

USDA National Organic Program (NOP)

In the US, the term “**organic**” identifies products produced in accordance with the rules set forth by USDA National Organic Program (NOP) as authorized by the Organic Foods Production Act (Title 21 of the 1990 Farm Bill). Organic agriculture is an ecological management system that promotes biodiversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity. It is based on minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain and enhance ecological systems. In order to market your crop or livestock products as organic or to label a product “100% Organic”, “Organic”, or “Made with Organic (*specified ingredients*)”, a farmer or producer must be “Certified” by an accredited Certifying Agent. Operations that are Exempt or Excluded from certification must still comply with the NOP rules including the record keeping requirements.

Exemptions from Certification:

1. A producer whose gross income from organic production is less than \$5000. However, products from exempt operations cannot be used as organic ingredients in organic products made or handled by another operation.
2. A retail food facility that does not process the organic product. Some retail stores do opt into the certification process.
3. A handling operation that only handles agricultural products that contain less than 70% organic ingredients or that only identifies organic ingredients on the information panel.

Exclusions from Certification:

1. A handling operation that only sells agricultural products that are packaged or otherwise enclosed in a container prior to being received by the operation and that remain in the same package or container and are not otherwise processed while in the operation’s control.
2. A retail food establishment that processes, on their premises, raw and ready-to-eat food from agricultural products that were previously labeled as “100 percent organic,” “organic,” or “made with organic (*ingredients*)”.

Understanding Organic Labels




There are three label categories: 100% Organic; Organic; and Made with Organic (ingredients).

- **100% Organic:** Must contain (excluding water and salt) only 100% organically produced ingredients and processing aids.
- **Organic:** Must consist of at least 95 percent organically produced ingredients (excluding water and salt). Any remaining product ingredients must consist of non-agricultural substances approved on the National List (§ 205.605) and/or specific non-organically produced agricultural products that are not commercially available in organic form (§ 205.606).
- **Made with Organic (ingredients).** Must contain at least 70 percent organic ingredients. Can list up to three of the organic ingredients or food groups on the principal display panel. For example, soup made with at least 70 percent organic ingredients and only organic vegetables may be labeled either “soup made with organic peas, potatoes, and carrots,” or “soup made with organic vegetables.” The remaining 30 percent may include agricultural ingredients that are conventionally produced. However, these ingredients must not have been produced using excluded methods (genetically modified organisms), sewage sludge, or ionizing radiation. Any non-agricultural ingredients or processing aids must be on the National List (§ 205.605).

Required Label Components of ALL Retail Products labeled as 100% Organic, Organic or Made with Organic (ingredients):

1. An ingredient list that identifies all organic ingredients.
2. A statement underneath the name and address of the producer/distributor that identifies the certifying agent with “Certified Organic by” or a similar statement.
3. A lot number that allows the organic ingredients to be tracked back to their source.

Optional Components: USDA or Certifying Agent Logo's except that the USDA Logo may not be used on products labeled as “Made with Organic (...).”

Label Marks	 or 	
100% Organic	Yes	Yes
Organic	Yes	Yes
Made With Organic (ingredients)	No	Yes
Exempt or Excluded	No	No

Knowingly selling or labeling an organic product that is not in compliance with the NOP Rule is subject to a civil penalty (currently up to \$11,000 per violation). To Report Violations Contact: NOP Compliance; Phone: (202) 720-8311; Fax: (202) 205-7808; E-Mail: NOPcompliance@usda.gov. If you suspect that a certified organic product is mislabeled you should contact the Certifying Agent listed on the label.

Organic Production and Handling Standards

The National Organic Program (NOP) rule contains regulations that ensure organically labeled products meet consistent national standards.

What agricultural operations are affected by the standards?

- Any farm, wild crop harvesting, or handling operation that wants to sell an agricultural product as organically produced must adhere to the national organic standards.
- Handling operations include processors, manufacturers, and repackers of organic products.

Standards apply to production process

- The national organic standards address the methods, practices, and substances used in producing and handling crops, livestock, and processed agricultural products.
- Although specific practices and materials used by organic operations may vary, the standards require every aspect of organic production and handling to comply with the provisions of the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA).
- Organically produced food cannot be produced using excluded methods (genetic engineering), sewage sludge, or ionizing radiation.
- Records must be kept to demonstrate compliance with the standards.

Crop standards

The organic crop production standards say that:

- Land will have no prohibited substances applied to it for at least 3 years before the harvest of an organic crop.
- The use of genetic engineering (included in excluded methods), ionizing radiation and sewage sludge is prohibited.
- Soil fertility and crop nutrients will be managed through tillage and cultivation practices, crop rotations, and cover crops, supplemented with animal and crop waste materials and allowed synthetic materials.
- Preference will be given to the use of organic seeds and other planting stock, but a farmer may use non-organic seeds and planting stock under specified conditions.
- Crop pests, weeds, and diseases will be controlled primarily through management practices including physical, mechanical, and biological controls.
- When these practices are not sufficient, a biological, botanical, or synthetic substance approved for use on the National List may be used.

Livestock standards

These standards apply to animals used for meat, milk, eggs, and other animal products represented as organically produced. The livestock standards say that:

- Animals for slaughter must be raised under organic management from the last third of gestation, or no later than the second day of life for poultry.
- Producers are required to feed livestock agricultural feed products that are 100 percent organic, but may also provide allowed vitamin and mineral supplements. These supplements must not contain prohibited ingredients.
- Producers may convert an entire, distinct dairy herd to organic production by providing 100 percent organically certified feed and organic management for a period of 12 months.
- Organically raised animals may not be given hormones to promote growth, or antibiotics for any reason.
- Preventive management practices, including the use of vaccines, can be used to keep animals healthy.
- Producers are prohibited from withholding treatment from a sick or injured animal; however, animals treated with a prohibited medication may not be sold as organic.
- All organically raised animals must have access to the outdoors, including access to pasture for ruminants. They may be temporarily confined only for reasons of health, safety, the animal's stage of production, or to protect soil or water quality.

Handling standards

The handling standards say that:

- All non-agricultural ingredients, whether synthetic or non-synthetic, must be included on the National List of Allowed Synthetic and Prohibited Non-Synthetic Substances.
- Handlers must prevent the commingling of organic with non-organic products and protect organic products from contact with prohibited substances.