



WHAT IS ORGANIC?

Use this Inside Organic Toolkit to learn about the basics of organic certification and resources to navigate and promote organic certification.

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NAVIGATING ORGANIC

The USDA certified Organic Seal was created in 2002 and is monitored by the National Organic Program (NOP), which "develops and enforces consistent national standards for organically produced agricultural products sold in the United States." Organic is the only seal backed by a federal regulatory program in this manner.

At the time the seal was created, the organic marketplace recorded approximately \$6 billion in sales according to the Organic Trade Association (OTA). In 2022, the industry reported \$67.6 billion in sales with the organic food category crossing the \$60 billion sales mark for the first time.

CERTIFICATION BASICS

If you or your partners are considering transitioning to organic, or if you are looking to better understand how organic certification works, here are key resources to help you get started.

Levels of certification

According to the USDA, "organic" is the labeling term that indicates food and agricultural products have been produced according to the approved methods outlined by the NOP's organic standards. These organic standards allow four different labeling options based on the percentage of organic ingredients in a product and the processing practices a company uses. These categories determine how a company can use the word "organic" on its packaging.

100 Percent Organic: Products that have been produced using exclusively organic methods, containing only organic ingredients

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(excluding water and salt) are allowed to carry a label declaring "100 percent organic."

Organic: Products that contain at least 95% organic ingredients (by weight, excluding water and salt) may bear the USDA label. The remaining contents can only be natural or synthetic ingredients approved by the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB). These ingredients must not be available in an organic form or else that version would have to be used.

Made with Organic: The USDA Organic seal may be used only on products labeled as "100 percent organic" or "organic." Products with 70% to 94% organic ingredients may display "Made

with organic" (with up to three specific organic ingredients of food groups listed) on the front panel. All three of these categories prohibit the inclusion of any ingredients produced using genetic engineering, irradiation or sewage sludge.

Ingredient Panel: Products with less than 70% organic ingredients can only list the organic items on the ingredient panel. Companies cannot mention the word "organic" on the front panel.

HOW TO BECOME CERTIFIED ORGANIC

Certifiers are responsible for making sure that USDA organic products meet all organic standards. There are five basic steps to organic certification:

WHAT IS ORGANIC?

Ask a person what "certified organic means" and they'll likely respond, "food grown without pesticides." But as is outlined in this toolkit, not only are organic agricultural practices so much more than that, the benefits of these practices are as well. "Organic", is and has proven to be healthy for people and the planet, supporting healthy soil, waterways and biodiversity while promoting humane animal treatment.

The USDA organic regulations outline organic agriculture as, "The application of a set of cultural, biological and mechanical practices that support the cycling of on-farm resources, promote ecological balance and conserve biodiversity. These include maintaining or enhancing soil and water quality; conserving wetlands, woodlands and wildlife; and avoiding use of synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, irradiation and genetic engineering."

The USDA further outlines that organic producers use natural processes and materials when developing farming systems—these contribute to soil, crop and livestock nutrition, pest and weed management, attainment of production goals and conservation of biological diversity.

FROM FARM TO TABLE

From field to retail shelf or consumer table, organic also encompasses a system of production, processing, distribution and sales that assures consumers that the products they buy maintain the organic integrity that begins on the farm. The Organic Trade Association's "Organic 101" outlines this in detail, noting that the federal standards and these processes are put in place to "provide verification and traceability from the farm to the consumer."

UNLIKE OTHER ECO-LABELS, ONLY ORGANIC GUARANTEES THAT PRODUCTS ARE PRODUCED WITH:

- NO toxic and synthetic pesticides or fertilizers
- NO GMO ingredients
- NO antibiotics or synthetic growth hormones
- NO artificial flavors, colors, or preservatives
- NO sewage sludge or irradiation

(OTA, "Organic 101")

1. The farm or business adopts organic practices, selects a [USDA-accredited certifying agent](#), and submits an application and fees to the certifying agent.
2. The certifying agent reviews the application to verify that practices comply with USDA organic regulations.
3. An inspector conducts an on-site inspection of the applicant's operation.
4. The certifying agent reviews the application and the inspector's report to determine if the applicant complies with the USDA organic regulations.
5. The certifying agent issues the organic certificate.

