

# Organic



I S S U E

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## A primer for organic: here's what consumers need to know

This newsletter is published by the Organic Trade Association, the North American trade association committed to the promotion of organic products in the marketplace, and the protection of the integrity of organic standards. Its membership includes more than 1,200 producers, processors, distributors and retailers of organic foods, fibers, farm and garden supplies, and health and beauty products. The OTA is your leading resource for information about this industry.

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How do you know when a product is organic, and what does it mean?

As of Oct. 21, 2002, all producers and processors of products sold as organic in the United States must comply with national organic standards or face fines and possible jail terms.

The reason? That is the day for full implementation of national organic standards governing the production and handling of organic products in the United States. At that point, all organic food and fiber products, whether domestically or foreign-produced, must be certified by an agency accredited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) verifying that such products meet strict federal organic standards. The only exemption to the certification requirement may be products sold by producers whose sales total less than \$5,000 a year. Although such producers do not need to be certified, they must comply with national organic standards and be able to prove that they do.

Here are the four labeling categories consumers will see when they look for organic products in stores and markets:

- **100 percent organic** — all of a product's content is certified organic. These products may display the "USDA Organic" seal.
- **Organic** — at least 95 percent of a product's content is certified organic. These products also may display the "USDA Organic" seal.
- **Made with organic ingredients** — at least 70 percent of a product's content is organic. Up to three ingredients can be listed with the phrase "made with organic."
- **Products containing less than 70 percent organic content** may identify organic content only on the product label's ingredients list.

**Note:** In all these labeling categories, any ingredient identified as organic cannot be from both organic and non-organic sources. For example, if the label says, "made with organic apples," that means all the apples used in the product are certified organic. Also, water and salt are excluded from calculations to determine the percent of organic content.

The certification process verifies that organic products meet stringent requirements each step from the farm to the store. Every phase of production—from the source of the raw ingredients to the facilities that produce the food and the shipping containers used to transport the organic products

## Museum event features organic



To help learn more about organic standards, come to the OTA's September 19

Organic For Kids press conference and media briefing at the Children's Museum of Manhattan.

The event, which will also celebrate Organic Harvest Month™, will feature appearances by Sandra Steingraber and Raffi. Reporters and other media representatives attending will receive a bag full of organic products and a clearer picture of organic agriculture and national organic standards.

Steingraber is the author of *Having Faith*, a groundbreaking book about pregnancy from an environmental scientist's point of view, and *Living Downstream*.

Raffi, a children's singer and songwriter, founded the Troubadour Institute, an environmental non-profit dedicated to children's concerns.

For more details or to get your name on the reservation list, contact Sue McGovern of McGovern Communications (Phone: 781-648-7157; e-mail: sue@mcgov.com).

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A primer for organic

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to your store shelves—is inspected and certified as meeting or exceeding U.S. national organic standards.

The new USDA rules will also cover imported organic food products, providing shoppers with additional assurance that all foods labeled as organic must meet U.S. requirements in order to be sold here. No other country offers an organic standard as stringent as the United States, which means the United States is truly setting the pace for organic standards around the world.

National organic standards will give U.S. consumers and retailers the assurance that items carrying an organic label truly are. When a product carries a claim that it is “100 percent organic,” “Organic,” or “Made with organic,” it, in fact, is. And, manufacturers will be able to say the actual percentage of the organic ingredients in a product. Thus, some may say 97 percent organic, or 77 percent organic, for instance. This makes it very clear about the product’s contents.

