

What does organic *really* mean?

Understanding exactly what *organic* means is a big issue for many consumers – especially during recent times where consumers are becoming more food-conscious and commercial deception is rife. In fact, use of the word *organic* on some product labels can be downright deceptive and clearly intended to deliberately confuse consumers in order to retain consumer sales without the effort and expense that true organic certification would incur.

From a scientific context, any product that starts life as natural matter and has a carbon base – basically anything that has been alive – can be classed as ‘organic’, and this is where the deception occurs and why it is difficult for food authorities to stop.

But you can educate yourself as a consumer to ensure you aren’t hoodwinked and here are some suggestions to look out for when making your purchasing choices:

- If using ‘organic’ as a guideline for buying a product, check for that product’s certification – only products certified by a registered authority can be labelled ‘certified organic’.
- If there is no certification on the product and you need to use your own intuition and logic to make a choice, then make sure to look at whether the product has been produced using genetically modified organisms (GMOs); whether you can pronounce the ingredient list; AND how many ingredients the product itself contains (as a guideline, if you cannot pronounce something and the list is longer than about 6 or 7 ingredients, then think twice about purchasing it!).
- Get in touch with the manufacturer and ask them. This is the best kind of social pressure, as it shows a company that not all consumers are blindly accepting products based on their marketing.
- Check for country of origin and do some quick research into what this means for the product you are considering. Don’t allow politics to sway you here – focus on agricultural practices and relevant regulations.
- Be wary of products claiming they ‘contain certified organic ingredients’ – this can sometimes be a ‘sweetener’ thrown in by a company to offset some other nasty ingredients. In fact, this warning could be applied to any product and any type of marketing deception – e.g. a toxic laundry liquid with pure essential oils added so it is allowed to be marketed as ‘natural’; or a sugary breakfast cereal fortified with synthetic supplements to offer your daily intake of a particular vitamin – again distracting you from the other harmful ingredients included. You hopefully get the picture.

Choosing products that are organic, certified organic, non-GMO, chemical-free and ethically produced (i.e. avoiding slavery practices, cruelty to animals and damage to the Earth) is rewarding for yourself and for our planet. Show your body and the Earth the respect they both deserve, and become a more conscious shopper – that way you will avoid being a victim of attractive labels and fancy language!