

What Do We Do?

- Accredit certifying agents, who certify organic producers and handlers
- Audit organic certifying agents to ensure they are properly implementing the USDA organic regulations
- Work with certifying agents to ensure organic integrity of more than 30,000 certified organic producers and handlers around the world
- Investigate complaints and enforce the USDA organic regulations when violations are identified
- Administer the USDA organic regulations (7 Code of Federal Regulations Part 205), developing and amending regulations and policies as needed
- Support the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), a Federal Advisory Committee
- Administer the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances, based on the NOSB's recommendations
- Establish and monitor organic trade agreements with representatives of foreign governments
- Oversee the Organic Certification Cost-Share Programs, which provide rebates to organic operations



The NOP Organic Insider
USDA National Organic Program

Become an Organic Insider

The NOP Organic Insider is an email update service that informs the organic community on a wide range of National Organic Program functions.

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What is Organic?



National Organic Program

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Organic integrity from farm to table, consumers trust the organic label.

What Is Organic?

Organic is a labeling term that indicates that the food or other agricultural product has been produced through 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.

How Are Organic Products Overseen?

The National Organic Program regulates all organic crops, livestock, and agricultural products certified to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) organic standards. USDA also conducts oversight of organic certification, compliance and enforcement activities, and product labeling. In order to sell, label, or represent their products as organic, operations must follow all of the specifications set out by the USDA organic regulations.

How Do I Know if My Food Is Organic?

Look at the label. If you see the USDA organic seal () the product is certified organic and has 95 percent or more organic content. For multi-ingredient products such as bread or soup, if the label claims that it is made with specified organic ingredients, you can be confident that those specific ingredients have been certified organic.

What About Other Labels?

Other voluntary labels for livestock products, e.g. meat and eggs, include:

Free-range. This label indicates that the flock was provided shelter in a building, room, or area with unlimited access to food, fresh water, and continuous access to the outdoors during their production cycle. The outdoor area may or may not be fenced and/or covered with netting-like material. This label is regulated by the USDA.

Cage-free. This label indicates that the flock was able to freely roam a building, room, or enclosed area with unlimited access to food and fresh water during their production cycle.

Natural. As required by USDA, meat, poultry, and egg products labeled as “natural” must be minimally processed and contain no artificial ingredients. However, the natural label does not include any standards regarding farm practices and only applies to processing of meat and egg products. There are no standards or regulations for the labeling of natural food products if they do not contain meat or eggs.

Grass-fed. Grass-fed animals receive a majority of their nutrients from grass throughout their life, while organic animals’ pasture diet may be supplemented with grain. Also USDA regulated, the grass-fed label does not limit the use of antibiotics, hormones, or pesticides. Meat products may be labeled as grass-fed organic.

Pasture-raised. Due to the number of variables involved in pasture-raised agricultural systems, the USDA has not developed a labeling policy for pasture-raised products.

Humane. Multiple labeling programs make claims that animals were treated humanely during the production cycle, but the verification of these claims varies widely. These labeling programs are not regulated.

Protecting Organic Integrity

30,000 on-site inspections per year by certifying agents to monitor compliance with USDA organic standards

Certifying agent audits to ensure appropriate monitoring

Residue testing program to verify that prohibited pesticides aren’t being applied to organic crops

Robust compliance and enforcement activities

Issue-based investigations (e.g. country- or commodity-specific)



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September, 2011