

California Seed Association Fact Sheet Series



Background

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What does it mean to be Certified Organic?

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Organic food and seed is produced without most conventional pesticides, fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients or sewage sludge, bioengineering or ionizing radiation.

All producers and handlers must be certified by a USDA-accredited certifying agent to sell, label, or represent their products as "100 percent organic," "organic," or made with specific organic ingredients.

Before a product can be labeled "organic," a government-approved certifier inspects the farm where the food or seed is grown to make sure the farmer is following all the rules necessary to meet USDA organic standards. Companies that handle or process organic food before it gets to your local supermarket or restaurant must be certified, too.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has put in place a set of national production standards that food and seed labeled "organic" must follow, whether it is grown in the United States or imported from other countries. Since October 21, 2002, food and seed labeled "organic," has been certified to have been produced using the highest organic production and handling standards in the world, according to the National Organic Program (NOP).

Look for the seal: The USDA Organic seal tells you that a product is at least 95 percent organic.

More Information

National Organic Standards (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/NOP>)

California Crop Improvement Association (<http://ccia.ucdavis.edu>)