To maintain organic certification, a certified organic farm or business must go through an annual review and inspection process. If an operation is not located in the U.S., it must follow the NOP's [International Trade](#) related options for organic certification.

For help getting started, review:

- [Transitioning to Organic](#)
- [The Road to Organic Certification](#)
- [Organic Certification Made Simple](#)
- [Steps to Certification Videos and Costs of Certification Web Application](#)

Or consider downloading the [Organic Trade Association's toolkit](#), which includes an outline of organic standards and certification 101.

USDA STRENGTHENING ORGANIC ENFORCEMENT RULE

The organic standards are intended to be a living document. While changes have been made over the years, the recent introduction of the [Strengthening Organic Enforcement \(SOE\)](#) rule marks the single largest revision to the standards since their inception in 2002. The rule went into effect in March 2023 and is designed to reduce fraud in the organic marketplace; strengthen oversight across the supply chain of organic producers, handlers and certifiers;



and improve USDA's enforcement mechanisms. SOE provides NOP with additional tools to enforce the regulations, increase transparency across supply chains, and raise the cost of violating the regulations, all to support the integrity of and consumer trust in the organic seal.

"The organic industry has changed significantly since 2002, and this new ruling gives the USDA NOP the tools to enforce USDA regulations and maintain consumer and industry trust in the seal. It makes sure that USDA can effectively oversee the supply chain that takes all of those ingredients from farm to market, to ensure that all of the practices that make the product organic were followed along the way" explains Jennifer Tucker, Ph.D., Deputy Administrator, National Organic Program. "We call that maintaining organic integrity."

Click [here](#) for a helpful resource list from the USDA to help you understand what SOE means for you and your business.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ELECTRONIC IMPORT CERTIFICATES

The U.S. organic agriculture sector has seen unprecedented growth over the past decade. As sales of domestic organic products continue to grow, global organic supply chains have become increasingly more complex. The Strengthening Organic Enforcement final rule requires importers to use electronic NOP Import Certificates for all organic products coming into the U.S. to improve the oversight

and traceability of those imported products. The new system is being tested with certifiers and importers. The electronic NOP Import Certificate will be required starting March 19, 2024.

FARM BILL FOCUS

The Organic Trade Association's Farmers Advisory Council (FAC), is a coalition of organic farmers and farmer organizations in the U.S. that represents more than 9,500 growers and producers. The OTA consulted with the FAC along with other growers, brands, retailers and non-profits to outline a focus for the upcoming Farm Bill. In order to continue to grow organic, the OTA has outlined that the next Farm Bill should include financial and policy investments to ensure:

- **Organic standards are responsive to marketplace demands**
- **Research and risk management tools are fair and equitable in their support of organic producers**
- **Conservation and climate-smart programs recognize the historical contributions of organic producers in protecting natural resources**
- **Organic supply chains are resilient in the face of known and unknown risks such as disease, weather and increasing costs.**

OTA's Farm Bill priorities will focus on responsive organic standards, thriving American farmers and resilient organic supply chains. Learn more [here](#).

BY THE NUMBERS

2002

The year the USDA National Organic Program went into effect and the Organic seal appeared.

\$6 billion

The approximate size of the market when the USDA organic seal went into effect.

\$32.9 billion

The amount the organic marketplace sales grew between 2013 and 2022.

\$67.6 billion

Total organic sales in 2022.

\$61.7 billion

The size of the organic food market, which crossed the \$60 billion mark for the first time in 2022.

\$6 billion

The approximate size of non-food sales (organic textiles, dietary supplements, household goods, pet food and flowers) in 2022.

6%

The percentage of overall food sales organic now accounts for in the United States.

80%

The percentage of households that have organic products in them according to the OTA.

1%

The approximate percentage of the country's farmland in organic production according to the USDA.

\$300 million

The amount the USDA has recently allocated to support current organic farmers and the organic marketplace, as well as those interested in transitioning to organic.

3 years

The time it takes to transition a conventional farm to organic.

