

The Ins and Outs of Organic Food Labeling

Analysis by [Dr. Joseph Mercola](#)

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › The top reason people choose organic foods is to avoid pesticides, yet the myriad of regulations makes it difficult to know exactly what you are eating, especially when it comes to chicken, eggs and dairy
- › The U.S. Department of Agriculture describes four categories of organic foods: those that are 100% organic, 95% organic, 70% organic and those that have some organic ingredients
- › When reading meat product labels, you must know the difference between free-range, cage-free, pasture-raised, grass fed and organic. They may sound similar, but they have very different meanings
- › If you're familiar with the problems associated with conventional pasteurized milk, you may have started buying organic milk instead. However, manufacturers can use loopholes to add ingredients to grocery store milk. If you want to drink milk, consider using these sources to find raw, grass fed milk
- › Organic produce can be coated with Apeel, a chemical used to extend shelf life and disrupts the human and animal gut microbiome. The Apeel founder is entrenched in the World Economic Forum (WEF) and started with a \$100,000 grant from the Gates Foundation

There are many benefits to buying and consuming organic foods. For some people, the primary reason is the inhumane treatment animals experience from the moment they

are born to the minute they die. Cows, chickens, pigs, sheep and other animals can feel pain and experience strong emotions and yet they are treated as inanimate objects.

The unspeakable treatment these animals endure is one tactic used by globalists to push everyone, except maybe themselves, to eat bugs and lab-grown or 3-D-printed meat and other foodstuffs. But for most people, the principal reason for buying organic food is to avoid pesticides, antibiotics, hormones and genetically engineered ingredients.

According to a 2017 survey¹ by Natural Grocers, over 90% of respondents said the main reason was to avoid pesticides and 70% said they did it to avoid genetically modified organisms (GMOs). While organically produced meat and produce are more nutritious, just 40% of Natural Grocers customers choose organic produce because they think it's more nutritious.

The USDA has a 2024 operating budget of \$24.46 billion. Inside this bureaucratic mountain of red tape and oversight exists the Agricultural Marketing Service, which administers domestic and international opportunities for farmers and ranchers. And inside that arm is the National Organic Program (NOP) that "develops then enforces national standards for organically produced agricultural products sold within the United States."²

Despite rising consumer interest in purchasing organic products, the NOP's operating budget to regulate the meat and produce organic market is \$24 million, as compared to the \$35 million allocated to the Packers and Stockyards program that regulates livestock, meat and poultry.

What Does 'Organic' Really Mean?

As Tenpenny notes, the organic labels on your meat and produce might not mean what you think they mean. According to information from the USDA, there are four USDA organic labels, and each has a different meaning.³

- **100% Organic** — Food that qualifies as 100% organic must be made with 100% certified organic ingredients and may use the USDA organic seal or the 100% organic claim.
- **Organic** — The term organic identifies a product or ingredients that must be certified organic except where non-organic ingredients are allowed that are specified on the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances. These must constitute no more than 5% of the combined total ingredients. An organic certification means that 95% is certified organic.
- **"Made with" organic ingredients** — Products must have at least 70% of the product made with certified organic ingredients. The organic seal cannot be used, and the final product cannot be represented as organic.
- **Specific organic ingredients** — Multi-ingredient products that have less than 70% certified organic content cannot display the organic seal or use the word "organic." However, they can list certified organic ingredients on the ingredient list.

To obtain the organic seal, a farmer must have an organic systems plan that outlines how the farm operation satisfies the NOP requirements. This requires organic farmers to have a working knowledge of the multiple rules and regulations that encompass hundreds, if not over 1,000 pages. As Tenpenny notes,⁴ it can be an onerous task to keep track of the updates, including those that regulate where and how organic labels can be used.

How to Read Labels on Meat

The labeling process for meat products may be the most complex. The organic regulations prohibit labeling of any product that's been contaminated with residue of GMO or bioengineered ingredients, pesticides, hormones and antibiotics. Regulations do not allow for any residue level to be able to use the organic seal.

The USDA regulations say that inspectors look at every component of the farm operation to trace products from start to finish, including seed sources, soil, water

systems, contamination and co-mingling risks.⁵ This includes what livestock are fed, but does not describe where they are fed.

Let's talk chickens. To be designated organic, chickens must be raised organically no more than two days after they hatch. Their food must be certified grown organically without pesticides or synthetic fertilizers.⁶

This is what they're fed but not how they live. Designation as free-range or cage-free describes how they live but not whether they're organically raised. Tenpenny notes that free-range is a marketing term that just means the bird has unlimited access to food, water and some outdoor access for at least 51% of their life.

Cage-free means they can roam in a building or an enclosed area with unlimited access to food and fresh water in overcrowded conditions. However, the definition of outdoor space is not defined, and cage-free hens typically do not have access to being outside.

The designations in the beef industry may be just as deceptive.⁷ Grass fed describes what the animal eats, but pasture-fed tells you where they ate it. Organic beef means that the cow eats organic feed and is not given antibiotics or hormones. This means that "grass fed" or "pasture-fed" beef may not be eating organic feed. To make this more complicated, pasture-raised and grass fed designations do not include whether the animal received hormones or antibiotics.

In the beef industry, the pasture-raised designation means that the animal had access to being outside for at least 120 days during the year. However, the outdoor designation can include living in a field or being outside in a small pen.

The pork industry has slightly more stringent regulations for USDA-certified organic designation.⁸ Pigs must be raised organically beginning in the last third of the sow's gestation, not have antibiotics and growth hormone stimulants and must be processed by a USDA-certified organic processing plant. Additionally, organic pigs must have access to direct sunlight, exercise areas, fresh air and shade.

