/or processing • Relatives working in the organic industry • Passion for environment and sustainability • Education in a related science field including (but not limited to) animal science, agriculture, crop science, agronomy, and biology
Personality and skill set match the work style and skills of the industry	• Interviewees had been told their personality and skill set would match well with the role by others in the industry including soft skills such as detail orientation, investigation, and discipline • Enjoy the independence of the role—ability to set own schedule, work from home, or travel
Mentorships are essential to gain the necessary on-the-job skills for being an inspector	• Current training courses do not always offer experience in completing a real inspection, but real experience gives new inspectors the confidence they need when first starting out • Some agencies hiring inspectors require on-the-job experience prior to hiring • OILC training can supplement IOIA training and in-house training, but none of these can replace on-the-job training

The pathway to finding a mentorship varies and can be difficult for an individual to arrange themselves	• Larger certification agencies often assign mentorships for new employees, but it is more difficult for smaller agencies to do so • Interviewees who had to set up mentorships on their own noted difficulty in doing so citing trouble finding contacts and then connecting to them once one was found
Training across inspector and certification reviewer roles provides valuable insight for workers	• Reviewers better understand the inspector process, e.g., how inspections are assigned, preparation, and challenges • Inspectors better understand what certification reviewers look for in reports • Improves communication across the two roles
Soft skills are essential to being successful in roles in the organic certification industry	• **Attention to detail:** keen observation, • **Organization:** a lot of information to absorb, • **Communication:** clear, how you say things to an operation, explain the process, writing (concise but detailed) • **Flexibility:** inspections can go off plan • **Interpersonal Skills:** establishing trust, • **Cultural Sensitivity:** working with those who are different than you; different backgrounds/lifestyles
Certification agencies look to the SOE regulations to guide their hiring; however, they most mentioned soft skills as essential to hiring a candidate	• Critical thinking and problem solving • **Interviewing:** asking the right questions • Auditing • Relevant previous working including farming, experience with regulatory standards, experience in alignment with SOE standards • Communication • Four-year degree

IOIA training is still the most popular form of training (and sometimes required) but is often bolstered by certifier-organized mentorship and in-house training for staff.

- IOIA training is the most typical method for training, but some larger operations will provide their own training
- Contract inspectors are often required to have IOIA training to enter the field
- Certifying agents tend to have their own in-house training for onboarding and to train staff inspectors the internal processes
- Shadowing and witness inspections are frequently used to onboard new inspectors
- Smaller operations cannot always provide a formal mentorship program

While IOIA provides strong training on the regulations of NOP, it does not cover the scope of all training necessary for the job and can be costly, creating a barrier to entry in the industry.

- IOIA training costs a minimum of $2,800 for one scope, increasing in price for in-person training and additional scopes
- IOIA content is mainly focused on the standards; deeper level training and on-the-farm training comes at a greater cost

Agencies have collaborated with each other and institutions to develop training curricula, but implementation has been difficult

- As a part of the ACA Human Capital Project, a team developed curricula for institutes of higher learning as well as an inspector manual
- Midwestern colleges have expressed interest in developing a 9-week certification program, but it's challenging to develop universal curricula with agency differences
- Online, asynchronous training program being developed with OEFFA and TOPP
- Recommendation from NOP to establish partnerships with universities, community colleges, and technical schools and/or develop organic curriculum at colleges and universities

The organic industry struggles to fill gaps in geographical regions leaving some areas underserved.

- Agencies certify operations, but sometimes do not have staff in the correct scope or geographical location to complete them, specific gaps exist geographically in the Midwest and in scope in California (livestock)
- NOC/OFA shared that some areas of the country are underserved by certification agencies, causing farms to pay more to have an agency travel to them
- NOC/OFA notes that creating new certifying agencies in these areas could help solve the problem and increase diversity (e.g., in Mississippi); however, starting up a new agency is difficult
- Having staff inspectors is easier for scheduling purposes but staff inspectors require a high overhead. Contract inspectors do not require high overhead but are sometimes difficult to find on demand

Livestock inspections were noted as the most difficult to complete correctly by multiple sources.

- NOP noted more issues coming from livestock inspections, specifically regarding brokering and trading
- Inspectors noted difficulty with livestock inspections, particularly dairy inspections, as those operations tend to be more complex than other

The industry has made progress in trying to increase Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; however, more work can still be done.

- To increase diversity, one agency has changed their application process to remove demographic information and base a first interview off a set of skillset related questions
- Another agency has adjusted their applications to increase diversity, but it's difficult to increase diversity if those populations aren't applying
- To address inclusion, an agency has created an optional demographic survey to share with inspectors before engaging with an operation including pronouns
- IOIA provided training sponsored by Kentucky State University and was offered free to participants*
- TOPP offers free-of-cost equity training
- NOC/OFA recommends partnering with minority serving institutions, 1890 land grant universities, and tribal colleges
- NOC/OFA recommends offering more materials in Spanish

Interviews noted specific recommendations to improve training including improving mentorships and in-person training and reducing the cost of entry to the industry.

