

Regenerative Organic Certified® Framework Revision

Summary of Updates: Framework Revision v4.1 to v4.2 proposed in the public draft open for consultation until May 15th, 2026.

This document summarizes the updates introduced in the Regenerative Organic Certified® Framework revision from version 4.1 to version 4.2. The purpose of this update is to strengthen clarity, consistency, and alignment across the Framework and related governing documents for the Regenerative Organic Certified™ program, while maintaining the integrity and intent of the standard.

The revisions include targeted technical adjustments, editorial improvements, and the removal of references that encourage deviations from the Framework, reinforcing a consistent, harmonized application of requirements. While the process for submitting deviation requests remains available, this update emphasizes alignment with the Framework as the primary pathway for certification.

In addition to the Framework updates, corresponding program documents will be revised to ensure coherence across the system. Upon release of the updated Framework, the revised Regenerative Organic System Plans (ROSPs) will be published, and associated checklists will be updated in myROC to reflect these changes.

Together, these updates aim to improve usability, transparency, and consistency for operators, certification bodies, auditors, and other stakeholders engaged with the Regenerative Organic Certified® program.

Ref.	v4.2
ROC Framework Introduction	<p>Parsed down and simplified the Program Management section within the Introduction to the Framework.</p> <p>Added applicable Terms and Definitions and Objectives to this section.</p> <p>III. Certification Scope and Structure: Levels of ROC: Bronze – removed the “50% by year five” growth requirement. Revised 10% minimum commitment at initial certification for large operations. Gold – Removed processor requirement</p>



ROC Pillar	Soil Health & Land Management
1.2 Regenerative Organic System Plan (ROSP) (Soil Health)	<p>Added additional required items to ROSP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indigenous people’s land rights considerations and criteria. - Biodiversity management plan - All plans include a monitoring process with interventions that are monitored annually. <p>Silver level: Plan sets specific goals Gold level: The scope of the ROSP goes beyond the production unit to incorporate the surrounding ecosystem and neighboring operations.</p>
1.3 Water (Soil Health)	<p>Added:</p> <p>Operations shall have a water health management plan that is reviewed annually and updated at least every three years based on monitoring outcomes.</p> <p>The water health management plan shall be designed to monitor changes in water health during operations and to assess how these changes are managed.</p> <p>The water health management plan shall include a strategy for water reduction and conservation.</p> <p>Rainwater, municipal water, and groundwater consumption and quality should all be part of the water strategy plan.</p> <p>Silver level: Targets that are time-bound and measurable shall be set for water health outcomes within the production unit. Gold level: Targets that are time-bound and measurable shall be set for water health outcomes both within the production unit, and beyond to include the surrounding ecosystems.</p>
1.4 Deforestation & High Conservation Value Areas	<p>Renamed ref. section to “1.4 Deforestation & High Conservation Value Areas”</p> <p>Establish High Conservation Value (HCV) areas through an assessment, to be critical for biodiversity, environmental integrity, and/or cultural or social significance.</p> <p>Gold level: Measurable restoration activities are demonstrated. (Restoration of forests and other natural habitats)</p>
2.4 Rotational Grazing (Soil Health)	<p>Added:</p> <p>Grazing plans must be developed by properly trained and knowledgeable personnel.</p> <p>Operations that use grazing contractors must have a grazing plan that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Considers using species that support the local ecosystem and positively impact the soil health/quality - Monitors animal grazing records (i.e. recent grazing locations to account for disease/pest contamination) and cross contamination.

<p>2.6 Control of Invasive Species (Soil Health)</p>	<p>Reworded and added to requirement: Operations must have a plan for identifying, monitoring, and managing the intentional, accidental or unintentional infestation of unwanted exotic or invasive plants and animals, including insects, that may spread to natural areas on and off the farm.</p> <p>Silver level: Plan sets specific goals. Gold level: Plan sets specific goals and includes areas surrounding the production unit.</p>
<p>2.7 Protection for Endangered Plants, Animals, and Protected Habitats (Soil Health)</p>	<p>Renamed ref. Section to “2.7 Protection for Endangered Plants, Animals, and Protected Habitats”</p> <p>Added: Operations must implement a buffer zone between the certified production area and any protected habitats, if present. Buffer zone size and type may be determined by a risk assessment.</p>
<p>2.8 Regenerative Practices</p>	<p>Added definition for Mulching (Terms & Definitions document)</p>
<p>4.2 Waste (Soil Health)</p>	<p>Added to Silver and Gold levels:</p> <p>Silver level: Waste management systems are in place and monitored to prevent air pollution and the contamination of soil and water. Gold level: Waste management systems include surrounding areas beyond the production unit.</p>
<p>5.1 Synthetic Chemicals & Chemical Management (Soil Health)</p>	<p>Renamed ref. Section to “5.1 Synthetic Chemicals & Chemical Management”</p> <p>Silver level & Gold level: There must be a chemical management plan that is managed by knowledgeable personnel and is reviewed at least every three years.</p>
<p>6.1 Soil Health Lab Test (Soil Health)</p>	<p>Added to Silver and Gold levels: Silver level & Gold level: Producers shall have a documented soil health plan that includes targeted outcomes for improving soil health. At a minimum it must include indicators listed in the ROC™ Soil Sampling Guidelines. Applicable to medium and large-scale operations only.</p>
<p>6.3 Computer Models & Monitoring (Soil Health)</p>	<p>Renamed ref. Section to “6.3 Computer Models & Monitoring</p> <p>Updated practice description and level requirements: Operators use digital modeling tools to estimate annual greenhouse gas emissions, removals, and trends in soil organic carbon. Tools must be appropriate for the operation type and based on recognized scientific methods. Operators document all inputs, assumptions, and results and review these annually with the auditor. Requirements scale by certification level:</p> <p>Bronze</p>



