

Organic Handling in Practice: Giant Jones

Jessica Jones (00:11):

Everything in our lives was already certified organic, but I couldn't have certified organic alcohol. So, we did it. I'm Jessica Jones, the brewer and co-owner at Giant Jones Brewing. We are a small certified organic brewery run by queer women in Madison, Wisconsin. Giant Jones is one of 15 certified organic breweries in the United States. There are 9,000 some breweries in this country. It's less than one one-hundredth of a percent. There are places where organic certification like gives you the entry. Whole Foods just picked up our beer for Wisconsin and the Chicago markets because it's certified organic. We decided to be making these strong beers because it allows us to absorb the cost of organic ingredients. People are happy to pay \$8 to \$10 for a half liter of these strong beers that are unique styles on the marketplace.

Jessica Jones (01:14):

We were going to open a brewery. It was going to be certified organic. Everything else was on the table. The day that we opened and served beer to people, that beer was not certified organic because there are too many things to line up in getting our business open. This was the first business that we opened. This was the first brewery that we opened. And we did it with determination, not really money. Once we decided to work with MOSA, we said, "Hi, we need some guidance," and they helped us through it. Getting to the point of being a certified organic brewery was one of the most difficult bureaucratic things I ever did in my life. Once you are certified organic, it's really easy to maintain. It's a lot of work and a lot of documentation upfront. And then once you get there, it's a whole new world.

Jessica Jones (02:08):

Finding, vetting, and establishing relationships with organic suppliers has gotten streamlined and easy. There's now the Organic Integrity Database that allows you to look up companies, see the scope of what their organic products are, and you can even just, like, search for particular products that you're looking for in the database. We have a shared loading dock. We receive things on this dock lift that everyone else does. We also recently added a storage unit. I learned early on that it's important to create space for all of the possible substitutions you might need to make within your product profiles, which is basically your recipe because of supply chain availability. Every time that we've had supply chain issues come up, my first call is to customer service at MOSA, our certifier. If you're in communication as your first step with your certifier, everything's going to go smoothly, and all your inspections will go great too, because they know that you're doing the best you can.

Jessica Jones (03:22):

Most of the grain gets added up through this big hopper and then drops into my mash tun. Then it comes in here, it's mixed with water. I have reverse osmosis water, so I've removed any chlorine or fluoride. I add the yeast, close it all up, and then fermentation starts. Temperatures being controlled by propylene glycol, which is in all these process pipes. I have a chiller up on the roof. What propylene



glycol I have in my chiller system is reported to my organic certifier because, again, they need to know all of the chemicals that are onsite. It's just part of a total understanding of facility. I probably wouldn't have actually written down all of my SOPs in such a good way if I hadn't been responsible for filing them with my certifier. I would be the most chaotic version of myself. But instead, I'm this wonderful organized brewer.

Jessica Jones (04:20):

Inspection is really just a chance to check in and strengthen your organic systems. It is a chance for me to review what I've been doing and make sure that I'm really doing the things that I say I am doing. There's your scheduled annual inspection, and there's also the possibility of a surprise inspection. The core of inspections is the traceback of an organic product. Traceback is also known as audit trail of your product. The certifier will take one of your products at random and say, "Cool. What's in this?" You find the lot number, however you're communicating that on your label. For us, our lot numbers and tracking is the packaging date, which is either noted on the collar of the keg or on the label of the beer. We can go back to our brew log and then it ties back to all of the ingredients that we used, ties back to the ingredients we received, which ties back to the ingredients I ordered. And then at that point, we're at the last certified organic handler to have touched the stuff, and my responsibility ends. <laugh>

Jessica Jones (05:33):

There are limitations around what you can use for pest control. Mainly, you're not using poisons or baits. I have a map that has what traps I have and where they are. We're checking those once a week. I'm checking the barriers at the beginning of each month, and then initialing who did the check.

Jessica Jones (05:51):

We had a mouse problem here exactly one time. We panicked and just went to the hardware store and bought some traps. And shortly later, we had our first organic inspection, and our certifier said, "Oh, those traps aren't allowed." And I wouldn't have known that unless my certifier said, "Oh, that's not the style of trap that's allowed." So organic certification helped us improve our pest control.

Jessica Jones (06:20):

Part of compliance starts with having a facilities map that shows the flow of organic things into, through, and out of your facility. I'm listing all of my organic control points in macro detail. Someone can just look at this map and understand how things would flow through here. And then I have just this overall flow of everything that I talked about. And so this just really simply lays out what ends up where, and then how we're packaging it, and then also how things go out to bars and restaurants. And then we pick up the empty kegs and it all just starts again.

Jessica Jones (07:02):

For your cleaning and sanitation, you need to file what chemicals you are using and your processes for using them with your certifier. This is what I use to clean my kettles, or this is what I use to clean my floor. Here is how I use it, and here are the steps that keep it from becoming part of my organic products.

Jessica Jones (07:27):

Our record keeping systems evolved and centered on a hybrid of my needs as a brewer of things I want to be keeping track of, and then what is required for organic certification. Looking at your certifier's handlers organic system plan is a good place to start to know what they're looking for. It's really useful. It starts to trigger what supporting documents you need. This is a total list of everything that has been reviewed for use by our certifier in our certified organic products.

Jessica Jones (08:07):

So my favorite supplier is California Craft Maltings, LLC, doing business as Admiral Malting. So I've listed all of their malts that I might use. And then we come over to my product profiles. Every product that we potentially make is down here and has its own tab. Part of organic certification is you have organic product profiles of all of your products that you make. Your product profile formula has to add up to 95% organic content, not including water or sodium chloride.

Jessica Jones (08:52):

My favorite part of being an organic handler is that it keeps me being my best self. The joy of organic certification is that there is limitations. You have this box of things that you can operate in, and it makes you more creative.

Jessica Jones (09:09):

One of the things I ask other brewers to do is like, "Oh, could you write down the lot codes of all those bags of malt that we just used?" They're like, "Wow, you actually do that?" Yeah, I have to. I'm certified organic. Organic certification is about connecting to the future emotionally, because we are doing work in the moment to have the world be better later. This is the world I want to live in, and this is me pushing towards the goals and aspirations of what humanity could be as part of the ecosystem.



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