

## ORGANIC CERTIFICATION

The following texts were compiled for the lesson [Exploring Organic Certification.](#)

### References:

Certified Organic: What Does it Mean? In CCOF Foundation (2020). Roadmap to Organic California: Policy Report: What is Organic?*California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF)*. Retrieved from <https://indd.adobe.com/view/c5491750-aa37-482f-9f78-8cdca37265e4>

“Organic Production and Handling Standards (n.d.).*USDA* . Retrieved from <https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/Organic%20Production-Handling%20Standards.pdf>

The Critical To-Do List for Organic Agriculture (2021). Swette Center for Sustainable Food Systems.*Arizona State University*. Retrieved from <https://sustainability-innovation.asu.edu/food/wp-content/uploads/sites/39/2021/06/Organic-Report-2021-2.pdf>

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## Organic Production and Handling Standards



### What is organic?

Organic is a labeling term that indicates that the food or other agricultural product has been produced and processed using approved methods. These methods integrate cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity. Synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, irradiation, and genetic engineering may not be used.

### Who is affected by the USDA organic regulations?

All products that are sold, labeled, or represented as organic must meet all requirements in the USDA organic regulations. Products must be certified organic by a USDA-accredited certifying agent. The USDA organic regulations ensure that organically labeled products meet consistent national standards.

*Exceptions.* Operations whose gross agricultural income from organic sales is less than \$5,000 do not need to be certified in order to sell, label, or represent their products as organic. These operations also do not need to prepare an organic systems plan. However, they must still comply with all other USDA organic regulations. Exempt operations may use the word "organic," but may not use the USDA organic seal on their products. Retail food establishments that sell organically produced agricultural products do not need to be certified.

### What are the USDA organic requirements?

The organic standards describe the specific requirements that must be verified by a USDA-

accredited certifying agent before products can be labeled organic. An overview of some of the crops, livestock, and handling standards are provided below. Please note that all organic operations must comply with all requirements in the USDA organic regulations.

#### Crop Standards

The organic crop production standards require that:

- Land must have had no prohibited substances applied to it for at least 3 years before the harvest of an organic crop.
- 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.
- 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.
- Operations must use organic seeds and other planting stock when available.
- The use of genetic engineering, ionizing radiation and sewage sludge is prohibited.

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# Organic Production and Handling Standards (continued)

## Livestock and Poultry Standards

Livestock and poultry standards apply to animals used for meat, milk, eggs, and other animal products sold, labeled, or represented as organic. Some requirements include:

- 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 must feed livestock agricultural feed products that are 100 percent organic, but they may also provide allowed vitamin and mineral supplements.
- Dairy animals must be managed organically for at least 12 months in order for milk or dairy products to be sold, labeled or represented as organic.
- Preventive management practices must be used to keep animals healthy. Producers may not withhold treatment from sick or injured animals. However, animals treated with a prohibited substance may not be sold as organic.
- Ruminants must be out on pasture for the entire grazing season, but for not less than 120 days. These animals must also receive at least 30 percent of their feed, or dry matter intake (DMI), from pasture.
- All organic livestock and poultry are required to have access to the outdoors year-round. Animals may only be temporarily confined due to documented environmental or health considerations.

- Organically raised animals must not be given hormones to promote growth or antibiotics for any reason.

## Handling Standards

The handling standards require:

- All non-agricultural ingredients, whether synthetic or non-synthetic, must be allowed according to the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances.
- In a multi-ingredient product labeled as "organic," all agricultural ingredients must be organically produced, unless the ingredient(s) is not commercially available in organic form and listed on Section 205.606.
- Handlers must prevent the commingling of organic with non-organic products and protect organic products from contact with prohibited substances.

## Labeling Multi-Ingredient Products

- Products sold, labeled, or represented as organic must have at least 95 percent certified organic content.
- Products sold, labeled, or represented as "made with" organic must have at least 70 percent certified organic content. The USDA organic seal may not be used on these products.
- Products containing less than 70 percent organic content may identify specific ingredients as organic in the ingredients list.



October 2002  
Updated November 2016

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National Organic Program  
[www.ams.usda.gov/nop](http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop)  
202-720-3252

# Certified Organic: What Does it Mean?

## What is Organic?

Organic is a holistic approach to farming that emphasizes healthy soils and communities as much as the bottom line. Organic farmers have developed innovative, science-based practices to grow food and fiber without synthetic pesticides or methods that degrade the environment. Organic certification is backed by federal law and every organic product is traceable from the farm to the grocery store.

