



For
Immediate Release: Media Contact: Eva Dilmanian December 1, 2022 718.599.2591
eva@buzzwordpr.com

PCO Chosen to Lead the Northeast Region in the USDA National Organic Program's Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP)

PCO will lead program development in the Mid Atlantic / Northeast Region for transitioning land to organic production

Spring Mills, PA – The **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)** National Organic Program (NOP) has chosen [Pennsylvania Certified Organic \(PCO\)](#) to lead the Northeast region of [Transition to Organic Partnership Program \(TOPP\)](#), a five-year cooperative agreement with USDA NOP to facilitate program support for transition to organic agriculture across the country in six regions. Farmers face technical, ecological, cultural, and market shifts during the transition period and the first few years of organic certification. The work of the TOPP will serve to support farmers through this time and prepare them for what comes next. The TOPP is a nationwide effort to bring together stakeholders in support of transitioning more farms and operations to organic production and practices.

PCO will lead activity in the Northeast region and work with other certifiers, state departments of agriculture, universities and extension, and non-profits in supporting farmer to farmer mentoring, community building programs, technical assistance/training, data collection/reporting, and workforce training/development.

The Northeast region includes Pennsylvania, Washington DC, Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland and Delaware. Many of the major population centers of the country are situated in this region. Connecting and creating organic markets while working in support of underserved rural and urban communities will be an important focus of this five-year project.

“Being chosen as a lead is an honor and vote of confidence for us, but it is also a

challenge of great responsibility and leadership. Working in close partnership with other certification, education, outreach, and community organizations in the region will be key in our approach and in having successful outcomes across the Northeast,” said Diana Kobus, Executive Director of PCO. “Along with our partner organizations and advisors, we’re being trusted to uphold and advance organic principles and practices through certification, advocacy, and technical support. This unified effort will help to create agricultural systems that prioritize health, ecological balance and fairness in our region. Pennsylvania is the only state with its own farm bill, and I am very confident that through that tradition of strong leadership, we can help transform the food system for the benefit of all of us.”

The TOPP partnership network covers six regions: the Mid-Atlantic/Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Plains, Northwest, and West/Southwest. Organizations in these regions are actively forming partnerships to serve transitioning and existing organic farmers. TOPP regions are set geographically and form a mix of states that are well-represented in organic and states that are currently underserved. The program is designed to maximize the availability of expert mentors in each region. TOPP is a collaborative effort involving many partners, with cross-functional teams and representatives from different regions working together to achieve a common goal.

“It is important to understand that everyone has a seat at the table in this work,” added Kobus. The NOP has set up a web form for submitting partnership inquiries directly to them at: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/form/transition-to-organic-partnershi>

Visit this NOP webpage to learn more about TOPP in regions across the United States: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/organic-certification/topp>

USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), National Organic Program (NOP) is administering TOPP. NOP is a federal regulatory program administered by AMS that develops and enforces consistent national standards for organically produced agricultural products sold in the United States.

About the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America’s food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.

About Pennsylvania Certified Organic (PCO)

Pennsylvania Certified Organic is a USDA-accredited organic certifying agency that

educates and certifies growers, processors and handlers of organic crops, wild crops, livestock and livestock products in the contiguous United States. PCO is also proud to be an accredited certifying agent for OPT Certified Grass-Fed Organic Certification. One of the founding agencies of USDA's Certified Organic program and the number five organic certifier in the country, PCO has been a leader in building community around organic practices for over two decades, celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2022. PCO currently has approximately 1700 clients in 23 states, 35 current staff, and a budget of approximately \$4M. For more information, please visit <https://paorganic.org/>.

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