- **Certification opportunities at land grant universities**
- **More available in-person training**
- **Large barrier to entry- cost of training; cost-sharing**
- **On-the-job training before investing in a job that is not the right fit**
- **Incentives for mentorship; like TOPP farmer matching mentor program**

Gaps and challenges in skillsets and preparation of inspectors vary between inspectors and certifying agents; however, both groups agree that inspectors struggle to interpret the regulations.

- **By inspectors:**
  - **Individual Certifier Differences**
  - **No formal mechanism for mentorships**
  - **Farming 101**
  - **Variety in farms**
  - **Rule interpretation**
- **By certifying agencies:**
  - **Understanding and interpretation of the regulations – outcomes tend to depend on the skill of the trainer**
  - **Transitioning from one scope to another**
  - **Those with previous experience in the industry tend to need to learn soft skills**

Role	Degress	Work Experience	Type	Full-time/ Part-time	Training
Inspector	• Soil Science • Journalism • Biology • Agaricology	• Farming • Reporter • Marketing • Food Processing • Service Industry	4 staff 2 contract	4 full-time 2 part-time	6 IOIA In-house NOP OILC Mentorship
Certification Reviewers	• Animal Science • Food Animal Science • Biology • Chemistry • Agriculture • Crop Science	• Exotic Animal • Sanctuary • Invasive Species • Management • Clerical • Environmental Consultant • Inspector • Farming	N/A	6 full-time	IOIA In-house

Interview Questions

Certification Reviewer

1. What is your job title/role and what does that entail?
2. How long have you been in your position?
3. Are you a full-time or part-time organic certification reviewer?
   a. If part-time, what other occupation(s) do you hold?
4. What inspection scope are you trained to review?
5. Describe your career journey to becoming an organic certification reviewer.
   a. What sparked your interest in this role?
   b. What relevant work experience, if any, did you have prior to becoming an organic certification reviewer?
   c. What relevant education experience, if any, did you have prior to becoming a certification reviewer?
6. What type of training did you receive prior to becoming an organic certification reviewer?
7. How much did it cost you to complete your initial training?
8. Did your training adequately prepare you for your role as a new organic certification reviewer?
9. Would additional training have benefited you as a new organic certification reviewer? If so, in what topical areas?
10. Inspector background only: have you acted as a mentor for new organic inspectors? Why or why not?
11. What skills do you find essential to your role? This can include technical knowledge, soft skills, cultural competency skills, etc.
12. Is there anything else you think would be helpful as we develop this needs assessment?

Certifying Agent

1. What is your job title/role and what does that entail?
2. When hiring for an organic inspector position, what do you look for in terms of:
   a. Skills
   b. Educational background
   c. Work experience
3. When hiring for certification reviewer position, what do you look for in terms of:
   a. Skills
   b. Educational background
   c. Work experience
4. Are there currently any workforce gaps in your organic inspector and certification reviewer staffing?
   a. If no, what recruiting and training strategies have enabled you to successfully maintain the proper number of qualified workers?
5. Are there regions and/or scopes for which it is difficult to find qualified inspectors? If yes, do you have a sense for why that is the case?
6. Have you found that new organic inspectors and certification reviewers have the necessary knowledge and skills to perform their duties?
   a. If no, what is most commonly missing in their education and training?
7. Do you offer any training, mentorship, internship, or apprenticeship programs to prospective or current organic inspectors?
   a. If so, what types of successes and challenges have you encountered?
   b. If not, is that something you'd be interested in offering?
8. Do you coordinate and/or collaborate with any of the following organizations to develop education and training for the organic inspector and certification reviewer workforce?
   a. Other certifying agents
   b. Professional organizations
   c. Educational institutions
9. What types of resources would improve the skills of organic inspectors and/or certification reviewers in your organization?
10. If you could implement any changes to current workforce training and education practices, what would you change and why?
11. Have you made any efforts to increase the diversity of the inspector/reviewer workforce? If so, have any of these efforts been successful?
12. Is there anything else you think would be helpful as we develop this needs assessment?

Inspector

1. What is your job title/role and what does that entail?
2. How long have you been in your position?
3. Are you a contractor, certifying agent staff inspector, or a member of an inspector cooperative?
   a. If you are a contract inspector or cooperative member, how many certifying agencies have you completed work for in the past three years?
4. Are you a full-time or part-time organic inspector?
   a. If part-time, what other occupation(s) do you hold?
5. What scope are you trained to inspect?
6. In what states/territories do you conduct inspections?

7. Describe your career journey to becoming an organic inspector.
   a. What sparked your interest in this role?
   b. What relevant work experience, if any, did you have prior to becoming an inspector?
   c. What relevant education experience, if any, did you have prior to becoming an inspector?