CERTIFIED ORGANIC:  
WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

8

### ORGANIC



PROVIDES  
HIGHER LEVELS  
OF VITAMINS,  
NUTRIENTS, &  
ANTIOXIDANTS



RAISES ANIMALS  
WITH LOW STRESS  
& PREVENTATIVE  
HEALTH CARE  
PRACTICES



CONSERVES &  
PROTECTS  
WATER



ENHANCES  
ECOSYSTEM  
SERVICES



BUILDS  
HEALTHY  
SOILS



PROTECTS  
WILDLIFE, BEES,  
& BUTTERFLIES

### NOT ORGANIC

3,000+ ARTIFICIAL  
FLAVORS, COLORS, &  
PRESERVATIVES

GMOS

SYNTHETIC  
PESTICIDES &  
FERTILIZERS

MONOCULTURE

GRAIN-BASED DIETS

CONFINED ANIMALS

550+  
SYNTHETIC  
LIVESTOCK  
DRUGS

ANTIBIOTICS  
& HORMONES

Sources:

National Organic Program, 7 CFR §205.1–205.699 (2019).

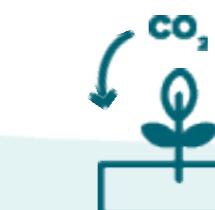
Organic Trade Association. (2019). National list of allowed and prohibited substances.

Organic builds healthy communities from the soil up to the economy.

ROADMAP TO AN  
ORGANIC CALIFORNIA

9

### Welcome to an Organic California!



Organic farming removes  
14 times more carbon  
from our atmosphere  
than non-organic farming.



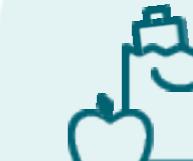
Organic food promotes  
patient health through  
higher levels of  
vitamins, minerals, and  
antioxidants.



Organic food in school  
gives kids the nutrients  
they need and protects  
the water they drink  
and the soils that grow  
their food.



Organic farms build  
healthy soils that  
conserve water and  
prevent pollution.



Organic farms are better  
prepared to supply food  
under a changing climate.



Organic farms reinvest  
dollars within the  
community by selling  
locally and creating jobs.



### Learn More About the Scientific Benefits of Organic

Learn more about the benefits of organic agriculture in the *Roadmap to an Organic California: Benefits Report*, a comprehensive review of hundreds of scientific studies about the impact of organic. Read the full *Benefits Report* at [www.ccof.org/roadmap](http://www.ccof.org/roadmap).

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### USDA National Organic Program – Key Regulatory Standards at a Glance

Land must be managed organically for three years prior to organic certification. Once this chemical-cleansing period has passed, a USDA-accredited third-party organization performs an on-site inspection to ensure that all NOP requirements are met. To maintain organic certification, annual inspection is required for all farms, ranches, and processing operations. USDA maintains a publicly available list of all certified operations on the NOP website.

#### **Key regulatory standards:**

- Prohibits use of almost all synthetic pesticides and fertilizers.
- Prohibits use of genetic engineering – including recombinant DNA and other technologies.
- Prohibits use of ionizing radiation and sewage sludge – which may contain heavy metals.
- Requires practices to build soil quality – such as adding animal or green manures and compost.
- Requires practices to conserve soil – such as cover cropping, mulching, and conservation tillage.
- Requires crop rotation – to help manage pests and disease, build soil organic matter, prevent soil erosion, and increase farm biodiversity.

#### Organic livestock systems

- Prohibits use of antibiotics and growth hormones.
- Requires access to pasture for ruminants during the grazing season.
- Requires use of organic feed – including all feed, pasture, forage, and plant-based bedding.
- Livestock must be raised organically for the last third of gestation – birds for poultry and egg production must be raised organically by the second day of life.
- Requires livestock vaccination – and other disease-preventative techniques.

#### Organic handlers

- Prohibits mixing of organic and conventional products along the supply chain.
- Requires organic pest management in facilities.
- Only allows non-organic ingredients and processing aids approved by the National Organic Standards Board.

#### Organic labels

- “100% Organic” – only organic ingredients (excluding water and salt).
- “Organic” – at least 95% organic ingredients.
- “Made with organic ingredients” – at least 70% organic.
- Listing in ingredients panel only – less than 70% organic.