The primary reason for national organic standards is to safeguard the integrity of products marketed and sold in the United States as organic. This rule does that, and includes penalties for those caught violating its provisions. Thus, the industry has a rule that is enforceable, and one that provides assurance to consumers.✦



## Benefits of organic products

*There are many reasons to purchase organic products, whether food or fiber.*



### Environment

- Organic farming helps prevent topsoil erosion, improves soil fertility, protects ground water, conserves biological diversity, and conserves energy.
- Because organic agriculture respects the balance of microorganisms in the soil, organic producers use composted manure and other natural materials, as well as crop rotation, to help improve soil fertility, rather than synthetic fertilizers that can result in an overabundance of nitrogen and phosphorous in the ground. As a result, organic practices protect ground water supplies and avoid runoff of chemicals that can cause “dead zones” in larger bodies of water.
- Organic agriculture uses practices that build the health of the soil, providing the foundation for healthy crops and a livelihood for persons wishing to be good stewards of the land.
- Because organic practices help safeguard the environment and protect habitats, organic production conserves and promotes species diversity.

### Health

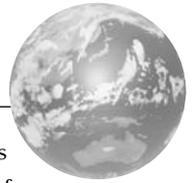
- Organic farming helps limit exposure to toxic chemicals from synthetic pesticides and fertilizers that can end up in the ground, air, water and food supply, and are associated with health consequences, from asthma to cancer.
- Organic practices prohibit the use of hormones, antibiotics or other animal drugs in animal feed for the purpose of stimulating the growth or production of livestock. If an antibiotic is used to restore an animal to health, that animal cannot be used for organic production or be sold, labeled or represented as organic. Thus, organic practices avoid the use of antibiotics that could have profound consequences for treatment of diseases in humans, including the serious danger of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.
- Growing crops in healthy soils results in food products that offer healthy nutrients. There is increasing evidence that organically grown fruits, vegetables and grains offer more of some nutrients, including vitamin C, iron, magnesium and phosphorous, and less exposure to nitrates and pesticides residues than their counterparts grown using synthetic pesticides and fertilizers.
- Organic agriculture minimizes children’s exposure to toxic and persistent pesticides in the soil in which they play, the air they breathe, the water they drink, and the foods they eat.

### Providing a choice

- Because U.S. national organic standards and industry practices do not allow the use of genetic engineering in the production and processing of organic products, organic agriculture gives consumers who wish to avoid genetically modified foods a choice in the marketplace. Organic practices also forbid the use of irradiation.✦

*Remember: September is Organic Harvest Month™!*

# A World of News



## Organic news

- A study has shown that organic soups sold commercially in the United Kingdom contain almost six times as much salicylic acid as non-organic soups. Source: *European Journal of Nutrition*, Vol. 40, Page 289.
- Organic fruits and vegetables have only a third as many pesticide residues as their conventionally grown counterparts, according to a study by Consumers Union and the Organic Materials Research Institute published May 8 in *Food Additives and Contaminants*.
- Research at Truman State University in Missouri has shown organically grown oranges contain up to 30 percent more vitamin C than those grown conventionally. Reporting the findings at the June 2 Great Lakes Regional meeting of the American Chemical Society, chemistry professor Theo Clark said chemical isolation combined with nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy revealed the higher level in the organic oranges.
- Organic farming is more energy efficient and results in healthier soil than conventionally managed agriculture, according to the first 21 years of the DOK trial under way in Switzerland. Details: *Science* 296, Pages 1694-1697 (May 31, 2002).
- The Rodale Institute's organic garden contest for schools encourages children nationwide to show how their organic school garden has affected their nutrition and health. Details: [www.kidsregen.org](http://www.kidsregen.org).
- Residents of San Luis Obispo, CA, can now buy and eat organic vegetables grown by students in the Organic Farming Enterprise Project at Cal Poly Tech University.
- The Palo Alto Unified School District in Palo Alto, CA, will begin offering organic lunches in a pilot program at three of its 12 elementary schools during Fall 2002.

## Environmental news

- An analysis of government water quality research shows that numerous dangerous pesticides are present in Northwest U.S. rivers and streams at levels known to harm salmon. Source: *Poisoned Waters* (Washington Toxics Coalition, 206-632-1545, Ext. 19).
- An investigation by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has found that four million tons of recycled sewage are spread on suburban and rural fields across the nation each year, without adequate research to ensure humans are safe from viruses, bacteria and toxins it may contain. Sludge cannot be used in organic agriculture.