17,445

The number of certified organic farms reported in the USDA 2021 census of organic operations.

ORGANIC RESEARCH: WHAT WE KNOW

WHO IS THE ORGANIC CONSUMER?

As more consumers become increasingly focused on the health of people and the planet when making product purchases, data experts at **NIQ** say organic shoppers, too, are focusing on brand attributes related to sustainability and social responsibility. And it's not just the typical white mom with young children doing this. As organic continues to move from niche to mainstream, the typical organic shopper is evolving too.

"Ultimately, many consumers are organic shoppers and that's really exciting," says Sherry Frey, VP of Wellness at NIQ. "One of the most fascinating things we have seen in our sustainability research is that organic is one of the attributes most penetrated across categories, other than recyclable, when we look at attributes associated with sustainability and environmental care. So, the reality is that while there are heavy organic shoppers, there is also truly something for everyone, as organic products are penetrating the entire store. Organic is becoming mainstream, and consumers are starting to find products that work for their lifestyle."

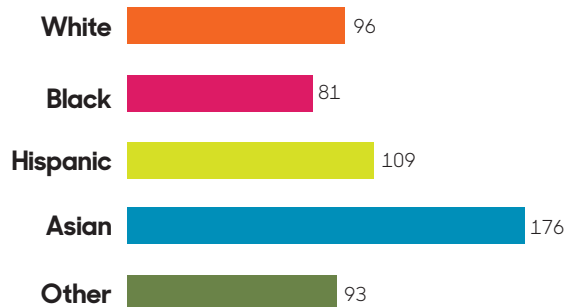
THE DATA

A majority of U.S. shoppers have purchased natural or organic products. And with each generation, interest in organic grows. According to a study conducted by Acosta Group in November 2022—surveying 816 shoppers ages 18 to 76 in Acosta's proprietary Shopper Community—younger generations, notably Millennial and Gen Z demonstrate the greatest interest in



Organic Shopper

Race of head of household



Source: NIQ Health & Wellness Organic, Spectra LifeStyle, 2023

organic products (see "Organic Purchasing Habits by Generation") with 85 and 100 percent respectively reporting organic product purchases.

Research also points to noteworthy diversity in the organic consumer base. In fact, the natural channel shopper skews towards being more diverse than the general population. Recent research conducted by *Nutrition Business Journal* (NBJ) and New Hope Network's NEXT platform shows that only about 6 in 10 U.S. consumers are white. Nearly half (47%) of natural channel shoppers identify as black, Asian, indigenous, Hispanic or Latino/a. Asian and Hispanic shoppers index higher for organic products.

Household income level remains a good predictor of organic purchasing. Natural and organic product shoppers are on average more affluent, while married couples are still the most valuable shoppers for organic. According to NIQ, 64% of organic volume comes from married couples and 31% of organic volume comes from married couples with kids. But what NIQ data also shows is that both Asian and Hispanic shoppers index higher for organic products than previously indicated.

Retailers take note: Nearly 30% of all households who buy organic are heavy buyers of organic and organic buyers tend to spend significantly more not just on organic but across the store. Boomers buy organic in the fewest categories, and Millennials purchase more broadly

across natural/organic categories than other generations (Gen Z and Gen X score higher than Boomers).

WHY CONSUMERS CHOOSE ORGANIC

Organic shoppers tend to prioritize "healthy" and enjoy trying new products, but "free from"

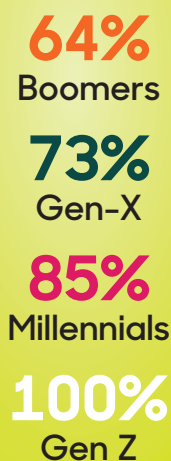
remains organic's most appealing quality. By and large, consumers still consistently choose organic as synonymous with "clean" or "free from"—to avoid chemicals, pesticides and processed ingredients. When combined with other values-based claims, organic becomes a clear choice for consumers

looking to align their values and food purchases.

According to consumer research by Acosta, the majority of shoppers buy natural and organic products because they perceive them as healthier and because they seek products free from pesticides and processed ingredients. In fact, "clean" (or free from synthetic/artificial ingredients) lists like the "dirty dozen" remain the most important factor for purchasing natural and organic products.