8. What type of training did you receive to become an inspector?
   a. Coursework – who provided this and in what format?
   b. Mentor/apprenticeship – how did you connect with this person/program?
   c. How long did it take you to complete your training?
   d. How much did it cost you to complete your initial training?

9. What skills do you find essential to your role? This can include technical knowledge, soft skills, cultural competency skills, etc.

10. What specific knowledge and skill challenges did you encounter as a new inspector?
    a. Would additional training have been helpful? If so, in what topical areas?

11. Are there skills that you see other inspectors struggle with?

12. Have you acted as a mentor for new organic inspectors? Why or why not?

13. Is there anything else you think would be helpful as we develop this needs assessment?

IOIA

Introduction

1. Tell me about your background and the perspective you bring to this conversation about organic inspector training.

Students

2. How many U.S.-based students take IOIA training per year?
   a. What do those numbers look like in terms of the various training models (webinar, live online, onsite, and self-paced)?

3. Who are the students who choose to take IOIA training?

4. How do prospective students find out about the training opportunities you offer?

5. Have you taken steps to make training more accessible for students? If so, how?

6. For someone starting their career as an organic inspector, what does the initial training that they need to land a job typically cost them?

Training Content

7. What distinguishes 100-, 200-, and 300-level courses in terms of content and who's taking them?

8. Are there content differences between the different training models (webinar, live online, etc.)?

9. Do specific training models fit certain learners and their educational goals better than others?

10. Have you offered coursework centered on practical hands-on and field experience?

11. What type of apprenticeship opportunities do you offer?
    a. How many students participate in apprenticeships each year?
    b. Are there challenges to growing this program?

12. How do you ensure that training content remains up to date?

13. How do you assess the effectiveness of your training?

14. Are there training opportunities you would like to develop or expand on?
    a. If so, what would it take to make that happen?

Partnerships

15. Do you collaborate with educational institutions, certifying agents, or other organizations involved with the organic industry?
    a. If yes, in what capacity?

16. How often do you conduct co-sponsored training inside the United States?
    a. Who requests this type of training?

Final Questions

17. Is there a question you expected us to ask or hoped we would ask?

18. Is there anyone else within your organization we would benefit from speaking to?

NOC/OFA

1. Can you describe your background and the perspective you bring to this conversation about organicinspector and certification reviewer training?
2. What, if any, workforce gaps have you heard about from members of the organic community in terms of organic inspectors and certification reviewers?
3. Are there regions and/or scopes for which members have noted it is difficult to find qualified inspectors? a. If yes, do you have a sense for why that is the case?
4. Have you found that new organic inspectors and certification reviewers have the necessary knowledge and skills to perform their duties?
   a. If not, what is most commonly missing in their education and training?
5. Do you offer any training, mentorship, internship, or apprenticeship programs to prospective or current organic inspectors?
   a. If so, what types of successes and challenges have you encountered?
   b. If not, is that something you'd be interested in offering?
6. Do you coordinate and/or collaborate with any of the following organizations to develop education andtraining for the organic inspector and certification reviewer workforce?
   a. Certifying agents
   b. Professional organizations
   c. Educational institutions
7. If you could implement any changes to current workforce training and education practices, what would you change and why?
8. Since the release of the DEI Resources for Organic Professionals report in 2022, have any efforts have beenmade to expand opportunities and diversity within the field of organic inspectors?
   a. If yes, what initiatives have you or others in the organic industry implemented to increase the diversity of new inspectors joining the industry?
9. Have any of these initiatives proven more successful than others?
10. What challenges still remain in expanding access to careers in organic inspection and increasing diversity in the organic inspector field?
11. What recommendations do you have to address these challenges?
12. Is there a question you expected us to ask or hoped we would ask?
13. Is there anything else you think would be helpful for us to know as we develop this needs assessment?

NOP

1. What is your job title and role and what does that entail?
2. What is Accreditation's role in evaluating and enforcing inspector (and certification reviewer) education and training standards?
3. Do you know how many inspectors and certification reviewers work in the United States?
   a. Do you have any data about geographic distribution of these professionals?
   b. And the specific scopes they inspect/review?
   c. And their employment status (full time or part-time)?
   d. And whether they are contractors, certifying agent staff inspectors, or members of an inspector cooperative?
4. What sources of training do inspectors commonly use?
5. What sources and types of training do certifiers commonly require?
6. Do certifiers require mentorships or apprenticeships as part of an inspector's training?
7. What challenges and barriers do certifiers face when training inspectors and certification reviewers?
8. What challenges and barriers do inspectors and certification reviewers face when seeking training and education?
9. Can you describe some of the noncompliances you issue for failure to meet education and training requirements?
10. What are the most pressing/concerning gaps you observe in inspector training and education?
    a. Are there specific regions, scopes, or combinations of the two, that are especially problematic?
11. What types of resources do you think would support inspector training and education and improve inspection outcomes?
12. What other information would be helpful for us to know?