

Organic Certification Q & A for Market Managers and Vendors

Since 2009 the Canadian government has overseen a mandatory regulation that guarantees the Canada Organic logo on a product means it has been grown and processed according to the Canadian Organic Standards. BC has had a voluntary provincial organic certification program in place since 1993 that uses the BC Certified Organic checkmark.

In both cases an accredited third party certifier audits organic producers and processors to ensure they are meeting the standards; making organic products the most regulated and inspected part of the Canadian food system.

What to look for:

- BC Certified Organic checkmark
- Canada Organic logo
- Check for a vendor's organic certificate
- Ask who a vendor's certification body is



1. How can I define certified organic at the market?

Organic certified means that **every year**, an accredited third-party body (a certifier) audits organic farmers, producers, and processors to ensure they are meeting the organic standards. The standards require an ecological approach to farming that includes growing food without toxic and persistent synthetic pesticides or fertilizers and not using GMOs, while building healthy soil, supporting ecosystem health and raising livestock under humane animal standards.

2. How are certified organic fruits and vegetables different than other locally grown produce?

Organic certification provides third-party assurance that fruit and vegetables:

- Are grown without toxic and persistent synthetic pesticides or fertilizers
- Are non-GMO (genetically modified organisms)

3. How are certified organic eggs, meat or dairy different?

Organic certification provides third-party assurance that eggs, meat and dairy are:

- Raised without synthetic growth hormones or routine antibiotics
- Raised under humane animal standards, including outdoor access
- Raised without GMO feed ingredients

4. Is “spray free” or “natural” the same as organic?

No. Statements such as “spray free” or “natural” are not supported by transparent production standards and are not overseen by a third-party to ensure compliance.

5. Why is organic more expensive?

Certified organic products may be more expensive than non-certified products because all of the products used in production from start to finish need to meet the organic standard, from on-farm cleaning products to compost sources to the wood used in fences. Also, organic farmers often rely on on labour more to manage pests, weeds, and build healthy soil. As a result, they often employ more people, and have higher labour costs.

6. Can I ask to see a vendor’s organic certificate?

Yes. Many farmers’ markets require vendors to keep these on file. If you are unsure if a vendor is organic you can ask to see their certificate.

7. Does anyone using the word “organic” need to be certified?

In 2015 the BC Ministry of Agriculture announced that they intend to move to a mandatory organic certification system that will require any food & beverage produced using the term “organic” to be third-party certified. **Mandatory organic certification will be fully implemented by fall 2018.**

8. Is there support for farmers wanting to get organic certification?

Yes. To assist with the transition to a mandatory organic regulation the BC Ministry of Agriculture is developing a number of business support, organic training, and marketing initiatives. Producers can find out more about organic certification through the Certified Organic Associations of BC: <http://www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/toolkits/grow-organic-food.php>

9. How can I learn more?

To learn more about BC’s move to mandatory organic certification:

www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/animals-and-crops/organic-food-and-beverages

For producers wanting to learn more about the organic certification process:

<http://www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/toolkits/grow-organic-food.php>

For consumers wanting to learn more about organic in BC: certifiedorganic.bc.ca/eatorganic

For consumers wanting to learn more about organic across Canada:

ThinkCanadaOrganic.ca