- Atrazine, the nation's top selling weed killer, has been found to disrupt the sexual development of frogs at concentrations 30 times lower than levels allowed by EPA, thus raising concerns about its heavy use on corn and soybean crops in the Midwest and around the world. Details: April 16, 2002, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.
- The U.S. Geological Survey has found one or more of 95 pharmaceuticals, hormones, and other wastewater-related chemicals in 80 percent of 139 streams sampled in 30 states. Source: "Pharmaceuticals, Hormones, and Other Organic Wastewater Contaminants in U.S. Streams, 1999-2000: A National Reconnaissance," *Environmental Science and Technology*.
- Researchers at the University of Maryland School of Medicine have found antibiotic use in animals can affect the emergence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria in people. Source: "Animal antibiotic use has an early but important impact on the emergence of antibiotic resistance in human commensal bacteria," by David L. Smith et al., *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, April 23, 2002.

## International news

- Statistics Canada's recent census showed that 2,230 Canadian farms, or almost one percent of the total, produce at least one category of certified organic products. Saskatchewan leads, with 773 farms, or 1.5 percent of its farms, certified as organic.
- Efforts are under way to amend the Canadian National Organic Standards. This includes steps to harmonize Canadian regulations with standards from around the world, and industry support for a mandatory, rather than voluntary, organic program.
- Plant science researchers at the University of Saskatchewan are undertaking a three-year project to examine challenges of growing organic grain in the province.
- The Austrian organization Ernte für das Leben has announced it will begin certifying the production of timber as organic based on the regulations of the Forest Stewardship Council.
- Organic agriculture accounts for more than 17 million hectares worldwide. Oceania represents 45 percent of the world's organically managed land, followed by Europe (25 percent) and Latin America (22 percent). Australia leads with 7.7 million hectares, followed by Argentina (2.8 million hectares), Italy (more than 1 million hectares), and the United States (approximately 900,000 hectares). Source: *Organic Agriculture Worldwide 2002: Statistics and Future Prospects*. ❖



## Museum event features organic

Save the date...  
September 19, 2002

## O'Mama Report

*In preparation for full implementation of national organic standards this fall, the Organic Trade Association has launched "The O'Mama Report" ([www.theorganicreport.org](http://www.theorganicreport.org)), an online resource aimed at consumers.*

Visitors to the site can learn about the organic standards, as well as obtain useful information about organic foods and other organic household products. The site also serves as an online organic community where people can share ideas.

The O'Mama Report (the "O" is for "organic") was specifically created to meet the needs of women who were likely to be going through pregnancy, breast-feeding or other life-changing experiences. The site is divided into six sections:



- **Information**, featuring organic news and information, including background on the new organic standards;
- **Connection**, where visitors can share ideas and explore resources, including "O'Mama Profiles" where women share inspirational personal experiences, and even "O'Papa Profiles";
- **O'Baby**, providing information on creating an organic world for infants;
- **O'Kid**, featuring a list of fun and educational sites for kids to learn about organic farming and the environment;
- **Kitchen**, highlighting cooking with organic foods, using a variety of organic recipes; and
- **Home & Garden**, spotlighting the organic home, inside and out.✦

Visitors can sign up for complimentary subscriptions to "The O'Mama Report" e-newsletter and special offers from OTA members including free copies of *Organic Style* and *Organic Gardening* magazines.

### Quote of Note

"If the world's environment is contaminated, so too is the ecosystem of a mother's body. If a mother's body is contaminated, so too is the child who inhabits it."

Sandra Steingraber,  
preface,  
*Having Faith:  
An Ecologist's Journey  
to Motherhood*,  
Persus Publishing,  
Cambridge, MA,  
2001.