They must have clean dry bedding, and bedding using crop residue must be from organic crops. Additionally, their diet must be produced organically without any animal by-products, hormones or antibiotics. However, pigs are allowed to receive vaccinations, and according to a 2021 paper,⁹ the vaccination program begins at three to six weeks of age and continues through adulthood.

What Makes Eggs Organic and Humane

As Tenpenny points out, labeling should be transparent, but the food industry has made it mostly about marketing.¹⁰ Labels you might find on eggs include organic, free-range, cage-free and vegetarian. As I've written before, conventionally raised eggs are not the most nutritional or ethical available, and since they are an [important part of a healthy diet](#), it's a good thing to buy quality eggs.

Conventionally raised birds are typically loaded with antibiotics and hormones and fed poor-quality feed. The hens live in spaces the size of a sheet of paper and the vast majority are confined in battery cages.¹¹ These animals are likely the most intensively confined animals, unable to spread their wings or exhibit any typical behavior. This is what the labels on eggs mean:¹²

- **Free-range** — Free-range eggs do not need to be organic, since they don't need to be fed organic feed. The term free-range identifies chickens who have limited access to the outdoors.
- **Organic** — Eggs that are labeled organic must be free-range and must be raised on organic free of animal by-products but not necessarily bugs and worms, which is their natural diet. The birds must not receive hormones or antibiotics.
- **Other labels** — Eggs can also be labeled all-natural, antibiotic-free or vegetarian. There are no strict rules about these labels so it's up to the farmer to set the standards.

Organic eggs are typically the most expensive eggs at the grocery, but the added nutrition is worth it. The USDA-certified organic label means the eggs were sourced

from farmers who follow strict standards.

Ashley Armstrong, cofounder of Angel Acres Egg Co., and I are working to overturn the conventional food system, starting with eggs. Angel Acres Egg Co. specializes in the production of low-PUFA (polyunsaturated fat) eggs. We [discussed the importance of low-PUFA eggs in a recent interview](#), embedded below for your convenience.

They ship low-PUFA eggs to all 50 states – but there is currently a [waiting list](#) as she slowly increases the number of chickens within the network to fulfill the demand. More egg boxes will be available this spring, so [join the waitlist for low PUFA egg boxes here](#).

Organic Dairy

If you're familiar with the problems associated with conventional pasteurized milk, you may have started buying [organic milk instead](#). Some milk brands on the shelf boast being DHA enriched, which a Washington Post article notes¹³ is accomplished by adding DHA omega-3 oil produced by corn syrup-fed algae.

If you want to drink milk, consider switching to raw, grass fed milk if you can get it. [RealMilk.com](#) has a list of raw dairy farms in your area. The Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund¹⁴ also provides a state-by-state review of raw milk laws.

Look for the [AGA grass fed certification](#) and search their website for AGA-approved producers that adhere to strict standards, including the cows being raised on a diet of 100% forage, never confined to a feedlot, never treated with antibiotics or hormones and born and raised on American family farms.

Organic Produce Can Be Coated in Apeel

Produce can only be labeled organic when it's been grown in soil that has not had any prohibited chemicals applied for three years before the first harvest. Pesticides also cannot be applied directly to organic produce, with the exception of Apeel.¹⁵ Apeel is a

chemical that's been used on produce since 1996 to extend shelf life, but it also disrupts the human and animal gut microbiome.

The technology began with a \$100,000 Grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.¹⁶ Other investors have included the Rockefeller Foundation,¹⁷ the World Bank Group and Anne Wojcicki, co-founder and CEO of the personal genomics company 23andMe.

Apeel Sciences founder, James Rogers, Ph.D., is an agenda contributor to the World Economic Forum (WEF)¹⁸ and a Young Global Leader. Among the articles he has written for the WEF is one in which he hailed COVID lockdowns as a model for future action on climate change.¹⁹ In other words, climate lockdowns.

I'm not the only one questioning the motives behind this product. "Is [Apeel] another Gates/WEF plot to destroy our health? Or a distraction from worse plots?" asked Alexis Baden-Mayer, political director at the Organic Consumers Association (OCA).²⁰ Apeel appears to have slipped through some loophole at the USDA.

Here's How to Break the Produce Label Code

So, how do you identify the fruits and vegetables you want to eat? Produce has a PLU label, which stands for price look-up. These are standardized codes used across the industry to manage the supply chain. There are more than 1,400 PLU codes assigned to a variety of produce, which you can use to help identify if the produce is organic or conventionally grown.

These codes are four or five digits long and any codes with more than five digits are not part of the standardized system. The next time you're at the grocery store, spend a minute or two looking at the food labels in the produce department to identify produce that's genetically modified, bioengineered or designated organic. Tenpenny lists the codes on produce you may want to consider:²¹

- A four-digit code starting with the number 3 or 4 (3000 or 4000 series) is used for conventionally grown produce. This means synthetic fertilizers, chemicals and/or

pesticides might have been used during the growth of the produce.

- A five-digit code starting with the number 3 identifies fruits and vegetables that have been irradiated or electronically pasteurized.
- A five-digit code starting with the number 6 identifies pre-cut fruits and vegetables.
- A five-digit code starting with the number 8 is designated for fruits and vegetables that have been genetically modified or bioengineered.
- A five-digit code starting with the number 9 is designated for organic fruits and vegetables.

Sources and References

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