



Navigating the Maze of Organic Foods

Sherri Cirignano, MS, RD, LDN

June 2009

Objectives

- Become familiar with the history of the National Organic Program (NOP)
- Verbalize various definitions related to organic foods
- Understand labeling and regulations of USDA organic foods
- Understand current research about organic foods



History of Organic Foods

- Organic Foods Protection Act of 1990
 - Part of the Farm Bill in 1990
 - Prior to 1990, many farm and processor certification programs
 - Not standardized
 - Led to consumer confusion
 - Sought to regulate organic food industry
 - Decrease confusion
 - Protect the consumer

History of Organic Foods

- National Organic Standards Board
 - Members appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture
 - Make recommendations to the National Organic Program
 - Determined allowable substances
 - Assisted in the development of standards
 - Advise the Secretary of Agriculture
 - Final organic rule went into effect in October 2002

History of Organic Foods

International

- The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC)
1991
 - Joint Food Standards Programme
 - Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) / World Health Organization (WHO)
 - Developed guidelines for organically produced food
www.ftp.fao.org / HEN DPG, 2006
- USDA Recognition
 - NOP has recognition agreements with Denmark, India, Israel, New Zealand, UK, British Columbia and Quebec

History of Organic Foods

- European Union Regulations
 - Vegetables in 1991
 - Animal products added in 1999
 - New rule to include mandatory use of the EU logo after July 1st, 2010
 - For products with 95% or more organic ingredients
 - Can be used on imported items

Organic-europe.net



Definitions

Organic: a chemical substance that contains carbon

- A system of farming that maintains and replenishes soil fertility

Organic Trade Association – www.ota.com

- A labeling term that refers to products produced under the authority of the Organic Foods Production Act
- Organic foods:
 - Minimally processed without most synthetic and petroleum-based pesticides & fertilizers, growth hormones, antibiotics, genetic engineering, ionizing radiation, and sewage sludge
 - No prohibited substances on the land for 3 years
 - Animals fed 100% organic feed
 - Animals must have access to outside

www.ift.org/USDA

Definitions

- Conventional

- Agricultural production that may use synthetic chemicals

Organic Trade Association – www.ota.com

- Sustainable

- Capable of being maintained long term and meeting needs of today without compromising the future

J Am Diet Assoc. 2007;107:1033-1043.

Fair trade

- A market-based model of international trade that benefits the growers

www.fairtrade.net

Rainforest Alliance

- Promotes tropical conservation

Environmental Nutrition, Dec 2008

Unregulated Definitions

- Natural
 - A product that is minimally processed, has no artificial ingredients, or added color
- Antibiotic-Free (banned language)
 - Can claim “no antibiotics administered” or “raised without antibiotics”
- Free Range
 - Allowed for poultry with access to the outdoors
- Hormone-Free
 - Meats can be labeled “no hormones administered”
 - No definition for any other product

www.fsis.usda.gov

Organic Labeling

- 100% organic
 - Must contain only organically produced ingredients
 - Can use the seal
- Organic
 - Must contain at least 95% organically produced ingredients
 - Can use the seal
- Made with organic ingredients
 - Must contain at least 70% organic ingredients
 - Cannot use the seal



What are ‘organically produced ingredients’?

Produced and handled *without* the use of:

- Synthetic substances or ingredients
- Non-synthetic substances
- Nonagricultural or non-organic agricultural substances (examples: enzymes or beet juice extract color)
- Other excluded methods, except for vaccines
- Ionizing radiation
- Sewage sludge

Who produces organic foods?

- Only **certified** operations may produce foods to be labeled as organic
- Certification process:
 - Complete application
 - Develop an organic system plan
 - Inspected by qualified inspector annually
- Exception:
 - Operations that sell less than \$5,000 a year of organic products

Organic Food Buying Tips

- Read food labels carefully
- Don't confuse foods labeled "natural" with organic food
- Try to buy and use fresh fruits and vegetables in season to ensure the highest quality
- Wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly to reduce dirt, bacteria and pesticide residues
- Support Buy Local programs in your area
 - Community Supported Agriculture
 - Farmer's Markets and Farm Stands
 - Encourage farm to school programs and community gardens

Endnotes

- “Organic” is a process claim, not a product claim

Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition;2006

- It is more important to eat whole plant foods, regardless of how they are produced, than to buy organic
- Watch for future studies on the benefits of organic foods

For More Information

- www.ams.usda.gov/nop
- njaes.rutgers.edu
- www.eatright.org
- www.aicr.org



Navigating the Maze of Organic Foods

Sherri Cirignano, MS, RD, LDN

Family and Community Health Sciences

Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Warren County

cirignano@njaes.rutgers.edu