

Understanding Organic Labels

WHAT DOES “ORGANIC” MEAN?

Organic food is produced without using harmful or toxic pesticides, sewage sludge or petroleum-based synthetic fertilizers, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), bioengineering, or ionizing radiation. Organic meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products come from not-cloned animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones.

100% ORGANIC

- » 100% organic ingredients
- » Only organic processing aids used
- » Absolutely no non-organic agricultural ingredients used (excluding water/salt)
- » Must be certified and the certifying agency must be named on the label

EXAMPLE:

100% organic oatmeal

LOOK FOR THE LABELS:



ORGANIC

- » 95-100% organic ingredients
- » Up to 5% may be from a limited, approved list of allowed non-organic agricultural ingredients and other additives (e.g. vitamins, baking soda, citric acid) approved by the USDA National Organic Program
- » Must be certified and the certifying agency must be named on the label

EXAMPLE:

Organic cereal

LOOK FOR THE LABELS:



MADE WITH ORGANIC INGREDIENTS

- » At least 70% organic ingredients
- » Up to 30% can be allowed, non-organic agricultural ingredients (e.g. vitamins and citric acid) approved by the USDA National Organic Program
- » May list up to three organic foods or food groups on label
- » Must be certified and the certifying agency must be named on the label

EXAMPLE:

Cereal made with organic oats

LOOK FOR THE LABEL:



LESS THAN 70% ORGANIC INGREDIENTS

- » Product is not required to be certified
- » All products with less than 70% organic ingredients are in this category
- » No restrictions on non-organic ingredients
- » The word “organic” can only be listed in the ingredients panel

EXAMPLE:

Ingredients: Organic oats, organic raisins



Organic Standards and Certification

As a leader in the organic movement since 1973, CCOF helped create the current USDA National Organic Program (NOP) regulations. The NOP requires that all foods labeled as “certified organic” must be grown and processed according to strict standards. Growers, handlers, retailers, restaurants, and any other operation marketing its products as organic must all be inspected by a USDA-accredited third-party certifier, such as CCOF, to ensure that all the rules necessary to meet these standards are being followed.

The Benefits of Organic Certification

The presence of the USDA organic and/or CCOF seal on a product guarantees that the product has been grown, produced, inspected, and certified to be in compliance with federal organic regulations. The USDA organic seal represents to consumers that someone is working behind the scenes to guarantee that their food is safe and healthy. CCOF is happy to be that someone and we are proud of the role we play in protecting the integrity of organic for the consumer.

Beware of Other Labeling

Food labeling can be misleading and confusing, which is why “certified organic” is an important choice for consumers. Learn about the differences in food labeling to demystify your purchasing.

“Natural,” “Local,” and “Sustainable”

There are no federal standards for “natural,” “local,” or “sustainable” claims. These products may include toxic pesticides, GMOs, or synthetic substances that are prohibited in organic production.

“No Spray,” “Pesticide Free,” and “Residue Free”

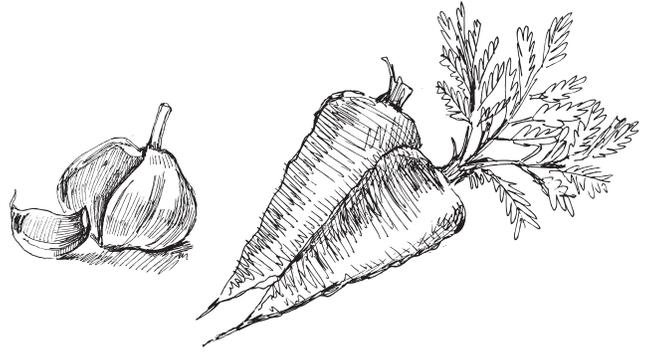
These labels do not ensure that your food is organic. Claims like “pesticide free” may mean that the edible part of a crop has not been sprayed with harmful chemicals; however, synthetic fertilizers, insecticides, and fungicides may have been used to grow the food.

Organic is ALWAYS GMO-Free

When you see the organic seal, you can be sure that your food is GMO-free! Products that are not certified organic may contain GMOs, and without labeling requirements, consumers have no way of knowing. CCOF believes mandatory labeling of GMO seed, products grown from GMO seed or stock, or products made with ingredients and byproducts of GMO crops is necessary for farmer, supply chain, and consumer choice.

Top Reasons to Buy Organic

Organic farms support larger populations of beneficial organisms such as bees, other pollinators, and songbirds!



Choose Healthy, Tasty Food

Research from Newcastle University suggests that switching to a diet of organic fruit, vegetables, and cereals provides 20-40% more antioxidants. Additional studies indicate that organically grown food has higher amounts of vitamin C, magnesium, phosphorus, and iron; all nutrients vital for healthy functioning bodies.

Protect Your Family's Health

Food choices you make now can have a major impact on your child's health. Children can be up to 164 times more sensitive than adults to at least eight widely used cancer-causing pesticides found in food. Exposure to toxic chemicals has been linked to the development of ADHD, allergies, asthma, and autism in children. Pesticides likewise have been implicated in birth defects, behavioral problems, nerve damage, and genetic mutations. Organic food is produced without the use of toxic pesticides and is a safer alternative for everyone.

Preserve the Environment

Pest management practices in organic farming protect wildlife, promote biodiversity, and work to improve and maintain native ecosystems. Organic farms support larger populations of beneficial organisms such as bees, other pollinators, and songbirds! Organic farming also centers on soil fertility: preserving the soil now and for future generations guarantees a sustainable food supply. These methods conserve water and protect our rivers from harmful chemical runoffs that can decrease fish populations and create ocean dead zones.

Mitigate the Effects of Climate Change

Soil treated organically absorbs more carbon, removing it from the air and environment and slowing the process of global warming. Rodale Institute research has shown that organic practices can remove about 7,000 lbs of carbon dioxide from the air per year and sequester it in each acre of organic farmland. Imagine the impact that more acres of organic production could have on the health of the planet if consumers demanded more organic.

Remove Additional Antibiotics and Hormones from the Food Supply Chain

Organic meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products come from animals that are not fed antibiotics or hormones. Resistance to antibiotics is on the rise and there is strong evidence to support the presence of antibiotics in our diet as playing a role in this trend. Organic practices avoid the overuse of antibiotics that have consequences for fighting illnesses.

Stop the Spread of GMOs

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are not allowed in organic production. A large and growing body of research shows that GMOs can be toxic, allergenic, and less nutritious than their natural counterparts. Studies indicate that GMOs can disrupt the ecosystem, damage vulnerable wild plant and animal populations, and harm biodiversity. Stop the uncontrolled biological experiment now taking place by buying organic.

Build the National Economy

Organic farms have higher operating profits than the U.S. average for all farms. Data from the USDA shows that 78% of organic farms have plans to maintain or increase organic production levels over the next five years. In a time when farmland is decreasing and the family farmer is struggling, the organic sector continues to aid in revitalizing America's rural economy and national food system by providing jobs and preserving farmland.

Support a More Fair Food System

Although organic foods might seem more expensive than conventional foods, conventional food prices do not reflect hidden costs that all consumers must bear. Billions of dollars are given annually in federal subsidies to conventional commodity crop production. There are also costs associated with the regulation and testing of toxic pesticide. In the supermarket, a basket of conventionally grown produce may appear cheaper simply because it does not include all these hidden costs that are unknowingly borne by the taxpayer. On the other hand, the price of organic food reflects all the personal and wider public benefits of organic production methods.