

# **ORGANIC FOOD LABELING**

## **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)**

### **National Organic Program (NOP) Updates**

The first national standards for organic food labeling went into effect on October 21, 2002. The standards specify growing and production requirements for organic farmers, and require farms to be inspected by licensed agencies. Any farm marketing products as organic must be certified by a USDA NOP accredited organization.

#### **What is classified as an organic product?**

- \$ Products that come from farms which have been free from pesticide and chemical use for at least three years.
- \$ Meat, poultry and eggs which come from animals which have not been given antibiotics or growth hormones.

#### **Do all farms have to be certified?**

- \$ Farms generating less than \$5000 are exempt from certification. They may label products as organic if they are following NOP production standards and labeling requirements, but if they want to label items as certified organic, they must go through NOP audit for certification.

#### **How do the standards effect labeling?**

- \$ If the product is 100% organic it can display the USDA organic seal or read **100% organic**.
- \$ If the product is 95% organic it can display the USDA organic seal.
- \$ If the product is 70% organic it can list organic ingredients on the front of the package.
- \$ If the product is less than 70% organic it can only list organic ingredients and they must be on the side of the package.

#### **What does this mean for retail food establishments (RFEs)?**

- \$ RFEs will not be penalized unless they are knowingly selling and/or labeling non-compliant products as organic (i.e. if they are also involved in the production).
- \$ Bulk containers may display the same information as shown on the original label, but only if the item is not mixed with other products.
- \$ The USDA seal and logo may be used by RFEs for labeling bulk products that were prepared in certified facilities.
- \$ If not all of the ingredients in a product are organic, an RFE cannot label the entire product as organic, only the specific ingredients (e.g. **Made with organic carrots**).
- \$ RFEs may choose to use the general term organic for bulk containers to avoid confusion.

#### **Where to find more information:**

USDA National Organic Program

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop>

List of accredited certifying agents

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/CertifyingAgents/Accredited.html>

Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (certification agency)

<http://www.oeffa.org>