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Sample Technical Definition

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What is organic food?

Food is classified as organic if it has been certified by the National Organic Program (NOP) to meet all the standards of the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA). This act was passed under title 21 of the 1990 Farm Bill by the United States Congress to ensure that foods labeled organic are produced through a system of agriculture that minimizes pollution to the environment, and optimizes health benefits of foods by using natural approaches to farming, and preventing the use of chemicals in food production.

How is organic food different from conventional (regular) food?

All food that has not been certified by the NOP as organic is conventional, or regular food. Many foods are labeled as *natural* or *all-natural*, but this label does not mean that the food has been certified as organic by the USDA. Also, if a food product meets all the standards of the OFPA, but has not been certified by the NOP, it is still not considered organic. The USDA organic label on foods is meant to show the consumer that all production and handling of a food product has been certified as organic.

What are the standards of the OFPA?

Only those food products that are free of chemicals, and do not use laboratory techniques or agricultural systems not found in nature meet the standards of the OFPA. The standards prohibit meat, poultry or dairy products from being labeled organic if the animal had ever been given hormones or antibiotics. Synthetic pesticides and sewage are not allowed to be used on organic farms for three years prior to harvest, and the handling and processing of food from the farm to the consumer must maintain the same standards in order to keep the USDA organic label.

When did companies start making organic foods?

Until about 70 years ago, all food was organic, conventional foods are new. Consumers began to have a choice when farms began using chemicals such as pesticides and artificial fertilizers for agriculture, and food producers began using chemicals and laboratory techniques to process and handle foods. The organic certification label shows the consumer that the food has been produced in the same way that people did before the 1940's. The OFPA was passed in 1990 and the law regarding the national organic standards rule was activated on April 21, 2001.

How does the NOP use the OFPA to verify that food is organic?

The National Organic Program is managed by the USDA and serves as the regulatory agency that checks for food safety and certifies food as organic. Government approved certifiers from the NOP visit farms and food processing locations to make sure that they are following the proper procedures, and will revoke the organic certification if the location does not pass the standards of the OFPA. The certification extends beyond the farm and production plants to your grocery store where certified organic food handlers must ensure that the foods labeled organic still meet the same regulations until you purchase them.

Works Cited

Gold, Mary V. "What is Organic Production?" *National Agricultural Library*. United States Department of Agriculture, June 2007. Web. 22 July. 2014.