



OEFFA Organic Certification Fact Sheet

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Organic Labeling An Introduction for Retailers

What does “organic” mean?

Any product labeled as “certified organic” must be produced on a farm or processing facility that goes through an annual certification process to verify that their practices comply with the USDA’s National Organic Program (NOP) standards. This rigorous process promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity. Organic producers are prohibited from using genetically engineered seed or feed, sewage sludge, or ionizing radiation. Additionally, most synthetic substances, including chemicals and pesticides, are prohibited from use in production. Organic livestock must have access to the outdoors and may not receive growth hormones or antibiotics.

Understanding the labels

- A product with a label of “**100% organic**” means that it contains only 100% organic ingredients, excluding salt and water.
- A product labeled “**organic**” consists of at least 95% organically produced raw or agricultural products, excluding salt and water.
- A product labeled “**made with organic [specific ingredients]**” must consist of at least 70% organically produced ingredients. These specific ingredients must be identified on the information panel.
- If any of the above label claims are made, the product must have the name of the organic certifier on the label.
- Terms such as “pesticide free,” “sustainably grown,” “chemical free,” and “naturally raised” can be used without violating NOP rules. However, these claims are not subject to 3rd party verification in the same way as the term “organic.”

Your responsibilities as a retailer

- Ensure that only certified organic products are under the organic banner. Always verify the organic status of a product by requiring the vendor to show their current certificate from an accredited agency.
- Ensure that there is space between organic products and all other products in both retail display areas and in storage. Organic standards stress limiting the chance of comingling, which means that unpackaged organic and non-organic products cannot touch.
- Ensure that containers that have been used to hold unpackaged non-organic products are washed with soap or sanitizer approved for use in organic production and are rinsed thoroughly prior to being used to hold more unpackaged organic products. You can find information on approved cleaners on the Organic Materials Review Institute’s (OMRI) website.

This is an example of an organic shelf sign developed for the “Oh So Fresh” marketing campaign. It may only be used to identify certified organic produce and may not be applied directly to the product.



Resources

USDA NOP website:
<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMsv1.0/nop>
OEFFA’s website:
<http://www.oeffa.org/certification.php>
Organic Materials Review Institute
<http://www.omri.org>