



OREGON TILTH CONSUMER & LABELING FAQ

What is organic?

Organic refers not only to the food itself, but also to how it is produced and processed. Organic food production is based on a system of farming that mimics natural ecosystems and maintains and replenishes the fertility and nutrients of the soil. Organic Production integrates cultural, biological and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance and conserve biodiversity. Organic foods are produced without the use of genetically modified organisms and irradiation. Processed organic foods are handled carefully to maintain the integrity of organic ingredients going into the products.

What does certification mean?

“Certified” means that the food, feed or fiber has been grown and handled according to strict organic standards which are enforced by independent third-party state or private organizations. Certification includes inspections of farm fields, livestock and processing facilities, detailed record keeping and periodic testing of soil, water and produce to ensure that growers and processors are meeting the standards of the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) or other third party standards.

What is the difference between Oregon Tilth membership and certification?

Membership is granted to any person who supports and endorses the mission of Oregon Tilth, Inc. and who contributes annual dues to the organization. Members support the mission of Oregon Tilth, but are not necessarily certified organic operators.

Certification is granted to those individuals or companies who have submitted an organic plan, had an annual inspection and who meet the requirements of set forth in the OTCO Standards and Procedures Manual. Although many certified operators are active members of Oregon Tilth, membership is not required for OTCO certification.



I see a lot of organic produce that comes from outside the US. Is it certified to the same standard as organic produce that's grown in the US?

Yes, products that are sold as certified organic in the US, regardless of what country they originate from, are certified to the USDA National Organic Program standard. This means that they are inspected annually, are subject to unannounced inspections and must respond to non-compliances in a timely manner, just like US-based farms and processors.

How are Oregon Tilth's Standards Different than the USDA organic Standards?

Prior to 2002, organic certifiers each had their own standards that they used when certifying organic produce and products. The standards were similar, but they were each different and were owned by the certifier. In 2002 the USDA National Organic Program took effect, and the NOP Final Rule became the one standard used for certifying organic products in the US. Since that time, when you pick up a product labeled organic you know that it was certified to the same standard as all other organic products, regardless of who certified it.



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What exactly are GMO's?

GMO stands for genetically modified organism, which is a plant or animal that has been modified on the genetic level to include genetic material from organisms that would not mix in nature. This is different than cross breeding and grafting, which are techniques that involve closely related species. Biotechnology companies tout the benefits of GMO crops and livestock, but some scientists have significant concerns about the future ramifications of this technology. When the USDA National Organic Program standards were being written, public comments were overwhelmingly against the allowance of GMOs. The USDA took note and the standards strictly prohibit the use of GMO crops and livestock in organic production. So when you purchase organic products, you know that this new and questionable technology was not used at any stage of production.

Do organic animals have access to the outdoors?

It is required that organic livestock be provided with access to the outdoors. When a farm seeks certification with Oregon Tilth they submit a plan that documents the practices and procedures that they use. For livestock operations, this includes the living conditions of the animals and their access to the outdoors, number of animals per square foot (or acre for larger animals), etc. Oregon Tilth reviews this plan and determines if it is adequate. If we feel it is inadequate we will require the operator to make changes to the plan. We verify that the operator is adhering to their approved organic management plan through scheduled and, when necessary, unannounced inspections.

Are organic chickens the same as free range chickens?

Organic and free range mean different things. Free range means the poultry has access to the outdoors, but there is no requirement regarding feed or health care practices and third-party certification is not required. Organic poultry is also given access to the outdoors, plus they are required to be fed organic feed and the use of hormones and antibiotics are prohibited. The organic management of the animals is verified by a third-party certifier, such as Oregon Tilth.