	<p>Operators use an approved computer-based tool to estimate emissions and removals and document the practices entered into the model.</p> <p>Silver Operators use an approved tool with site-specific data inputs, including soil test results, yields, livestock numbers, and input quantities, to estimate GHG fluxes and soil carbon trends. Operators review model assumptions and results with the auditor annually.</p> <p>Gold Operators use scientifically validated modeling systems incorporating measured soil health indicators, high-resolution field-level data, and updated regenerative methodologies. Modeled results must be supported by measured SOC/SOM trends, and all assumptions, data sources, and results must be fully documented and submitted to the certifying body.</p>
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ROC Pillar	Animal Welfare
Preface/Intro	Added more details. Slight modification.
1.1 Existing Certifications	<p>Incorporated information from the guidance document.</p> <p>“To be eligible for the Regenerative Organic Certified® program, livestock operations* are required to hold one of the baseline certifications listed in the “Required Baseline Certifications & Equivalency Assessment” document. The equivalency assessment represents the needed criteria to earn Regenerative Organic Certified® Bronze level. For Silver or Gold level, please refer to the full Regenerative Organic Certified® Framework.</p> <p>**Certified Humane laying hen operations must meet the Certified Humane standards for Seasonal Pasture Raised or Pasture Raised as outlined in Part 4: A & B of the Humane Farm Animal Care (February 1, 2018) Animal Care Standards for Egg Laying Hens. Laying hen operations that only meet the baseline requirements (no outdoor access) or Free-Range standards of the Certified Humane certification are not eligible for the Regenerative Organic Certified® program.”</p>
1.4 Prohibition of CAFO and Long-Term Confinement	Simplified this section. Created a CAFO definition in the Terms & Definitions document. Removed reference granting exemptions.
2.2 water	Reworded. Removed reference to waterfowl. Simplified text.
3.1 General	<p>Incorporated an update from the guidance document:</p> <p>“For meat chickens, breeds must be selected that demonstrate higher welfare outcomes and have the genetic growth potential of no more than .10 lbs. (45g) per day”</p>
3.2 Indoor shelter	<p>Added clarifications for use of tie-stall barns within dairy operations.</p> <p>“Tie-Stall Barns: Tie-stall barns are not permitted for permanent housing; see exceptions for Bronze. Bronze: Dairies are allowed a two-year period to transition to a free stall or complete pasture-based operation.”</p>
3.3 Confinement	<p>Added clarification for temporary confinement and calf hutches for dairy operations.</p> <p>“Temporary confinement is permitted when necessary to protect animal health and welfare, ensure human safety, or prevent environmental degradation. Temporary confinement must be time-limited, restricted to the minimum duration necessary to address the identified risk, and shall not be used as a routine management practice. Temporary confinement decisions may be made by the operation at the time of need and do not require prior approval from the Certification Body (CB) or ROA. However, all instances must be documented and available for verification during inspections. Repeated or extended confinement may be subject to additional review to ensure alignment with the intent of the ROC Framework. Allowable reasons for temporary confinement include, but are not limited to:</p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inclement or extreme weather events• Environmental or soil protection concerns• Animal health or biosecurity needs• Short-term management activities (e.g., breeding, birthing, weaning, sorting, veterinary handling) <p>Management-related confinement must be event-specific and short-term and shall not be interpreted as permitting animals, including gestating females, to be confined indoors for extended periods or production cycles. During temporary confinement, animals must be provided with sufficient space, shelter, feed, water, and bedding (as applicable) to maintain health and welfare.”</p>
4.2 Physical Modifications	<p>Added clarification regarding beak-trimming.</p> <p>“Routine beak trimming/debeaking is prohibited in Regenerative Organic Certified® poultry operations should avoid the use of routine beak trimming/debeaking. Poultry producers should use environmental interventions to reduce the incidence of injurious feather pecking, including, but not limited to early access to forage and range, mash feeding, providing areas of refuge for subordinate birds, and having matching housing conditions during pullet rearing and lay for laying hens. Infrared beak trimming of chicks immediately after hatch may be permitted on a case-by-case basis. Hot or cold blade trimming is not a permitted method. Only infrared beak trimming is recommended at hatch and not to be applied beyond 10 days of age.”</p>
4.3 Disposition of Culled Animals – Specific to Dairy Animal Welfare Criteria (NEW SECTION)	<p>Only applies to dairy bull calves from dairy operations.</p> <p>Animals cannot be sold to standard auctions.</p> <p>Level specific requirements:</p> <p>Bronze: Dairy bull calves are sold to an operation that provides continuous access to pasture.</p> <p>Silver: Dairy bull calves are sold to an operation providing continuous pasture access and raised to maturity.</p> <p>Gold: Dairy bull calves are raised on site to maturity or sold to another Regenerative Organic Certified® farm to be raised to maturity.</p> <p>All other classes of dairy animals, including cull cows, that need to be treated, euthanized, or sent to slaughter are covered under the relevant sections:</p> <p>Criteria 4.1, 5.1, and all of sections 6, 7, & 8 regarding humane treatment, euthanasia, transport, slaughter/killing, and personnel training in the Regenerative Organic Certified® Framework and the Dairy Animal Welfare Criteria.</p>



