

# BUYING ORGANIC PRODUCTS FROM THE UNITED STATES

## Organic Products from the United States— Bringing High Quality to You

With the December 2000 publication of the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Organic Program final regulations, the United States (U.S.) now has national standards for the production and handling of organically grown food. These standards are among the strictest in the world.

### What is organic?

Under the USDA's regulations, "organic" is a labeling term that refers to the way agricultural products, both food and fiber, are grown and processed. Organic products come from a system of agriculture that strives for a balance with nature, using methods and materials of low impact to the environment. Organic foods are minimally processed without artificial ingredients, preservatives or irradiation.



### U.S. Organic Standards:

- Prohibit the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), irradiation, and sewage sludge in organic production
- Prohibit the use of antibiotics and growth hormones in raising organic livestock
  - Require 100 percent organic feed for organic livestock
  - Require the use of production and processing materials in accordance with the National List of Allowed Synthetic and Prohibited Natural Substances
  - Require three years from the last use of a prohibited substance in order for a farm to be certified organic
- Require that animals for slaughter be raised under organic management from the last third of gestation and throughout their lives
- Require that animals have access to the outdoors, and that ruminants have access to pasture



On U.S. organic farms, soil fertility and crop nutrients are managed through tillage and cultivation practices, crop rotations, and cover crops. U.S. regulations also feature strict controls on how compost is used. Crop pests, weeds, and diseases are controlled through management practices without the use of toxic and persistent pesticides.



Part of USDA's role is to accredit public and private certifying agents. USDA accredited certifying agents verify that producers and handlers follow U.S. Organic standards. Certification includes inspections of farm fields and processing facilities, detailed record keeping, and periodic testing of soil and water.



As of Oct. 21, 2002, all agricultural products sold, labeled, or represented as “organic” in the United States must be in compliance with the U.S. organic law. The words “ecological” or “biological” are not considered synonymous with “organic” and are not regulated under the US organic law.

## What products are available?

An impressive variety of organic foods and fiber products are now available.

Food offerings include fruits and vegetables, pasta, prepared sauces, frozen juices, frozen meals, milk, ice cream and frozen novelties, cereals, beef, pork, poultry, breads, soups, cookies, beer, wine, vodka, and baby foods, to name a few.



In addition, organic fiber products available include bed and bath linens, tablecloths, napkins, toys, cosmetic puffs, feminine hygiene products and men's, women's and children's clothing in a wide variety of styles, from T-shirts to business attire.

Commodities available include wheat, corn, soybeans, cotton, small grains, oilseeds, and fresh fruits and vegetables.

Many new products and ingredients are regularly introduced to the marketplace.



## Enforcement of standards

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Organic Program (NOP) will enforce producer and handler compliance with the U.S. organic standards. In addition, accredited certifying agents are authorized to investigate complaints of noncompliance



## Labels and what they mean

U.S. organic standards provide four labeling options.

They are:

### ◆ 100 PERCENT ORGANIC

- Made only of organically produced ingredients

### ◆ ORGANIC

- At least 95 percent of the product by weight, excluding water and salt, are organically produced ingredients.

- Up to 5 percent of the remaining ingredients may be nonagricultural substances allowed on the National List.
- The same ingredient can not be from both organic and non-organic sources.
- There can be no use of genetic engineering, sewage sludge, or irradiation.
- All agricultural ingredients must be organically produced unless the ingredient is not commercially available in an organic form.

### ◆ MADE WITH ORGANIC...

- At least 70 percent, and up to 95 percent, of the ingredients are organically produced.

- Up to three organically produced ingredients or food groups may be named.

- The same ingredient can not be from both organic and non-organic sources.

- To qualify for this labeling, the non-organic agricultural ingredients must be produced and handled without use of GMOs, sewage sludge, or irradiation.

- Examples of this type of label include: “Soup made with organic vegetables,” or “Soup made with organic beans, rice, and tomatoes.”

### ◆ A listing of organic ingredients on the ingredient panel for products containing less than 70 percent organic ingredients.



Under the new regulation, producers can post the exact percentage of organic ingredients on the product label. For instance, there may be products that claim to be 97 percent organic.

In addition, the regulation allows the use of a USDA “organic seal” on raw or processed agricultural products beginning Oct. 21, 2002. It is only allowed on products that are 100 percent organic or organic (95 percent or more). Products containing less than 95 percent organic ingredients cannot display the USDA seal.

There are provisions in the national organic standards allowing U.S. companies to label organic products to comply with regulations in countries wishing to import these products.



U.S. produced organic products intended for export can be labeled to meet the requirements of the country of destination or any labeling requirements specified by a buyer from outside the United States. For instance, a product label may carry a statement that the product has been certified to, or meets, certain European Union organic standards. Such products, however, must display the statement “For export only.”



It is accessible through the OTA's web site ([www.ota.com](http://www.ota.com)). Searches are free and accessible to anyone with Internet capabilities.

## Seeking organic sources?

The Organic Pages Online developed by the Organic Trade Association (OTA) is a useful tool for searching for organic products, ingredients, and companies that provide services from all sectors of the organic industry.



## All Things Organic™

OTA in 2001 organized All Things Organic™, its first conference and trade show, held in May 2001 in Austin, TX. Due to the enthusiastic response to this conference and trade show, OTA is making this an annual event.

To learn more about U.S. organic products and to meet suppliers, exporters and manufacturers, you can attend All Things Organic™, featuring U.S. organic finished goods and commodities as well as seminars and social events.

For further details about the upcoming All Things Organic™ Conference and Trade Show, consult OTA's web site ([www.ota.com](http://www.ota.com)), or e-mail: [otashow@ota.com](mailto:otashow@ota.com).



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