



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 by 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 the Organic sector have developed national standards for organic production systems, which are reviewed every five years. The Canadian Organic Standards outline the approved production processes and permitted substances for organic production and processing in Canada. These standards are incorporated by reference in the [Safe Food for Canadians Regulations \(SFCR\)](#) and are available at the following links:

- [CAN/CGSB 32.310 Standard of the Canadian General Standards Board – Organic Production Systems – General Principles and Management Standards](#)
- [CAN/CGSB 32.311 Standard of the Canadian General Standards Board – Organic Production Systems – Permitted Substances Lists](#)
- [CAN/CGSB 32.312 Standard of the Canadian General Standards Board – Organic Aquaculture Standards](#)

The most recent edition of the [General Principles and Management Standards](#) and [Permitted Substances Lists](#) were published on December 11, 2020. **All certified organic operators have one year from this date to become compliant with the updated standards.**

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

Under the *SFCR*, any food, seed, or animal feed that is labelled organic is regulated by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). [Part 13 of the SFCR](#) defines the requirements for the certification and marketing of organic products, both imported and domestic, including specific requirements for organic products to be labelled as organic or that bear the [Canada Organic Logo](#). Under Part 13, all products must be certified as organic according to the [Canadian Organic Standards](#).

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. Under an equivalency arrangement, an imported product would be certified through the foreign country's conformity assessment system to the foreign standards and to the terms of the equivalency arrangement, (respecting the variances where applicable), and would be considered to meet the importing country's requirements.

- See [more information and a list of equivalency arrangements currently in place with Canada](#)



The [Canada Organic Regime \(COR\)](#) is designed to build on the existing system of domestic accreditation and certification and 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 and monitored based on the recommendation of CFIA-designated Conformity Verification Bodies (CVBs), which must meet the criteria established by the *SFCR* and CFIA. The Certification Bodies are responsible for organic certification of food commodities and organic product packaging and labelling.

[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 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 is 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), allowed in organic production 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 France’s 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 Shannon Sommerauer at ssommerauer@cpma.ca or use the following resources:

- Canadian Food Inspection Agency – [Organic products](#)
- [Canadian Organic Standards](#)
- [Safe Food for Canadians Regulations \(SFCR\)](#)
- [Québec Organic Reference Standards](#)
- CPMA website – [Information on Provincial Organic Regulations](#)
- CODEX Alimentarius (FAO and WHO) – [Guidelines for the Production, Processing, Labelling and Marketing of Organically Produced Foods](#) (Last updated in 2013)
- 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.
- Williams, C.M. (2002). [Nutritional quality of organic food: shades of grey or shades of green?](#) Proceedings of the Nutrition Society, 61, 19-24.