

The following piece is excerpted from *Why Food Justice Certified* by Agricultural Justice Project. (n.d). It has been shortened and adapted for this lesson.

## What is Food Justice Certification?

You're standing in the grocery store aisle. Everywhere you look there are labels making all kinds of claims. When you pick up that "certified" item at the grocery store, we know you're wondering: Does this label really mean anything?

A certification system is only as meaningful as the "truth" behind its label.

The Food Justice Certification standards guarantee just working and living conditions for all agricultural and food and fiber system workers and just financial returns, equity, and fair pricing and contracts for farmers, their families, and other food businesses. AJP holds the Gold Standard for domestic fair trade certification.

In 1999, a group of stakeholders, disappointed that the proposed U.S. National Organic Program's standards did not address the people involved in organic agriculture, developed standards for the fair and just treatment of the people involved in organic and sustainable agriculture.

The Agricultural Justice Project standards for fair trade and social justice in the food and fiber system are based on the

Declaration of Human Rights, the conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the experience of stakeholders including: farmers, farmworkers, farm labor organizations, organic farming associations, manufacturers, retailers, and other participants in the food and fiber system in North America.

**Principles:** All workers have the right to safe working conditions, just treatment, and fair compensation and all farmers have the right to fair, equitable, transparent agreements and pricing.



*Food Justice Certification is a label based on high-bar social justice standards allowing participation by every link in the food & fiber chain from **farm to table**.*

## What does the Food Justice Certification program address?

- Rigorous environmental requirements for biodiversity, soil health, and animal welfare through application of Organic Certification standards
- Third-Party certification<sup>1</sup>
- Highest standards for fair and ethical labor and fair trade practices<sup>2</sup>
- [International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements](#)<sup>3</sup> (IFOAM) and [International Labour Organization](#)<sup>4</sup>(ILO) principles of social justice
- Truth in labeling and transparent policies
- Governance by food system stakeholders

The certification label on your box of mac-n-cheese is only as truthful as its labeling requirements are strong. Your favorite processed foods, like granola bars or pasta sauce, are made up of many different ingredients coming from many different farms and processors. When you see a certification label on the front of a processed product, you expect that all of those ingredients, farms and processors involved met the standard. The label should mean that the actual food in that package is certified. Whether or not that is true depends on the labeling requirements.

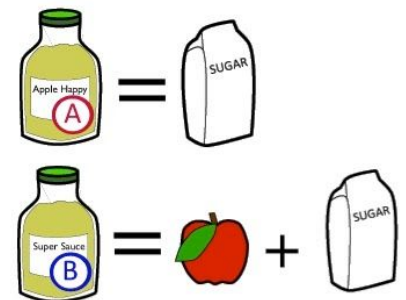
Companies “Apple Happy” and “Super Sauce” make the exact same product. Their raw ingredients (apples, sugar, cinnamon) come from the same farms and processors. Apple Happy carries “A” certification. Super Sauce carries “B” certification. In the grocery store, both jars of apple sauce look exactly the same – with a full color label on the front panel. However: Certification “A” has a very low labeling requirement for multi-ingredient products. Certification B’s requirements are much higher. Apple Happy only has to use certified sugar to qualify for full use of the label. Super Sauce has to have certified sugar AND apples. Which one would you rather buy?



Even though the products look the same in the store, Super Sauce is using a more transparent label – their Certification “B” means more.

### Food Justice Certified Requirements

The Agricultural Justice Project partners have developed the Food Justice Certified multi-ingredient labeling requirements to be as high as The Agricultural Justice Project believes is possible. They require that 95% of the dry weight of the product (meaning the weight without water content) is certified before full use of our label is granted. Anything short of 95% says “Made With” or is listed only in the ingredients panel.



<sup>1</sup> See student notes for vocabulary definition.

<sup>2</sup> Same as above.

<sup>3</sup> See student notes for information on organization.

<sup>4</sup> Same as above.

## Student Notes:

### Vocabulary:

- **Third-party certification** means that an independent organization has reviewed the manufacturing process of a product and has independently determined that the final product complies with specific standards for safety, quality or performance.
- **Fair Trade** is a set of business practices voluntarily adopted by the producers and buyers of agricultural commodities and hand-made crafts that are designed to advance many economic, social and environmental goals, including: Raising and stabilizing the incomes of small-scale farmers, farm workers, and artisans.
- **The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM)** was founded in 1972, we are the only international umbrella organization for the organic world, uniting a diverse range of stakeholders contributing to the organic vision.
- **International Labour Organization (ILO)**. Since 1919 the ILO brings together governments, employers and workers of 187 member States, to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all.

### References:

Food Justice Certification for Farmers. *Agricultural Justice Project*. Retrieved from [https://www.agriculturaljusticeproject.org/media/uploads/2017/03/15/2015.1.15.AJP\\_Introduction\\_to\\_Farmer\\_Practices\\_for\\_printing.pdf](https://www.agriculturaljusticeproject.org/media/uploads/2017/03/15/2015.1.15.AJP_Introduction_to_Farmer_Practices_for_printing.pdf)

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