ROC™ Pillar	Farmer & Worker Fairness
1.3 Labor Laws, Legal, & International Conventions Compliance	Removed link to the International Labor Organization (ILO)
1.4 Supply Chain Requirements	Removed reference to processor criteria document
2.3 Work Restrictions for Children and Young Workers	Updated criteria to provide more clarity. “Young workers under 18 do not perform work that jeopardizes education and emotional or physical development. Young workers between the ages of 15-18 years old (including those residing on the farm and those of migrant workers) shall not engage in hazardous work that jeopardizes their health, or safety, such as heavy lifting, exposure to dangerous agriculture production activities, including exposure to chemicals/pesticides.”
3.2 Hiring Practices	Incorporated a remediation policy requirement. “Operations must have remediation policies in place to address child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking.”
3.3 Contractors	Incorporated information from the Farmer & Worker Fairness Guidance document. Clarified that the contracted labor providers must comply with the ROC social fairness requirements.
6.1 Protection Against Retaliation	Added requirement for a “Freedom of Association” policy.
7.1 Worker Voice	Added clarification regarding worker voice communication channel(s). “Workers have a safe, anonymous, and accessible channel for communicating feedback to management.”
7.3 Employment Contracts & Terms	Incorporated requirements from the associated guidance document. “Operators must have a documented process for onboarding labor providers whereby expectations associated with legal compliance and compliance with this standard are communicated. The operator must ensure that auditors have access to workers, worker files, payroll, and timecard records for all workers, including workers hired through labor contractors. It is recommended that Operators discuss this access with contracted labor providers in advance of the audit. If labor contractors deny access to workers or request records, this will result in non-conformance.”
8.1 Wages	Updates to include minimum requirements. “At least the minimum wage (national or local) and/or the collective bargaining agreement wage must be paid, whichever is higher.”

8.2 Commitment to a Living Wage	<p>Incorporated language from the associated guidance document and incorporated requirements for showing verifiable evidence of positive social outcomes.</p> <p>“Operations must show verifiable evidence of positive social outcomes regarding one or more of the following: payment of living wages, freedom of association/worker voice, or any other social benefits enacted through the operation.”</p>
8.4 Housing	<p>Updated to include that appropriate advance notice must be given to workers if housing is subject to inspection during an audit.</p> <p>Other minor rewording.</p>
9.1 Hours of Work	<p>Updated criteria to include the requirement for a timekeeping system and to include a plan for monitoring worker hours within a production management plan.</p> <p>Incorporated requirements from the associated guidance document.</p>
Formatting updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removed A-1 Glossary of Key Terms and A-2. Definitions for Prohibited Animal Handling & Management Practices. Replaced with reference to the ROA Terms & Definitions, which will be a separate document on the ROA Resources webpage. • Moved A-4. Operation Scale Definitions to the beginning of the document • Removed the following appendices due to duplicative information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A-2. Soil Health Lab & In-Field Tests ○ A-5. Auditor Requirements for All Modules of Regenerative Organic Certified® ○ A-6. Certification Resources