ORGANIC PURCHASING HABITS BY GENERATION

Percentage of consumers that have purchased natural/organic products:



Source: Acosta Shopper Community Survey Fall 2022

ORGANIC PRODUCT SALES TRENDS

Organic and natural consumers shop for preferred products across channels—club (49%), mass (82%), traditional grocery (84%), natural/select grocery (35%) and farmers markets (22%)—not surprisingly skewing higher than conventional shoppers at natural/specialty and farmers markets.

Across store categories,

the most popular organic categories include plant-based milk, produce, eggs and tea; non-food items include beauty care and vitamins.

ORGANIC GROWTH AND THE RISE OF SUSTAINABILITY

Consumers are embracing new ways of thinking, and top of mind is health and wellness. What's more, consumers are more aware of sustainability and are willing to pay more for sustainable products with certifications, like USDA Certified Organic, which are indicators of a brand's commitment to sustainability.

Although consumer desire for products that exemplify sustainability and social responsibility has been understood for a while, [a recent report](#) published by NIQ in partnership with McKinsey & Company set out to show that focusing on these initiatives does pay back in dollars. The report examined sales growth for products that claim to be environmentally and socially responsible. Based on previous reports outlining that consumers care about sustainability, the report aimed to further back that consumers do indeed care about Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) initiatives and there are dollars to show it.

The data evaluated 600,000 SKUs over a 5-year period. The study also looked at data from consumer insights from

Top 10 Fastest Growing Organic Categories*

1	Feminine Care
2	Bagels
3	Alcoholic Beverage Mixers
4	Vitamins & Supplements
5	Creams & Non-Dairy Creamer
6	Baby Feeding
7	Extracts, Herbs, Spices & Seasonings
8	Baby Bath
9	Pancake, Waffle, French Toast Toppings
10	Eggs

SOURCE: NIQ Retail Measurement Services, NIQ Product Insight, powered by Label Insight, Total Store (May 2022-April 2023)]

NIQ's household panel, which tracks the purchasing behavior of people in more than 100,000 U.S. households. From the data, the team identified 93-different ESG-related claims and divided them into 6 types of claims, which included organic-farming methods:

- Animal welfare
- Environmental sustainability
- Organic-farming methods
- Plant-based ingredients
- Social responsibility
- Sustainable packaging

Researchers found that, "Products making ESG-related claims averaged 28-percent cumulative growth over the past five-year period, versus 20 percent for products that made no such claims."

On average, products with multiple claims grew more quickly than other products. Most categories showed a positive correlation between growth rate and the number of distinct types of ESG-related claims a product made. Products making multiple types of claims, such as USDA certified organic and certified grass-fed, B-corps or Fair Trade, grew about twice as fast as products that made only one.

ORGANIC SALES TRENDS

Post pandemic supply chain interruptions and inflation have caused some slowing of growth in the organic marketplace over the past year, with growth coming more from price

MOST POPULAR ORGANIC CATEGORIES

- Plant based milk
- Fresh produce
- Eggs
- Tea
- Skin Care/ Beauty
- Vitamins/Supplements
- Dairy Products
- Snacks
- Beverages
- Household Cleaning Products

Source: Acosta Shopper Community Survey Fall 2022



increases than volume sales. Data from NIQ, however, shows organic products maintaining strong growth over the last 4-year period. Products that are USDA Organic had a dollar volume growth of 7.2%. Products with stated organic positioning (e.g. "made with organic ingredients"), grew by 7.6% in the same time, whereas non-organic products grew by 6.5%. Organic still sees the greatest number of sales in conventional channels (38%), followed by warehouse and club (19%), mass merch (16%) and premier fresh/natural channel (12%) according to OTA data.

Still NIQ reports that retailers aren't yet making the most of their organic sales with an opportunity to provide a greater selection of organic products across the store and to help shoppers filter for key attributes. By not doing so, retailers are missing out on organic sales to the tune of approximately \$11 billion dollars missed, on average, every year.

