

Message from the Parish Nurses

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ORGANIC FOOD LABELS

We are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of healthy nutrition for our general health and overall well-being. Organic produce is a safer and healthier alternative to conventionally grown produce, that uses synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, and genetic modification of plants.

Animals raised for meat and dairy produce often are in an unhealthy living environment, have been given hormones, and unnecessary antibiotics in animal feed. Organic foods virtually eliminate all of these risks. When shopping for produce, you may have wondered about the labels you see. Good, verifiable labels can be your guide to leading you to foods that has been raised and/or grown in a way that aligns with your values.

USDA CERTIFIED ORGANIC

Since 2000, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has established an organic certification program that verifies that produce meet all requirements in the USDA organic regulations from farm to market. Every since the final rule on organics nearly two decades ago, farmers and processors using the USDA Organic seal have been required to meet strict standards and undergo a rigorous certification process. The USDA makes an exception for producers who sell less than \$5,000 a year on organic produce. They must follow the guidelines for organic food production, but they don't need to go through the certification process. The producers can label their products as organic, but they can't use the official USDA Organic seal.

USDA PRODUCT LABELS

USDA guidelines on how organic foods are described on product labels.

• **100 Percent Organic:** Fruits, vegetables, eggs, dairy, and meat must meet these criteria:

- ~ All ingredients must be certified organic.
- ~ Any processing aids must be organic.
- ~ Product labels must state the name of the certifying agent on the information panel.

May include USDA organic seal and/or 100 percent organic claim.

Must identify organic ingredients (e.g., organic dill) or via asterisk or other mark.

• **Organic:** Fruits, vegetables, eggs, dairy, and meat must meet these criteria.

- ~ All agricultural ingredients must be certified organic, except where specified on National List.
 - ~ Non-organic ingredients allowed per National List may be used, up to a combined total of 5 percent of non-organic content (excluding salt and water).
 - ~ Product labels must state the name of the certifying agent on the information panel.
- May include USDA organic seal and /or organic clam. Must identify organic ingredients (e.g., organic cinnamon) or via asterisk or other mark.

• **“Made With Organic”:** Multi-ingredient agricultural products in this category must meet these criteria:

- ~ At least 70 percent of the product must be certified organic ingredients (excluding salt and water).
- ~ Any remaining agricultural products are not required to be organically produced but must be produced without excluded methods (e.g., genetic engineering, ionizing radiation, or sewage sludge).
- ~ Non-agricultural products must be specifically allowed on the National List (e.g., baking soda, citric acid, enzymes).
- ~ Product labels must state the name of the certifying agent on the information panel.

May state “made with organic (insert up to three ingredients or ingredient categories).”

Must not include USDA organic seal anywhere, represent finished product as organic, or state “made with organic ingredients.”

Must identify organic ingredients (e.g., made with organic oats) or via asterisk or other mark.

• **Specific Organic Ingredients:** Multi-ingredient products with less than 70 percent certified organic content (excluding salt and water) don't need to be certified. Any non-certified product:

Must not include USDA organic seal anywhere or the word “organic” on the principal display panel.

May only list certified organic ingredients as organic in the ingredients list and the percentage of organic ingredients. Remaining ingredients are not required to follow the USDA organic regulations.

By Barbara Mueller, RN, Faith Community Nurse

Source: United States Department of Agriculture

More information can be found at:

<https://www.ams.usda.gov>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/organic-food>

Visit: www.StAgnesShepherdstown.org for “**Not All Labels Are Created Equal**”. **Click on:** Parish Health Newsletter

NOT ALL LABELS ARE CREATED EQUAL

No that, “natural” and “organic” are not interchangeable terms. In general, “natural” on a food label means that it has no artificial color, flavors or preservatives. It does not refer to the methods or materials used to produce the food ingredients.

Other common food labels should also not be confused with organic labels. For example, the guidelines for certified organic beef include, among a number of requirements, access to pasture during a minimum 120-day grazing season and no growth hormones. But the labels “free-range” or “hormone-free”, while they must be used truthfully, do not indicate a farmer followed all guidelines for organic certification.

There is a website called FoodPrint. “FoodPrint” is also the name of a program from a non-profit organization on food production practices.

The non-profit organization is GRACE Communications Foundation. This foundation develops innovative strategies and consumer tools to increase public awareness of the critical environmental and public health issues created by our current industrial food system, and to advocate for more sustainable alternatives.

On the “FoodPrint” website you can browse all food labels for: **Produce, Beef, Chicken, Pork, Eggs, Dairy**. It explains what kind of label it is, if it has Clear Standards, and if it has requirements such as Verification/Inspection.

Labels that are Lacking Clear Standards, verification processes or independent oversight, allowing farm conditions and practices to vary widely across producers. Go to: <https://foodprint.org/eating-sustainably/food-label-guide>

Fish is regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

<https://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/GuidanceDocumentsRegulatoryInformation/seafood>

Labels for Fish

Certified Sustainable Seafood MSC

<https://www.MSC.org>

Best Aquaculture Practices Certified

<https://www.bapcertification.org>

Alcohol

In addition to the USDA organic requirements, alcoholic beverages must meet the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) regulations, including sulfite labeling requirements. Any use of added sulfites means

that the wine is only eligible for the “made with” labeling category and may not use the USDA organic seal.

Please note that sulfites may only be added to wine “made with” organic grapes; wine labeled as “made with” other organic fruit (e.g., apples) may not contain added sulfites. Organic alcohol labels must be reviewed by an organic certifying agent and the TTB.

To learn more about the TTB requirements and labels for wine, malt beverage, and distilled spirit go to:

<https://ttb.gov/alfd/alfd.organic.shtml>

Recalls, Outbreaks and Emergencies

<https://www.fda.gov/Safety/Recalls/default.htm>

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