



**Organic Trade Association Poll of Home Gardeners  
Summary Report  
March 2006**

**Background on the poll**

During the month of January, the Organic Trade Association (OTA) circulated a poll to home gardeners to clarify home gardeners' understanding of fertilizer and soil amendments labeled "organic". The poll was distributed to many thousands of home gardeners through OTA's *O'Mama Report* (an electronic newsletter sent to consumers interested in organic products and issues), the National Wildlife Federation's listserv, *Organic Gardening Magazine's* listserv, an e-mail newsletter associated with the media program, *People, Places & Plants*, several home gardener marketing listserves from members of OTA, the American Community Gardening Association's listserv and member electronic newsletter, and a posting on the website for the online garden journal, *Dirt*. A request to distribute the poll was e-mailed to other organizations, including the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and Penn State Cooperative Extension, but these organizations did not directly confirm their participation. Given the nature of e-mail, the poll may have been distributed to other individuals and organizations also not confirmed.

Data indicate that a total of 576 or 50% of respondents to the poll have access to information about organic agriculture, gardening and related products, having received the poll through the Organic Trade Association's *O'Mama Report*, *Organic Gardening Magazine's* listserv, or one of the Northeast Organic Farming Associations. It seems safe to assume that many of these individuals are more likely than the average gardener to be well informed about organic gardening and the meaning of garden products labeled "organic".

**Poll results**

A total of 1,218 individuals took this poll, although 56 responses have been excluded from poll results because respondents were not from the United States or did not clearly indicate what state they live in. 1,162 poll responses were included in the poll results. 1,148 respondents consider themselves home gardeners. 1,148 respondents have gardened for at least one year. 935 or 81% of respondents have gardened for ten to seventy years (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Number of years gardened.

Years gardened	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
0 years	3	
1-4 years	87	8%
5-9 years	126	11%
10-19 years	256	22%
20-70 years	679	59%
Unspecified	5	

The percentages given for each of the questions are based on the number of responses to that individual question, to accommodate for varying small numbers (a maximum of 16) of respondents who skipped different questions.

96% of respondents to poll question three indicated that they would like to garden with products that are approved for use by USDA in certified organic farming. Although most respondents would like to garden with products allowed in organic farming, the poll responses show that a majority of these home gardeners are confused by the meaning of the “organic” label and unable to accurately identify fertilizers and soil amendments allowed for use in organic farming.

The central question of the poll is Question Four as follows:

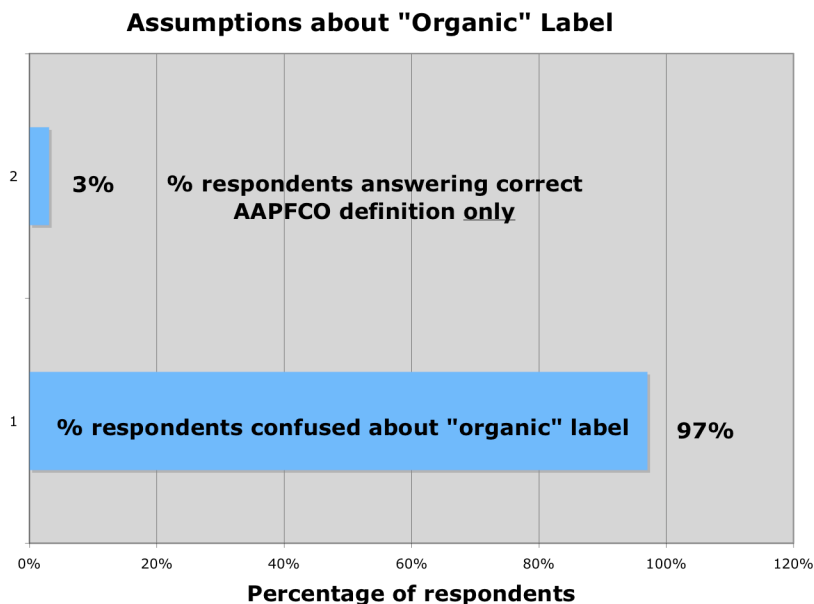
*I assume that fertilizers and soil amendments that are labeled with the word “organic” are:  
(Check all that apply):*