It's important to look at organic as part of greater trends in ESG in food, says Sherry Frey, VP of Total Wellness at NIQ. "Products with ESG claims grew at

"Price will become less of an inhibitor of growth for organic."

—Nick McCoy, Co-Founder and Managing Director, Whipstitch Capital

retail faster than those without them over the last three years," she says. Dollar volume growth year over year stands at 14.4% for products with demonstrated ESG values versus just 11.3% for total store.

Even more remarkable: According to analysis by Whipstitch Capital, price premiums for organic are shrinking. In other words, the actual cost savings that consumers site as the number one reason they choose conventional over organic is becoming much less over time. The organic-conventional price differential shifted from 10% in 2018 to a mere 2% in 2023. "That's important when we're thinking about challenges in the future," says Nick McCoy, Co-Founder and Managing Director of Whipstitch Capital. "Price will become less of an inhibitor of growth for organic."

THE SCIENCE OF ORGANIC

BEYOND CLEAN—CLIMATE SMART

The organic industry and consumers have long appreciated what organic foods don't include—potentially health-harming chemical inputs, pesticides and chemically altered/artificial ingredients. But as climate shift becomes more apparent and personal across the country—from New York to Hawaii—and around the globe, consumers may pay more attention to climate resilient food choices, says Alison Grantham, PhD, Founder and President of Grow Well Consulting.

"There are two parts to addressing the climate crisis: mitigation and adaptation," says Grantham.



Adaptation is well documented in organic systems. Organic crops are more tolerant of extreme heat or rainfall, she explains. "We need to ask: What kind of food system is going to continue to produce and minimize greenhouse gasses that are driving fires and other stressors?"

Organic production is a solution to reducing (and eventually eliminating) fossil fuels to keep global warming to lower levels, Grantham points out. "Nutrient management via legumes, cover crops, biointensive crop rotations, compost and integration of livestock into cropping systems provides a critical blueprint for all of agriculture to escape from fossil fuels," she states.

Sequesters Carbon and Reduces GHG Emissions



ORGANIC FARMS...



Emit **18% less global warming-causing gasses** and use **~50% less new reactive** nitrogen (an extremely potent greenhouse gas).*



Produce healthier soils that contain **13% higher total organic matter** and capture **44% more stable sequestered carbon**.*



Releases **40% fewer carbon emissions**.*

*As compared to conventional
Source: The Organic Trade Association

Organic also provides a blueprint for crop resilience. Rodale Institute's Farming Systems Trial, the DOK-Trial in Switzerland and the USDA-ARS's Beltsville Farming Systems Project have demonstrated that "organic management improves soil health, enhances water holding capacity and enables crops to withstand extreme weather events like droughts and heavy rainfall," says Grantham. "These findings emphasize the relevance of organic agriculture in building resilient food systems in the face of a changing climate."

NEW SCIENCE ON ORGANIC NUTRITION

Although studies in the early 2000s didn't show many nutritional differences between organically and conventionally grown foods, data show that the nutritional quality of many foods has decreased over time. And new research on organically grown/produced foods suggests that earlier scientists may have been looking at too few factors.

"There's increased interest in using a broader toolset with different measures and metrics to assess nutrition," says David LeZaks, co-author of "The Regenerative Agriculture and Human Health Nexus: Insights from Field to Body." "Previous studies looked at just minerals. This next generation of science looks at phytochemicals, polyphenols and active compounds, where difference is found," he says.

The USDA currently tracks about 150 nutritional components, but scientists have identified more than 26,000 biochemical compounds in foods. Organically produced foods often contain more of those. For example, research demonstrates nutritional differences in products from pasture-raised animals—including increased levels of CLAs, omega fatty acids and vitamins A and E.

LeZaks and others make a connection between soil health and human health—particularly via the foods we consume and how they affect the gut microbiome. The complex relationship between phytonutrients (more available in organic foods), processing methods and our gut and overall health is the horizon for new research, he says.

COMMUNICATING ORGANIC

KEY MESSAGES FOR ORGANIC CONSUMERS

As a selling point, organic tends to tell a much more interesting story than its counterparts. The key is to make sure these interesting selling points are being told in a way that consumers understand.

