

What's so
special about
“Organic”?



History of “Organic”

- Carbon-based life forms?
- 1970s-1980s – spectrum of definitions, problems with fraud, inconsistency between various certifying agents
- In 1990, federal government passed the Organic Food Production Act (OFPA) & created the National Organic Program (NOP). National Organic Standards Board established.
- In 2000, USDA unveiled detailed regulations to implement OFPA, effective October 2002.
- Access to Pasture rule effective June 17, 2010



What is “Organic” ??

- "Organic agriculture is an ecological production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity. It is based on minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain and enhance ecological harmony."

(excerpted from the definition of "organic" that the National Organic Standards Board adopted in April 1995)

- More a description of the methods used than the food itself.
- Use of term “organic” now regulated
- Doesn't really address food safety and nutrition



Implementing Uniform “Organic” Standards

- Small producers (<\$5000/yr) may choose “registration”
- Larger producers choose “certification”
- Certification required for businesses that repackage or alter products or process foods.



What does it take to be “Organic”

- Need Organic System Plan
 - No pesticides on land for 3 years prior
 - Use organic seeds & plants
 - Keep records of every application & activity
 - Harvest audit trail
 - Livestock dry matter calcs & living conditions
- Comply with National List of Allowed & Prohibited Substances
- Certified by 3rd Party Accreditation \$\$\$
- Subject to inspection
- Same for international producers



Why go through the certification process?

- They're doing it anyway - can help cover higher production costs.
- Organic component of market growing faster than conventional
 - In 2009, organic food sales grew 5.1% vs conventional food sales (1.6%)
 - 2000 to 2008 growth rates ranged from 16-21% vs conventional 1-5.5%



Trends

- 20% of organic farms nationally are in California
- Nationally, 44% sold within 100 miles of the farm, 30% sold within 500 miles
- 54% of organic foods are sold through mass markets (grocers & club stores)
 - Only 2% via Farmers Markets
 - “Health Food” stores dropped from 47% in 2006 to 38% in 2009
- Organic non-food (clothing, household cleaners, pet food) growing at 20-40% annually
- Finding shortages of available land



Local Certified Organic Producers

- Trinity County
 - Weaver Creek Produce
 - Strawhouse Coffee
- Humboldt County
 - Willow Creek Farms
- Shasta County
 - Redwood Seeds
- Flying Blue Dog Nursery?
- Luna Farms?



National List of Allowed & Prohibited Substances

- Most natural or nonsynthetic materials can be assumed to be acceptable in organic production
- Some synthetic materials are allowed in organic crop production, ie sulfur, insecticidal soap
- Some natural or nonsynthetic materials are prohibited, ie ash from manure burning, nicotine sulfate, etc.
- Confusing federal regulation (see link)
- Look for Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) symbol



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So how do you garden “organically”?

- Focus on soil health
 - Use organic fertilizers
 - Follow composting rules for manure and plant waste
 - Cover crop
- Use approved propagation methods
 - organic seeds
 - organic potting mix (bought or your own)
- Follow integrated pest management
 - Use OMRI certified pesticides



More Information

- National Organic Program www.ams.usda.gov/nop/
- California Certified Organic Farmers www.ccof.org/
- California Department of Agriculture Organic Program www.cdfa.ca.gov/is/i & [c/organic.html](http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/is/c/organic.html)
- National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service
-long list of organic publications
<http://attra.ncat.org/organic.html>
- Organic Trade Association
www.ota.com and www.howtogoorganic.com

