

Fresh Facts for Industry: Organics

The principles of organic agriculture are to produce food using production methods that emphasize the use of renewable resources and the conservation of soil and water to enhance environmental quality for future generations. The intent is to promote and enhance agro-ecosystem health through encouraging agricultural production systems to manage their resources cyclically and to maintain soil fertility in the long term while minimizing external inputs and avoiding the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers.

Why is it important?

The Canadian General Standards Board and Organic sector have developed a national standard for organic production systems. The Canadian Organic Standard outlines the approved production processes and permitted substances for organic production and processing in Canada. These standards are referred to in the *Organic Product Regulations, 2009* (OPR 2009) and are available at the following link: <http://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/ongc-cgsb/programme-program/normes-standards/internet/bio-org/principes-principles-eng.html>

A national organic standard for organic agriculture in Canada provides a consistent framework for organic producers to use to assist with growing and marketing their products. Having clear and consistent methodologies reduces confusion and increases the national credibility of organic production systems.

On June 17, 2009, the Government of Canada entered into an agreement on the trade of organic products with the United States, and there are now several equivalence agreements with other countries. For more information please visit the following link: <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/food/organic-products/equivalence-arrangements/eng/1311987562418/1311987760268>

The **Canadian Organic Office of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency** is responsible for the administration and enforcement of the organic regulations.

The ***Organic Products Regulations*** provide a system that allows the **Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA)** to regulate the certification and marketing of organic products, both imported and domestic, by defining specific requirements for organic products to be labelled as organic or that bear the organic agricultural product legend (logo).

The **Canada Organic Regime** was developed to:

- Protect consumers against misleading or deceptive labelling practices;
- Reduce consumer confusion about the definition of organic;
- Facilitate the access of Canadian organic products to foreign markets that require regulatory oversight; and
- Support further development of the domestic market.

Under the Regime, Certification Bodies are accredited based on the recommendation of CFIA designated **Conformity Verification Bodies**. The **Certification Bodies** are responsible for verifying the application of the **Canadian Organic Standards**.

Provinces that have regulations concerning organic produce may have additional labelling requirements. In many cases, retail stores have an organic fresh produce section so that consumers who wish to purchase organic fresh produce can do so easily.

An effective and supportive organic framework provides opportunities for farmers, wholesalers and retailers to provide consumers with certified organic fresh produce. It increases credibility, decreases confusion and enhances market opportunities.

What you need to know

Organically grown and conventionally grown fresh fruits and vegetables are equally safe and nutritious. Fresh fruits and vegetables produced by each growing method still must comply with all of the food safety and nutritional laws of Canada. This applies to both imported and domestic produce.

When not handled properly, any produce item, regardless of how it's grown, can become contaminated by microbes and potentially make someone sick. So far, studies have not found conclusive evidence that the likelihood of microbial contamination is associated with use of conventional or organic production methods (Agence Française de Sécurité Sanitaire des Aliments, 2003 and Food Standards Agency, 2000).

Many people are not aware that organic production methods can include the use of fertilizers and pesticides. Organic production systems use approved, registered botanical pesticides, such as pyrethrum. Pyrethrum is an insecticide which originates from Chrysanthemum flowers. Fertilizers, (usually referred to as soil amendments) range from composted organic manure to non-synthetic amino acids to calcium sulphate.

There has been much discussion in the media concerning the taste and nutritive value of organic products versus conventional products. For fresh produce, in order to make valid taste comparisons between an organic product and its non-organic counterpart, all other variables (soil conditions, seed variety, degree of ripeness, length of storage, etc.) must be exactly the same. This can be very difficult if not impossible to achieve. Some studies find differences in the sensory properties (taste, texture, acceptability, etc.) of organic produce while others do not. In the end, it is up to individual perception and taste.

As with flavour, many factors influence the nutrient content of produce. The nutrient content of produce can vary due to plant variety, growing conditions, post-harvest distribution, storage and preparation methods. Extensive literature reviews by the **Food Standards Agency** in the United Kingdom and the **French Food Safety Agency** concluded that there is insufficient evidence to support the claim that organic food is more nutritious than conventionally produced foods. More comparative research that takes into account the multitude of variables that can influence nutrient content of conventional and organic produce needs to be done. It is the overall nutrient content and variety of the diet that are important to healthy eating and not the composition of individual foods.

Overall, increasing consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, whether organic or conventionally grown, is the most important factor for individual health.

CPMA Contact and Other Resources

For more information, please contact Sally Blackman at sblackman@cpma.ca or use the following resources.

- [Canadian Food Inspection Agency Organic Site](#)
- [Canadian Organic Regulations](#)
- [Québec Organic Reference Standards](#)
- [Canadian Organic Standard and Permitted Substances List](#)
- Bourn, D., Prescott, J. (2002). *A comparison of the nutritional value, sensory qualities, and food safety of organically and conventionally produced foods*. Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition, 42(1): 1-34.
- [CODEX Alimentarius](#) (2001). *Production, processing, labelling and marketing of organically produced foods*
- Newsome, R. (1990). *Organically grown foods: A scientific status summary by the Institute of Food Technologists expert panel on food safety and nutrition*. Food technology. 44(12), 123.
- Salunkhe, D.K., Bolin, H.R. and Reddy, N.R. (1991). *Storage, processing and nutritional quality of fruits and vegetables*, second edition, volume 1. CRC Press, Boston, MA.
- Williams, C.M. (2002). *Nutritional quality of organic food: shades of grey or shades of green?* Proceedings of the Nutrition Society, 61, 19-24.