

FARMERS ALLIANCE NETWORK

Supporting Central Indiana Rural Families in New Income Opportunities

Questions and Answers About Organic Farming

What is organic?

Organic refers to the way agricultural product-food and fiber-are grown and processed. Organic food production is based on a system of farming that maintains and replenishes soil fertility without the use of toxic and persistent pesticides and fertilizers. Organic foods are minimally processed without artificial ingredients, preservatives, or irradiation to maintain the integrity of the food.

Is there an official definition of “organic”?

The following excerpt is from the definition of “organic: that the National Organic Standards Board adopted in April 1995: “Organic agriculture is an ecological production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity. It is based on minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain and enhance ecological harmony.”

What does “Certified Organic” mean?

“Certified Organic” means the item has been grown according to strict uniform standards that are verified by independent state or private organizations. Certification includes inspections of farm fields and processing facilities, detailed record keeping, and periodic testing of soil and water to ensure that growers and handlers are meeting the standards which have been set.

Who regulates the certified organic claims?

The federal government set standards for the production, processing and certification of organic food in the Organic Food Production Act of 1990 (OFPA). The National Organic Standards Board was then established to develop guidelines and procedures to regulate all organic crops. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) during December 2000 unveiled detailed regulations to implement OFPA. These took effect on April 21, 2001, with an 18-month implementation period ending October 2002. At that time, any food labeled organic must meet these national organic standards. USDA’s National Organic Program oversees the program.

Other references:

National Trade Organization: www.ota.com

Government National Organic Program: www.ams.usda.gov/nop

Indiana Certified Organic Group: www.members.iquest.net

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