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What Does the "Organic Seal" Really Mean?

Cooperative Extension Service
South Dakota State University

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FYI - Organic

Organic food products are defined as being produced by farmers whose practices include the use of renewable resources and the conservation of soil and water.

Combining these practices with the absence of conventional pesticides and fertilizers is a requirement for foods that will be marketed with the organic seal.

Agricultural products sold, labeled, or represented as organic must be produced and processed in accordance with National Organic Program standards.

For more information about organic foods, labeling, and production, go to:

National Organic Program
<http://www.ams.usda.gov/>

*Click on National Organic Program in the “Browse by Subject” column.

Resources:

USDA Agricultural Marketing Services, National Organic Program, Oct. 2002, updated April 2008

North Carolina Cooperative Extension, North Carolina State University, “What Does the Organic Label Really Mean?”

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South Dakota
Cooperative Extension Service

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SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY
South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service



USDA Regulations

To use the word “organic” on food and other agricultural products, regulations

- prohibit the use of irradiation, sewage sludge, or genetically modified organisms in organic production;
- reflect National Organic Standards Board recommendations concerning items on the national list of allowed synthetic and prohibited natural substances;
- prohibit antibiotics in organic meat and poultry;
- require 100% organic feed for organic livestock.

Requirements include verification from a certification agency that the product meets or exceeds USDA standards.

Farmers whose gross income from organic products is less than \$5,000 are exempt from the certification requirement. Those farmers may call their product organic, but they can’t use the USDA seal. In addition, they must both be truthful in their label claims and comply with government standards.

Individuals or companies who sell or label a product as organic when they know it does not meet USDA standards can be fined up to \$11,000 for each violation.

What Does the “Organic Seal” Really Mean?



100% Organic – The product contains ONLY organically produced ingredients and processing aids (excludes water and salt). Generally, a single-ingredient food such as fruit, vegetable, meat, milk, and cheese may display the USDA Organic seal.

Organic – The product has 95% to 100% organic ingredients. Generally, a multiple-ingredient food may display the USDA Organic seal.

Other labels:

Made with organic ingredients – The product has 70% or more organic ingredients. Label may include a list of specific organic ingredients. May NOT display the USDA Organic seal.

Contains organic ingredients – The product contains less than 70% organic ingredients. Cannot use the term “organic” anywhere on the front panel, but may list the organic ingredients on the ingredient label.

National Organic Program

United State Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Marketing Service

The Organic Foods Production Act and the National Organic Program assure consumers that the organic agricultural products they purchase are produced, processed, and certified to consistent national organic standards.

Labeling requirements apply to raw, fresh products and to processed products that contain organic agricultural ingredients.

Other labeling provisions:

- Must identify each organically produced ingredient in the ingredient statement on the information panel.
- Name of certifying agent on the final product must be displayed on the information panel; the address is optional.
- No restrictions on the use of other truthful labeling claims such as “no drugs or growth hormones,” “free range,” or “sustainably harvested.”