For more information:

USDA National Organic Program,

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic>



# WHY

# 46

## RECOMMENDATIONS?

46 is a magic number only insofar as Joseph Biden is the 46th President of the United States. It is a fun contrivance. Honestly, we could easily double, maybe triple the number of recommendations but we thought it apropos to align our recommendations with the historic nature of this administration.

As you read through this document, please note that there is no hierarchy among the recommendations – whether a recommendation is listed as #4 or #24 is meaningless as they are not ordered in degree of importance nor ease of implementation. To the degree that there is organization, it is that we have tied most recommendations to the broad themes of our forthcoming report – health, economy, and climate.

The majority of these recommendations could be accomplished almost immediately, as the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has the power to carry out many of the needed actions we identify within existing statutory authority and, in many cases, within existing budgets. Some might refer to such recommendations as ‘low-hanging fruit.’ Other recommendations require new money, necessitating action by the appropriations and/or authorizing committees in Congress. Still others require passage of new law by Congress, and the timing for new legislative proposals is good, given that policymakers are introducing bills to seed ideas for the 2023 Farm Bill. Bottom line: with reasonable effort, these 46 recommendations are attainable in the near future.

**Some other numbers to keep in mind as you read through this report...**

**30**

30 years ago, Congress passed the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) as part of the 1990 Farm Bill. The law established strict national standards for organic food and a public-private enforcement program to ensure compliance with the law. In quick time, the US National Organic Program (NOP) became the model for the world and the US organic label its foremost ecolabel.

It is difficult to describe organic in a simple statement since organic production systems require a complex array of practices. USDA's organic rules and guidance documents total hundreds of pages. A citizen-led National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) is responsible for organic materials review and advising USDA on all aspects of organic production, processing, and labeling.

The organic industry has always faced an uphill battle in the policy arena. Early on, sluggish USDA regulatory efforts delayed the law from going into effect until 2002. Today, USDA regulatory delays continue to thwart industry success. Federal research investments in the sector are less than 2% of research spending,<sup>1</sup> and many USDA agencies have no organic agenda.

The organic industry faces a number of challenges including consumer confusion around what organic means, input and product shortages in organic supply chains, competition from new environmental labels, and the concern that some NOP rules are limiting further growth and innovation that has been achieved in other markets.

The opportunity to address these challenges is before us. While there has been some policy support for organic over the years, it has been meager and in no way commensurate with the sector's size nor sustainability contributions. The next 30 years should be marked by robust policy support for organic.

**82**

82% of Americans say they buy some organic food on a regular basis and sales are strong across every state of the nation. Overall, 6% of food sold in the US is organic.<sup>2</sup>

**61,900,000,000**

US organic sales totaled nearly \$62 billion in 2020.<sup>3</sup> This number includes food and non-food items such as clothing and personal care items. With few exceptions, organic sales have grown exponentially year over year since passage of the 1990 law, far exceeding growth in the food sector overall.

**57.5**

The average age of America's farmers and ranchers is 57.5 years old.<sup>4</sup> With more than a third of producers over the age of 65, the challenge to repopulate farms and ranches with young people is urgent. The good news is that organic is drawing young people into agriculture. 35% of organic producers are classified by USDA as beginning farmers compared to 27% of farmers overall.<sup>5</sup> And organic producers are more likely to farm fulltime, with 65% of organic farmers claiming farming as their primary occupation compared to 42% of farmers overall.<sup>5</sup>

The reality is that assisting the organic sector is a sound investment in the future of American agriculture.

**2,480,091,949**

This is the number of dollars known to be spent by Americans on imported organic products in 2020.<sup>6</sup> The reality is that much of this nearly \$2.5 billion worth of goods bought from other countries could be grown and processed here in the US, providing economic opportunities for our farmers and ranchers, food processors, and businesses of every size. And this is not a one-time thing – year after year, US organic imports are increasing; the US imported 10% more organic products in 2020 than in 2019<sup>6</sup>. We need to reverse this trend. In his first address to a joint session of Congress, President Biden emphasized the value of "Buy American," stating that "American tax dollars are going to be used to buy American products made in America to create American jobs. That's the way it's supposed to be, and it will be in this Administration."<sup>7</sup>

Demand for organic food continues to outstrip supply. Unfortunately, rather than home-grown organic, we are importing from other countries, eclipsing markets that could support our young and beginning farmers and the communities in which they live. This needs to change.