

## National Programme for Organic Production

Over the last few years, food production processes have been a concern. The increased use of pesticides during cultivation has proven hazardous for human health. These chemicals' toxicity and long and high exposure have been found to have severe adverse effects on the environment as well. To minimise this two-pronged danger, people across the globe are now shifting to organic and healthier food options to ensure a disease-free, longer life. In India, this trend has resulted in the establishment of NPOP or the National Programme for Organic Production.

### National Programme for Organic Farming

The National Programme for Organic Production is an Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry initiative, implemented since 2001. The primary objectives of this programme are:

- Providing a platform or method that can evaluate the certification programme for organic agriculture and products, according to the criteria approved by the government.
- Recognising the certification programmes of bodies that seek accreditation or certification.
- Facilitating the certification of organic products in compliance with approved standards.
- Helping the certification of organic products to be imported, as per the agreement of equivalence that is determined between the two nations, or in accordance with the requirement of the importing countries.
- Promoting organic farming, organic processing and their development in the country.

### The NPOP Certification Process

The NPOP certification full form stands for 'the accreditation or certification of organic food products.'

It is a system of process certification where an independent body reviews the production, processing, handling, storage and transport of organic food items. Currently, there are 32 accredited certification organisations. The third-party certification system, apart from reviewing the end-to-end process, also sees if the organic products comply with the approved organic standards.

The process typically includes a comprehensive review of cultivation practices. This includes land management, usage of inputs, use of machinery, pest management and post-harvest in crops, rearing practices as per their natural behaviour, animal welfare, non-usage of synthetic feed additives and hormones, and limit the allopathic drugs and antibiotics usage in animal products. It also includes processing and handling through document review and on-site physical inspection. To help the consumers and other buyers to make wise purchasing decisions, the packaging of all the certified products consists of the certification symbol.

## Further Relevance of NPOP

There is no denying that food quality and safety levels have deteriorated over the years. This deterioration can be partly accredited to the huge surge in demand for food items (directly proportional to the population size), and the problems surrounding their inadequate supply. Moreover, global climate change and an increase in the volume of plastic waste have also impacted food standards. All these factors have necessitated quality alternatives (organic food) to ensure a superior lifestyle.

For an in-depth IAS preparation, you need to understand the relationship between the food industry, and the production and consumption of plastics and microplastics.

Therefore, any agricultural product grown today needs to be certified by the NPOP in a process that involves:

1. Inspection of the operators to ensure that the entire operation is truly organic and not synthetic, and that no cheaply processed food items are approved.
2. The inspection is followed by the operator complying with the terms and requirements of certification.
3. Finally, the certification decision is made. Based on the overall results, the product is certified.

## The NPOP Certification Process Eligibility and Categories

The eligibility criteria for NPOP certification include checking whether the individuals, firms, or societies comply with the ISO/IEC Guide 65. Under this guide, the certified products are readied for further distribution.

There is another criterion- the organic food producer affiliated with a product should be in operation for at least a year before accreditation.

The components that are taken into account in the NPOP certification process are:

- Organic agricultural production
- Wild products
- Organic processing operations
- Forestry
- Organic animal production
- Organic animal processing

Therefore, the National Programme for Organic Production is a highly necessary initiative to look over the development and distribution of organically produced and processed food items, originating especially from the agricultural sector. This is a beneficial measure to ensure that the country's population is living a safe and sustainable lifestyle.