

Procedure for Extension, Reduction, Suspension, Revocation and Withdrawal of Certification

1. Purpose

This procedure ensures compliance with the requirements of ISO/IEC 17065:2012 and NPOP 08th Edition and maintains the integrity of the certification system.

2. Scope

This procedure applies to all certified operators, applicants, and associated entities within the certification system of USOCA, covering all relevant scopes under NPOP.

3. Policy on Sanctions

USOCA maintains documented policies to impose sanctions whenever non-compliances with applicable standards are identified. Sanctions are progressive in nature, beginning with warnings and corrective action requests, and escalating to suspension or withdrawal of certification where necessary.

Sanctions are applied to:

- Ensure operators return to compliance within defined timelines.
- Protect the credibility of the certification system.
- Safeguard the organic integrity of certified products.

Typical enforcement measures include:

- Annual inspections of every certified operator.
- Unannounced and compliance inspections.
- Sampling and testing for residues of prohibited substances.
- Investigation of complaints and alleged violations.
- Issuing non-compliance notices with corrective timelines.
- Applying suspension, revocation, or withdrawal where corrective action is not implemented.

No suspended or withdrawn operator may sell, label, or represent its products as organic.

4. Extension of Scope of Certification

Certified operators may request extension of scope (e.g., addition of crops/products).

Procedure:

1. Application Submission: Operator submits a request with supporting documents.
2. Contract Review: Quality Manager/Certification Head reviews compliance against NPOP guidelines.
3. Audit Requirement: Additional audit may be conducted to assess conformity if required.

4. Certification Decision: Certification Committee reviews findings and recommends approval or denial.
5. Documentation: Upon approval, the amended scope is updated in TraceNet and certification records.
6. Reference: Conditions for extension are detailed in Annexure-I.

5. Reduction, Suspension, and Withdrawal of Certification

1 Reduction of Scope

- Scope may be reduced when certain products fail to meet certification requirements, or at the operator's request.
- Decision is based on inspector's report and Certification Committee review.
- Annexure of amended scope is issued and updated in TraceNet.

2 Suspension of Certification

Suspension is applied when:

- Non-conformities remain unresolved within given deadline.
- Operator fails to permit audits or unannounced inspections.
- Improper use of certification mark/logo occurs.
- Fraud, breach of contract, or integrity concerns arise.
- Significant deviations from prior certification are detected.

Suspension Process:

1. Certification Committee issues a suspension notice.
2. Client is required to cease all promotional use of certification.
3. Suspension status is published on USOCA website and TraceNet.
4. Accreditation body (APEDA/NAB) is informed automatically through online system.
5. Suspension may be extended once under extraordinary circumstances (till the last date of grace period).

3 Revocation of Suspension

Revocation may be granted when:

- Operator submits evidence of corrective actions.
- Certification Committee verifies compliance through site inspection if required.
- Decision is approved and updated in TraceNet.
- No Transaction Certificates (TCs) shall be issued until suspension is formally revoked.

4 Withdrawal (Termination) of Certification

Withdrawal is applied when:

- Non-compliant lot of production is removed from entire lot, when organic integrity is infringed.
- In case of any violation by the Operator, the Certification Body shall withdraw certification from the Operator for a specified period in case serious non-compliances affecting the organic integrity are observed.
- Non-conformities remain unresolved after suspension deadlines.
- Serious or repeated non-conformities and repeated violations of the NPOP norms occur, certification of the operator shall be terminated.
- Regulatory authority issues irregularity notifications.
- Operator requests termination.
- Instances of withdrawals/termination shall be displayed in the website of USOCA.

Withdrawal Process:

1. Certification Committee issues a formal withdrawal decision.
2. Operator must cease use of logos, marks, and references to certification.
3. TraceNet and USOCA website are updated.
4. Accreditation bodies and affected stakeholders are notified.

6. Directory of Certified Clients

- USOCA maintains an up-to-date directory of certified clients.
- Current status (active, suspended, withdrawn, reduced scope) is publicly accessible on the USOCA website and communicated to requesting parties.

7. Unannounced Audits

- USOCA conducts unannounced audits in cases of complaints, regulatory findings, or follow-up of suspensions.
- No prior notice is provided to operators.
- Audit teams are carefully assigned to avoid conflicts of interest.

8. Conditions for Sanctions

Detailed conditions for extension, reduction, suspension, revocation, and withdrawal are provided in Annexure-I. Prescribed pecuniary penalties, as per NPOP Annex-6 (1), shall also apply for operators and external service providers (e.g., ICS managers).

9. Responsibilities

- Quality Manager: Oversees compliance and ensures TraceNet updates.
- Certification Committee: Takes final decisions on scope extension, suspension, withdrawal, or revocation.
- Certification Head: Ensures public communication of certification status.

- Audit Team: Conducts audits (regular, additional, or unannounced) and reports findings.

10. Confidentiality & Communication

- All proceedings related to sanctions are treated confidentially.
- Clients are promptly notified of certification status changes.
- Accreditation bodies and stakeholders are informed where required by NPOP.