

Organic Complaint Guide: Crop Example

This resource provides an outline to support documentation and approach to a complaint process or investigation of potential fraud. An effective complaint and investigation includes: Who, What, Where, When, and How. Some information in this resource is not necessary but is included to support a variety of scenarios.

Always start with the certifier's complaint and investigation process and use this resource to augment as needed. Ensure you are qualified for the activities you are performing and seek guidance when you are unsure.

Important Reminders for Complaint:

- **Facts Only:** Complaint information should include only verifiable facts and should *not* include information such as Social Security Numbers.
 - **Clarity & Specificity:** Clearly and specifically outline the identified issue(s).
 - **Support for Investigation:** Provide a clear explanation of what occurred, when, where, and by whom.
 - **Evidence:** Attach and include all available evidence that supports the complaint and demonstrates the violation(s).
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I. Complainant Information: [NAME]

- a. Complainant Contact Information: [Phone Number, Email Address]
 - b. Safety concerns or sensitivity issues: [Indicate whether there are safety or confidentiality needs]
 - c. Date of Complaint: [Date]
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II. Subject of Complaint

- a. **Business Name of Operation/Individual/Entity:**
 - i. Business Address:
 - ii. Website (if applicable):
 - iii. Primary Contact Information (Phone, Email):
 - iv. Name(s) of Individual(s) Involved (if known):
 - v. Any other identifying information (e.g., social media, observed sales locations):
- b. **Certifying Agent of Operation: [Name of Certifying Agent]**
- c. **Field Location(s) (if applicable):**
 - i. GPS Coordinates (e.g., Latitude, Longitude for each field):
 - ii. Attach detailed Field Maps (e.g., Google Maps screenshots with boundaries, parcel numbers):
- d. **Other Parties Involved in Transactions (if applicable):**
 - i. Name/Business Name:
 - ii. Certifier & Certificate Number (if organic):



III. Complaint Details

- a. **What (Product/Commodity Information):**
 - i. Product/Commodity Name:
 - ii. Lot Information (if applicable):
 - iii. Product Name/Image of Packaging (if applicable):
 - iv. Impacted Product Details (if known): (e.g., specific lot information, container details, traceability codes).
- b. **Where (Location of Violation/Sale):**
 - i. Address/Location where violation/potential fraud was observed or identified:
 - ii. Location of Sale (if applicable):
 1. Physical retail, auction, or transaction/exchange location:
 2. Virtual sale (state/business address of entities involved):
- c. **When (Date/Dates of Occurrence):**
 - i. Date/Dates of observed occurrence:
 - ii. If activities are believed to be ongoing, specify potential future dates of occurrence if possible:

IV. Supporting Information & Evidence

Evidence May Include (and should be referenced in the summary document):

- a. **Photographic Evidence:**
 - i. Clearly labeled photos demonstrating a violation (e.g., prohibited materials, mislabeled products, application events).
 - ii. Include date, time, and specific location for each photo.
- b. **Witness Statements:**
 - i. Written statements from witnesses, including their contact information (phone, email).
- c. **Images of Records:**
 - i. Photos or scans of relevant records (e.g., purchase invoices, application logs, sales receipts).
- d. **Photos of Product:**
 - i. Images of the product in question, including packaging, labels, lot information. *Do not open sealed product.*
- e. **Sample Results:**
 - i. **Sample Name:** [e.g., "Soil Sample - Field 3 North"]
 - ii. **Type of Testing:** [e.g., "Isotope Ratio Testing," "Chemical Residue Analysis"]
 - iii. **Results:** Clearly indicate the findings that support the complaint.
 - iv. **Critical Note:** Document the exact location of sample collection and if a retained sample/product is available for follow-up investigation. Redact sensitive information (e.g., sample number, requester name, details linking to sampler) for initial submission but ensure it's available upon request.



V. Summary of Allegation(s) and Examples

Overall Summary: Briefly describe the core issue(s) being alleged.

a. Example 1: Insufficient Organic Nutrient Sourcing for Yields

- i. **Description:** The operation appears to be sourcing inadequate organic fertilizer to achieve reported yields.

1. *Example:* "This crop requires approximately [e.g., 150 lbs N/acre] of nitrogen, but the operation's documented organic fertilizer purchases account for only [e.g., 50 lbs N/acre]."

b. Example 2: Application of Prohibited Materials

- i. **Description:** The operation is applying prohibited materials to specific location(s).

1. *Example:* "Prohibited material [Compound Name] was applied to [Location of Application] for [Reason for Application]."

c. Example 3: Application of Known Prohibited Materials over Timeframe

- i. **Description:** The operation is applying materials known to be prohibited in organic production during a specific timeframe.