- (a) Products containing carbon and one or more elements other than hydrogen and oxygen essential for plant growth.*
- (b) Products allowed for use in certified organic farming.*
- (c) Products containing organic matter.*

Poll data indicate that the Association of American Plant Food Control Officials’ (AAPFCO) meaning of the word “organic” on fertilizer and soil amendment labels (choice (a) above) confuses home gardeners. Many states use AAPFCO’s model regulations as their fertilizer rules, as is generally the case regarding the use of the labeling term “organic”.

As shown in Graph A below, only 40 or 3% of the 1,147 respondents to Question Four assumed that products labeled as “organic” complied *only* with the AAPFCO definition of “organic” products, checking only the correct answer, “a”. 1,107 or 97% of respondents do not understand what “organic” means on garden supplies.

Graph A.



Keeping in mind that the respondents to Question Four were asked to check all answers that apply, the percentage of total responses to this question rose well above 100%. Table 2 below highlights the responses to this question. 270 of responses included the AAPFCO definition in their answers, answering “a”, “a” and “b”, “a” and “c”, or “a”, “b” and “c”. 421 answered *only* “b” (“*Products allowed for use in certified organic farming*”), and 819 answers included option “b” among their responses. These respondents assume that the “organic” label assures them of buying a product that could be used for organic farming and are clearly misinformed about the intended AAPFCO meaning of the “organic” label. 671 of responses included answer “c” (“*Products containing organic matter*”), again indicating a clear lack of understanding among home gardeners. 252 answered *only* “c”.

Table 2. Responses to Question 4.

<b>Response(s) chosen</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents</b>
AAPFCO definition: A only	40	3%
Included AAPFCO definition in answer: A, AB, AC, or ABC	270	24%
Allowed for use in certified organic farming: B only	421	37%
Included “allowed for use in certified organic farming” in answer: B, BC, AB, or ABC	819	71%
Products containing organic matter: C only	252	22%
Included “Products containing organic matter” in answer: C, AC, BC, or ABC	671	59%

*States represented in poll*

Individuals from the following 49 states and Washington, DC, took this poll (numbers in parentheses below indicate the number of respondents from each state):

Alabama (6), Alaska (4), Arizona (24), Arkansas (9), California (76), Colorado (20), Connecticut (35), Delaware (10), Florida (41), Georgia (21), Hawaii (2), Idaho (7), Illinois (36), Indiana (17), Iowa (7), Kansas (9), Kentucky (11), Louisiana (4), Maine (15), Maryland (34), Massachusetts (60), Michigan (36), Minnesota (15), Mississippi (6), Missouri (16), Montana (9), Nebraska (11), Nevada (6), New Hampshire (14), New Jersey (53), New Mexico (5), New York (78), North Carolina (25), North Dakota (1), Ohio (32), Oklahoma (8), Oregon (36), Pennsylvania (122), Rhode Island (16), South Carolina (13), Tennessee (15), Texas (41), Utah (10), Vermont (5), Virginia (71), Washington (29), West Virginia (10), Wisconsin (22), Wyoming (1) and Washington, DC (2).

*Responses to the poll came from the following sources:*

39% from *Organic Gardening Magazine's* listserve

24% from miscellaneous sources

26% from the National Wildlife Federation's listserve

10% from The Organic Trade Association's O'Mama Report electronic newsletter

1% from *People, Plants & Places'* listserve

The mission of the Organic Trade Association is to promote and protect the growth of organic trade to benefit the environment, farmers, the public and the economy. OTA envisions organic products becoming a significant part of everyday life, enhancing people's lives and the environment. OTA's approximately 1,700 members include farmers, processors, importers, exporters, distributors, retailers, certifiers, and more. For further information, visit OTA's web site at [www.ota.com](http://www.ota.com) and its consumer web site at [www.theorganicreport.org](http://www.theorganicreport.org).