A brand's mission matters to consumers and organic certification shows a baseline commitment to people and planet. Organic stewardship—the idea of consumers being drawn to a product for its story, rang through in the recent NEXT + *Nutrition Business Journal* (NBJ) "Trends & Innovations" report.

NEXT researchers analyzed 35 trends against each other arriving at a list of trends with the most momentum heading into 2023. The 10 top trends showed that healthy whole foods and holistic nutrition, eco/social values and using diet to build a resilient and solid foundation to address health conditions are of equal value in the marketplace explains Amanda Hartt, Lead Market Analyst, NEXT Data & Insights, New Hope Network. In this report, "organic stewardship," says Hartt, landed at #5 in the Top 10.



The Benefits of Organic

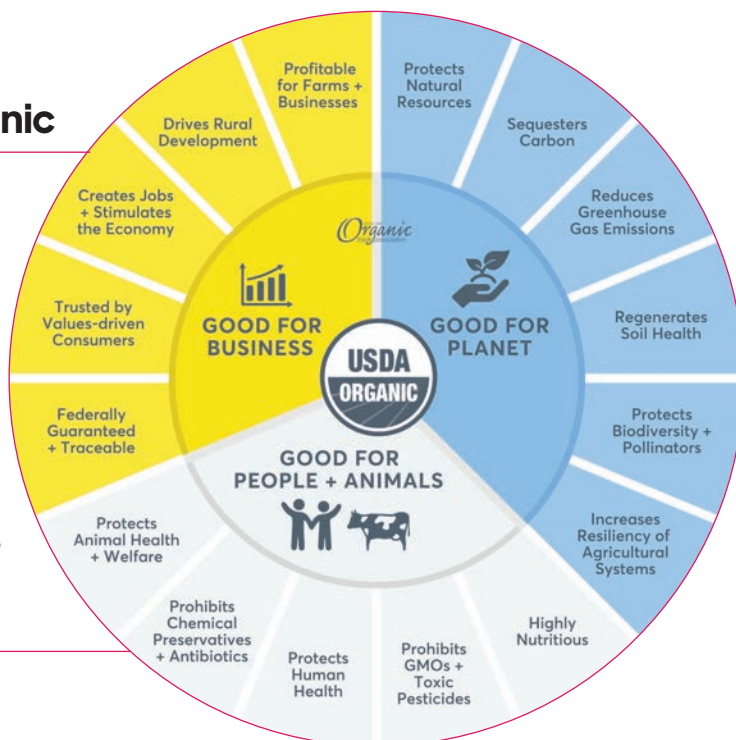
Organic is good for the planet, good for people and animals and good for business.

Environmental benefits include improvements of: Biodiversity, soil health, farm resilience and climate change mitigation.

By reducing chemical exposure, organic protects farmers, farmworkers, animal health and rural communities.

Organic is good for business as it continues to be one of the fastest growing sectors in US agriculture and organic aligns with consumer priorities and values.

Source: The Organic Trade Association



The momentum for organic continues to be driven by consumer demand as 31% of consumers say they are prioritizing purchasing organic products. The takeaway, she says, is that one-third of consumers are looking for organic and in a competitive marketplace, brands should continue to prioritize organic certification.

Additionally, there is a huge opportunity for brands to differentiate by proving their commitment to stewarding the organic movement. This includes messaging and storytelling behind a brand's commitment to expand acreage or transition new crops to organic or communicating the nutrition and environmental benefits of organic.

THE BENEFITS OF ORGANIC

The Organic Trade Association's data-driven Organic Opportunity Communications Toolkit helps brands communicate an array of benefits associated with USDA organic certification, including highlights from organic science, organic certification 101, organic principles and regenerative ag info, as well as organic opportunity talking points. As part of that toolkit, the Organic Sustainability Wheel highlights benefits in three categories: Good for Business, Good for Planet and Good for People + Animals.

Explore how to elevate your organic messaging [here](#).

