

# Understanding “ORGANIC”

NJ Department of Environmental Protection  
Pesticide Control Program  
Pesticide Evaluation and Monitoring

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The National Organic Program (NOP) was established by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 1990 to regulate the labeling of organic products. In terms of food, “organic” simply means that the product or its ingredients were produced without routine inputs of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. An organic label does not necessarily indicate that a product is healthier or safer.

In 2007, the NJ Department of Agricultural (NJDA) earned USDA NOP Accreditation. The NJDA Certified Organic program has certified more than 60 organic farms representing over 2,350 acres of organic production. NJDA Certified Organic producers and handlers must follow the NOP guidelines for production and labeling of organic products.

It should be noted that any farm or processing operation that grows organic agriculture products must be certified by USDA-accredited certifying agents, **except** for operations whose gross income from organic sales totals \$5,000 or less. Even though these operations are exempt from certification, they are expected to be familiar with and follow the regulations for production, handling, labeling and record keeping.

## *NOP Label Guidelines for Organic Products*

### “100% Organic”

A product labeled as “100% organic” must contain ONLY organically produced ingredients and processing aids (except water and salt). These are usually single ingredient items such as fruit, vegetable, meat, milk and cheese products.



### “Organic”

A product labeled as “organic” must contain at least 95% organically produced ingredients (excluding water and salt).

“100% organic” and “organic” products can display the USDA Organic seal on the package. These products cannot be produced using excluded methods such as sewage sludge or ionizing radiation.

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### “Made with Organic Ingredients”

This labeling applies to processed products that contain at least 70% organic ingredients. Up to three of the organic ingredients or food groups can be listed. These products can not be produced using excluded methods. The USDA Organic seal cannot be used anywhere on the package.

### Processed Products with less than 70% Organic Ingredients

These products cannot use the term “organic” anywhere on the principal display panel. They may list specific organic ingredients on the information panel. The USDA Organic seal cannot be used anywhere of the package.

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Even if a producer is certified organic, the use of the USDA Organic seal is voluntary. An alternative way to identify organic produce is by the PLU (Price Look-Up) Code. The PLU Code is usually located on a small sticker found directly on the produce or the product packaging. PLU Codes are typically used at grocery stores and large retailers.



- A conventionally grown product carries a 4-digit code (conventionally grown melon: **4050**)
- An organic product carries a 5-digit code, starting with the number 9: (organic melon: **94050**)
- A genetically engineered product has a 5-digit code, starting with the number 8: (genetically engineered melon: **84050**)

For more information about the USDA NOP, visit [www.ams.usda.gov/nop](http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop)

For more information about NJDA Certified Organic, visit [www.state.nj.us/agriculture/divisions/md/prog/jerseyorganic](http://www.state.nj.us/agriculture/divisions/md/prog/jerseyorganic)

For more information about PLU Codes, visit [www.plucodes.com](http://www.plucodes.com)