New National Organic Standards:
Part 1 of 2

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Information courtesy of David Granatstein, WSU Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources and USDA News Release No. 0453.02

WASHINGTON, Oct. 21, 2002 — “Today, when consumers see the USDA national organic seal on products, they will know that the products labeled organic will be consistent across the country. Organic agriculture is increasing and organic farmers across the country have been looking forward to the release of these regulations with anticipation that they will create consumer confidence in their products.” So stated U.S. Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman when she launched the implementation of USDA’s national organic standards. The purpose of this program is to provide consistent labeling on agricultural products nationwide.

Organic agriculture is the production of crops and animals without the use of synthetic pesticides or fertilizers. U.S. organic farmland has recently increased from about 1.4 to 2.4 million acres. The organic industry grows between 20 and 25% annually. U.S. retail sales of organic foods were about $7.8 billion in 2000, and global sales topped $17.5 billion.

Developed from extensive industry input and hundreds of thousands of public comments, the National Organic Program (NOP) standards went into effect Oct. 21, 2002. Any organic agricultural product must now meet USDA standards to be labeled and sold as “organic.” The USDA has developed strict labeling rules to help consumers know the exact organic content of the food they buy. Consumers can tell organically-produced food from conventionally-produced food by looking at package labels and store signage. The USDA Organic Seal tells consumers that a product is at least 95% organic.

There are four classifications of organic labeling within the new NOP standards:

1. **100% Organic:** all ingredients and processing aids must be organic.
2. **Organic (95%):** all agricultural ingredients must be organic or be commercially unavailable in organic form; all nonagricultural ingredients must be on the National List of Approved Materials.
3. **Made with Organic Ingredients:** must be comprised of at least 70% organic ingredients; non-organic ingredients **may not** be GMO, irradiated, or produced with sewage sludge.
4. **Products with less than 70% organic ingredients:** may only list each organic ingredient as such on the ingredients label or the information panel; no organic claim on the label’s principle display panel.

The USDA is administering a $50 million national cost share program to help defray the costs of certification incurred by organic producers and handlers in all 50 states, the U.S. territories, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. For information about your state’s program contact the following state agriculture department staff:
Part 2 of this series will go into detail on organic certification steps, including organic system plans and other requirements. For homework in the meantime, interested readers should consult the following Web sites for more information:

**Helpful Resources:**
- [www.ams.usda.gov/nop](http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop)
- [www.organicaginfo.org](http://www.organicaginfo.org)
- [www.oda.state.or.us/admd/pdf/organicapp.pdf](http://www.oda.state.or.us/admd/pdf/organicapp.pdf)