

THE **EDIBLE**
SCHOOLYARD
PROJECT

EXPLORING ORGANIC CERTIFICATION

Summary: In this lesson, students will read texts on organic certifications and conduct research on various standards of organic certifications. Students will review an infographic on Organic, answer questions, and engage with further readings.

Time: 45-60 minutes

Materials:

- [Infographic on Organic](#)
- Device to search the internet (optional if documents are printed out)

Teacher Notes:

- An optional part of this lesson utilizes a report prepared by the [California Certified Organic Farmers](#) (CCOF). The reading level of the brief might be a little advanced for a middle school audience. However, it's a good resource that might generate productive conversations. Instead of assigning the document as a reading, consider leading students through a conversation on the topics explored.
- The "READ" sections of this lesson plan can be used as talking points or a script to introduce activities. Please note, these sections simply provide brief introductions to the topics. We recommend using your experiences to add more information and context to the topics being covered.
- This lesson was developed for Edible Schoolyard Project's [Understanding Organic](#) curriculum and is part of the extension inquiries.



EXPLORING ORGANIC CERTIFICATION

READ: “Organic” can refer to both certified organic food and farming practices that are designed around protecting the environment. For foods to be certified organic, they must be produced in adherence to strict rules governing farming methods and materials used. In this lesson, you will learn about some of those regulations.

EXPLORE: Look over the information presented in the [Infographic on Organic](#) and answer the following questions.

1. List two things you found interesting
2. What phrases, ideas, and/or statistics drew your attention?
3. Discuss one of the quotes. What do you think the person meant in their quote? What does their quote make you think about?

READ: According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), “Organic is a labeling term that indicates that the food or other agricultural product has been produced through approved methods.” Organic is regulated and codified to standardize and preserve the meaning of the word—in other words, when you buy something certified organic, you can be sure that it was produced in a way that follows a very specific set of requirements.

Organic food and the “organic movement” existed long before the USDA created an official certified organic label though. The core principles and practices of organic agriculture have existed for millennia and have been practiced continuously by indigenous communities around the world. In recent decades, the “organic movement” has adopted many of those practices and built upon them. This spurred many states to develop their own frameworks and certifications. The term “organic” was only legally defined on a federal level in 1990 by the Organic Food Production Act. Now when you buy organic food, you know it adheres to the terms set out in the 1990 Organic Food Production Act.

DO AND ANSWER: Look at the [Infographic on Organic](#) again and find the information to the following questions:

- What are organic standards?
- Who develops the rules and regulations for organic?
- When was organic legally defined at the federal level?
- What are the different categories for organic labeling?

As a class, discuss your answers.



EXPLORING ORGANIC CERTIFICATION

DO: Work independently or with a group and spend some time reading about specific organic regulation. Each group will be assigned one page of the [Primary Texts on Organic Certification](#), which is five pages long. If there are more than five groupings of students, assign the same page of the readings to multiple groups. The page numbers are indicated at the bottom right of the page. Where it says “lesson: page_”

- Reading one: “Organic Production and Handling Standards,” page one.
- Reading two: “Organic Production and Handling Standards (continued),” page two.
- Reading three: “Certified Organic: What Does it Mean?,” page three.
- Reading four: “Why 46 Recommendations,” page four.
- Reading Five: “30,” page five.

DISCUSS: Share out what each group read with the class. Consider the questions on the [Says Who?](#) Chart.

READ: Organic certification can be costly, time-consuming, and labor intensive, because it involves close record keeping for 3 years of transition. Farmers must track and record their farming practices so that the USDA can review them and make sure they have been fully following organic guidelines for 3 years. Some farmers choose not to get certified organic, but they still utilize organic practices. However, without being certified according to federally regulated standards, it’s difficult for consumers to know for sure if their farmer is utilizing organic practices. If the farm is not certified organic, the only way to find out about the growing practices a farmer is using is for the consumer to inquire and learn more.

DISCUSS: Discuss or reflect on the questions below.

- Why is organic certification important?
- What does having a label of organic certification do for the farmer?
- What does it signal to the consumer?
- What are ways you can get to know your farmer and know their practices?

DO (OPTIONAL): Choose a section from “[Roadmap to Organic California: Benefits Report](#)” prepared by California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) and answer questions about the texts.

- Economic Benefits. Pages 10-17 of the report.
- Environmental Benefits. Pages 18-27 of the report.
- Social Benefits. Pages 28-35 of the report.

ANSWER (OPTIONAL):

- What is the section of the report about?
- What are some key facts, thoughts, and/or ideas you found interesting?
- What are some of the recommendations made in the report?

References:

CCOF Foundation (2020). Roadmap to Organic California: Benefits Report. *California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF)*. Retrieved from <https://indd.adobe.com/view/O8d24118-8d54-474d-8c2e-1f49328d429b>

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>

Ellsworth, J. (2001). *The History of Organic Food Regulation (2001 Third Year Paper)*. Digital Access to Scholarship at Harvard. Retrieved from <https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/8889458>

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