



ORGANIC FOOD

WHAT is organic food?

Organic food is grown, processed and packaged in ways to meet the Canadian Organic Standards,¹ which are based on the Principles of Organic Agriculture.^{2,3}

Principle of Health – Organic agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soil, plants, animals, humans and the planet as one and indivisible.

Principle of Ecology – Organic agriculture should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them, emulate them and help sustain them.

Principle of Fairness – Organic agriculture should build on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities.

Principle of Care – Organic agriculture should be managed in a precautionary and responsible manner to protect the health and well-being of current and future generations and the environment.

CANADIAN ORGANIC STANDARDS

Canada’s organic standards are among the most recognized in the world, and place strict limits on and, in some cases, prohibits the use of the following:



pesticides



synthetic fertilizers



the routine use of drugs, antibiotics or synthetic hormones



animal cloning



genetic engineering (often referred to as “GMOs”)



artificial food colours, flavours, sweeteners, preservatives and many other processing aids and ingredients in processed foods.⁴

HOW DO I KNOW IT’S ORGANIC?

Look for certification identification or the Canada Organic logo. Certified organic products have undergone a strict certification process to ensure they meet Canadian Organic Standards, which are regulated by Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).

For most non-organic farmers, it takes a minimum of 15 months and at least 36 months since the last use of prohibited substances to achieve organic certification. Organic farms are inspected annually to ensure they continue to meet the Organic Standards.



WHAT ABOUT IMPORTS?

When you buy imported food bearing the Canada Organic logo, you can be confident it meets the Canadian Organic standards. After careful examination, if the CFIA concludes another nation’s organic standards are comparable to ours, Canada may sign an equivalency arrangement. Products that meet equivalency requirements can receive the Canada Organic logo. Canada has equivalency arrangements with the US, EU, Japan, Switzerland and Costa Rica.

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Why does organic food cost more?

The costs of organic production are often high because organic farming practices are labour-intensive.⁵ Also, organic products are grown, processed, packaged and sold at smaller volumes than non-organic foods and often on smaller farms. As a result, economies of scale cannot be realized.

Organic livestock production, particularly, has higher costs than non-organic. Feed costs more, transportation costs are often greater because of the scarcity of organic abattoirs and dairies, and housing costs may be higher because organic livestock are raised at lower densities and must have access to the outdoors.

Consumers may pay more for organic food but much of that money stays in Canada's rural communities.



WHY DO PEOPLE BUY ORGANIC?

Many organic consumers associate organic food with a healthy and sustainable lifestyle⁶; 55% of Canadian consumers said their decision to buy organic was influenced by recommendations from a health professional.⁷

When comparing the nutritional differences between organic and non-organic food, the results of individual studies are often inconclusive. However meta-analyses compare the results of hundreds of individual studies. These show organic meat⁸ and milk⁹ contain approximately 50% more beneficial omega-3 fatty acids, and organic plant-based foods contain 18-69% higher concentrations of antioxidants.¹⁰

Many antioxidants are linked to lower rates of degenerative diseases and certain cancers. They can also result in more intense flavours and this may be why so many people say they prefer the taste of organic food.¹¹

Whether people choose organic food because they feel it's healthier or for the great taste, one thing is certain – the market is growing¹². In 2017, 66% of Canadian consumers bought organic products on a weekly basis.¹³