Source: Organic Trade Association

CONFUSION AMIDST PROLIFERATING TERMS

According to Acosta Group's Shopper Insights Fall 2022 survey, many consumers are unsure of the differences between natural and organic products. Even natural/organic shoppers think "natural" and "organic" are similar. A little over 1/3 of natural/organic shoppers say the two are similar; while 48% of conventional shoppers say the same.

Consumers are looking for products that "show who I am and what my values are," says NIQ's Frey and beyond organic, claims and certifications are proliferating across every area of the store. From *upcycled* to *regenerative* to *responsibly sourced*, "we're introducing a lot of concepts to consumers that might confuse them. So how do we as an industry give them

opportunities to show their values as sustainable/ environmentally conscious consumers while not creating confusion in the space?"

NIQ tracks organic sales versus those of emerging claims. *Upcycled* and *Regenerative Agriculture* (which represent new movements and product innovations) show strong growth over the last three years, but the size of sales are still very small compared to organic, she notes. These are in less than 100 categories, whereas organic has the strongest category count of any claim, approaching 1,100 categories.

IT'S STILL ABOUT INGREDIENTS & INTEGRITY

Not only is the organic consumer evolving, so too is the messaging that consumers are responding to when considering making an organic purchase. In a messaging study conducted by New Hope's Inside Organic program, 6 possible organic messages were evaluated for traction. These included:

- **Organic is better for people and planet.**
- **Organic means you have transparency and traceability across the supply chain.**
- **Organic promotes animal welfare.**
- **Organic is a powerful solution to climate change.**
- **Organic products are made with clean ingredients, free from pesticides, chemicals and toxins.**
- **Organic plays a key role in living a healthy lifestyle.**



SOCIAL MESSAGING

When it comes to messaging, experts agree that there are many untapped opportunities. "There is a big opportunity for brands to message the differences between organic and natural. Tell the ingredient story so that shoppers will see how your brand is relevant for them," says Kathy Risch, Senior Vice President, Shopper Insights & Thought

Leadership at Acosta Group.

The key also is to not pigeon-hole your messaging to one demographic or one message. As new science and research validate a wider swath of organic attributes and reasons to buy organic, there is also opportunity to reach out to a broader consumer base.

Social media posting possibilities are a rabbit hole for any company, but particularly for those with modest marketing muscle. Don't try to do it all. Focus on one or two platforms (chosen by target audience age) and then invest in easy-to-implement, visually appealing campaigns that share the core stories and ideas behind the brand.

Try these: Short video clips of founders, farmers or employees in action; farm photos with highlights on what's grown/produced there; beautiful food/ dishes prepared with brand ingredients; or short testimonials from fans. Simple background footage of your product in use, overlaid with short facts or ideas on how to use the product, can also be appealing to consumers. Quick-hit, fast fact ideas and short form video is an increasingly popular way to attract attention from younger shoppers.



Not surprising, the two concepts with the greatest potential to motivate respondents to buy more organic products are "Organic products are made with clean ingredients, free from pesticides, chemicals and toxins" and "Organic is better for people and the planet."

"Organic means you have transparency and traceability across the supply chain" garnered the least interest as a leading message to consumers, but transparency is still very important to consumers. As the only federally regulated certification, organic offers transparency across the supply chain and even though transparency is not a draw in messaging, it is a reason to buy organic. The new SOE rule (page 3) is intended to further support and elevate the transparency the organic certification offers.

"Organic is a powerful solution to climate change," resonated with respondents ages 18–34 and respondents ages 35–46 were slightly more motivated by "Organic plays a key role in living a healthy lifestyle." As a secondary message, "Organic promotes animal welfare" garnered interest from all groups and even showed to have appeal among non-natural channel shoppers.

Still within this study more than half of respondents said they want to learn more about organic foods. As the organic market works through its kinks and supply chain challenges, it's worth thinking about how and to who you are marketing your organic products. With the right platform, the right messaging and the right reach to varying demographic groups, demand and interest in organic remains strong.

ORGANIC FAQs

Q: Is Organic Non-GMO?

A: Yes. USDA enforced organic standards prohibit genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in organic products. Organic means that a farmer uses non-GMO seeds, non-GMO feed for organic livestock and dairy, and brands use only certified organic, non-GMO ingredients.