1. *Example:* "Application of prohibited materials observed between [Start Date] and [End Date] at approximately [Time]. Statements from [Position, e.g., Farm Manager] confirm the use of prohibited materials."

VI. Tools & Recommendations for Investigation

Example Recommendations:

a. Example 1: Insufficient Organic Nutrient Sourcing

- i. **Methodology:** Mass balance analysis of production and field records, soil analysis, and yield information is recommended.
- ii. **Records to Obtain:** Specify types of records (e.g., purchase invoices for organic and conventional fertilizers, yield records, soil test reports).
- iii. **Location/Format of Records:** (e.g., "Housed at farm office, paper copies," "Available digitally via farm management software").
- iv. **Comparison:** Compile organic and non-organic production records. Compare organic and non-organic yields. If nitrogen application is not comparable but yields are, this suggests supplementation.
- v. **Confirmatory Testing:** Isotope testing of crop tissue/product.
 1. **Threshold:** A $\delta^{15}N$ value of XX is the commonly accepted threshold for distinguishing organic versus synthetic nitrogen sources. *[Note: Provide the specific $\delta^{15}N$ threshold if known and universally accepted for the crop/region.]*

b. Example 2: Application of Prohibited Materials

- i. **Sampling:** Recommend specific sampling locations (e.g., "Sample XX location in spot sampling," "Field test within buffer zone").
- ii. **Timing:** Anticipated application window: [Start Date] - [End Date].
- iii. **Labs:** Labs that perform testing for these compounds: [List Lab Names and Contact Information].



- c. **Example 3: Ongoing Application of Known Prohibited Materials**
- i. **Location(s) of Anticipated Application:**
 - ii. **Dates of Suspected Application:**
 - iii. **Sampling Recommended:** (e.g., "Product sampling," "Plant tissue sampling").
 - iv. **Labs:** Labs that perform testing for these compounds: [List Lab Names and Contact Information].
 - v. **Photographic Evidence:** What to look for, timing considerations (e.g., "Look for spray equipment during early morning hours," "Observe plant stress patterns").
 - vi. **Interview Recommendations:**
 1. Name of individual(s) to interview:
 2. Contact information (phone, email):
 3. Key questions to ask.
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VII. Financial Impact & Longevity

- a. **Crop Fraud Value (Estimate):**
- i. **Differential:** Estimate the \$\$ differential between organic and conventional crop for the specific commodity.
 - ii. **Volume/\$\$ of Fraud:** Provide estimates of volume (e.g., kg, lbs) and dollar value of fraud on a specific time period basis (e.g., per crop year, per harvest).
- b. **Longevity of Activity:**
- i. **Duration:** Are there any records or resources that can prove the longevity of the alleged activity?
 - ii. **Brainstorm Contents/Records:**
 1. Interview employees (names if known, e.g., "former employees," "current field workers").
 2. Applicator records.
 3. Historical purchase records.
 4. Satellite imagery analysis.
 5. Neighbor observations.
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VIII. Chemicals of Concern

- a. **Chemical(s) of Concern:** [List specific chemical names, e.g., Glyphosate, Chlorpyrifos]
- b. **Attached Files:**
- i. **Safety Data Sheets (SDS):** Include SDS sheets for all chemicals of concern.
 - ii. **Pest Control Advisor (PCA) / Applicator Information:**
 1. Name and contact information for the PCA or person selling/applying the chemical (e.g., "Roundup being sprayed by [Applicator Name]").
 2. Any associated records (e.g., application recommendations, invoices).



IX. Sampling & Record Acquisition Notes

a. Isotope Ratio Testing (if performed):

- i. Confirm isotope ratio testing was performed and supports the complaint.
- ii. Ensure sample numbers are redacted but linked to the operation under investigation.

b. Chemical Analysis Results (if performed):

- i. Include results, redacting sensitive information.

c. Pesticide Records (e.g., California example):

- i. **How to Obtain:** Provide specific guidance on how to obtain pesticide application records in the relevant state/region (e.g., "In <State>, pesticide use reports are submitted to the County Agricultural Commissioner's Office and may be publicly accessible via X, Y, or Z process.").
- ii. **What Records Show:** Describe the type of information these records typically contain (e.g., "Records show compound applied, application rate, date, and location.").
- iii. **Access to Other Operation's Records:** Clarify if records from *another* operation can be obtained and how.

d. Purchase of Organic Fertilizer Records:

- i. **Company Name & Contact:** Name of company, contact information (phone, email).
- ii. **Information to Request:** Specify what to ask for (e.g., "all invoices for organic fertilizer purchases from [Start Date] to [End Date], including product names, quantities, and NPK analysis").