Q: Is organic regenerative?

A: Yes. In many ways organic is the original regenerative approach to agriculture. Like the regenerative agriculture movement, organic farming principles prioritize ecosystems, using practices that regenerate soil, increase biodiversity, safeguard water, increase climate change resilience and sequester carbon in the process. Critics contend that larger scale organic farming may not adhere as strongly to organic's original regenerative principles. Still, Rodale Institute and the Regenerative Organic Alliance, together with many early adapter and leading brands introduced Regenerative Organic Certification (ROC), contending that being truly regenerative starts with organic.

Q: How is organic climate smart?

A: The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

of the United Nations, defines Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) as "an approach that helps guide actions to transform agri-food systems towards green and climate resilient practices... support reaching international climate goals such as the SDGs and the Paris Agreement." CSA has three main objectives: sustainably increasing agricultural productivity and incomes; adapting and building resilience to climate change; and reducing and/or removing greenhouse gas emissions, where possible.

USDA organic practices support sustainable productivity, climate adaptation and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. By boosting soil health, organic growing methods also improve water replenishment and uptake, helping crops perform better in drought or flood. Long-term studies on organic farming by the Rodale Institute show that organic methods help return carbon to plants and soil (carbon sequestration). According to Rodale, a switch to organic management practices could sequester more than 100% of current annual CO₂ emissions, reversing the greenhouse effect. Additionally, organic farming prohibits synthetic pesticides, including nitrogen fertilizers that emit nitrous oxide (N₂O), the most potent greenhouse gas.



ORGANIC RESOURCES

Organic Farming Research Foundation: [OFRF.org](https://www.ofrf.org)

OFRF's goal is "to advance organic agriculture through scientific research." Working closely with organic farmers, OFRF works to "foster the improvement and widespread adoption of organic farming systems by cultivating organic research, education, and federal policies that bring more farmers and acreage into organic production." The non-profit organization notes, "Through these efforts, we are working to create a more resilient and sustainable agricultural system that values healthy environments and healthy people."

The Organic Center: [organic-center.org](https://www.theorganiccenter.org)

The Organic Center helps food companies and consumers make healthier choices based on scientific findings. The Organic Center "partners with established research institutions, universities and non-profits in the pursuit and achievement of sound science...to empower consumers and help strengthen and expand sustainable farming to make organic even better." Find emerging organic research, plus articles on major benefits of organic growing, producing and eating on the Organic Center website.

Organic Trade Association: [ota.com](https://www.ota.com)

The Organic Trade Association is "the leading voice for the organic trade in the United States, representing more than 9,500 organic businesses across 50 states." The OTA supports organic brands and producers with resources, programs, events, market analysis and advocacy at the national level.

Regenerative Organic Alliance: [regenorganic.org](https://www.regenorganic.org)

Calling on farmers to "farm like the world depends on it," the Regenerative Organic Alliance (ROA) oversees the Regenerative Organic Certified (ROC) certification framework and guidelines. This relatively new certification is for food, textiles and personal care ingredients. With organic as a baseline, the ROA website outlines that, "ROC farms and products meet the highest standards in the world for soil health, animal welfare and farmworker fairness."

Rodale Institute: [rodaleinstitute.org](https://www.rodaleinstitute.org)

Founded in 1947, the Rodale Institute is a nonprofit "dedicated to growing the regenerative organic agriculture movement through rigorous research, farmer training and education." With a focus on organic science (including living soils and organic solutions to pests, disease and weeds) and farmer-support programs, Rodale "serves as a catalyst for change in farming and food production worldwide." Their Farming Systems Trial, which began in 1981, compares and analyzes outcomes of organic vs. conventional farming practices.

- 1 <https://www.nrdc.org/bio/lena-brook/organic-agriculture-helps-solve-climate-change>
- 2 <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcapjpcgiclfendmkaj/https://rodaleinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/Regenerative-Organic-Agriculture-White-Paper.pdf>
- 3 <https://www.nrdc.org/bio/lena-brook/organic-agriculture-helps-solve-climate-change>