

# Making America Organic...One Home At a Time!



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## Food Labels: They're Downright Organic

Utilizing images of a rising sun and of rolling green fields, the packaging of many organic products evokes healthy living, of getting back to nature and reclaiming all that is pristine in the world. But following a last-minute amendment to a routine congressional appropriations bill last year, consumers, producers and marketers of what's billed as the cleanest food available are wondering: What exactly does the term "organic" mean, and will it stay that way for much longer?

According to a statute enforced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, organic animal products - be they meat, eggs or milk - must come from livestock not treated with antibiotics or growth hormones. Organic produce, likewise, can only come from farms that shun chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

But to the organic community, that term means so much more.

"People have lots of different reasons for buying organic," explains Jean MacKenzie, produce manager at the Weavers Way Coop, a cooperative grocery in West Mount Airy, where a full third of the agriculture sold is of the organic variety. "The two most compelling are the health of the body - to not add to a pesticide intake that has gotten bigger and bigger since the '50s and '60s - and then what's healthy for the planet, for the environment, critters and so-on."

Since October 2002 - when the National Organic Program authorized by the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 took effect - the USDA has regulated four types of labeling systems that marketers of organic products can use. A cereal, for instance, can be called "100 percent organic" if it contains solely organic ingredients, or "organic" if at least 95 percent of its ingredients are organic. In each case, an official USDA "organic" seal may be placed on the box.

If provisions contain between 70 percent and 95 percent organic ingredients, producers can specify their organic components - "made with organic rice and raisins," for example - on the packaging. When organic products constitute less than 70 percent of an item, those specific ingredients may only be identified as organic on the information panel of a package.

Non-organic ingredients used in any organic formulation can only come from a National List approved by the National Organic Standards Board.

Despite all the legal minutiae, MacKenzie claims that organic products, in terms of produce anyway, "just taste better, like when you had a garden. They taste like they're supposed to taste."

The stance may hold less water in the ensuing months, according to Craig Minowa, an environmental scientist with the Organic Consumers Association. His organization fought tooth and nail against last year's insertion into the agriculture appropriations bill of legislative language designed to nullify a January 2005 court ruling banning the use of synthetic ingredients in organic preparations.

"It could potentially allow a whole new list of synthetic ingredients in processed organic foods," says Minowa, who is concerned that the relatively small change instituted by Congress - from allowing synthetic "substances" in food production to green-lighting synthetic "ingredients" in actual food products - could open the floodgates to more chemical-driven procedures of food giants like General Mills and Kraft. Those two corporations own the organic brands Gold Medal Organic, Cascadian Farm and Muir Glen, and Back to Nature and Boca Foods, respectively.

Minowa directly implicates Kraft, through its parent company's lobbyist, Abigail Blunt - wife of Rep. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) - with the controversial amendment's passage, which came during a conference session between House and Senate negotiators. Any debate that may have occurred was not recorded in the Congressional Record.

"By allowing synthetic ingredients that are bad for your health in organic foods," which he feels conglomerates seek to do to make manufacturing easier and more profitable, "a consumer can no longer go out and buy a can of organic chili with the USDA seal on it, and feel comfortable," he says.

Holly Givens, spokeswoman for the Organic Trade Association, which represents manufactur-

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### Harvest Blend Regular

- Crunchy Sprouts
- Baby Carrots
- Hass Avocado
- Yellow Onions
- Collards
- Spinach
- Romaine Lettuce
- White Mushrooms
- Braeburn Apples
- Honey Tangerines
- Kiwi
- Blood Oranges
- Kent Mango

See the web site for details on our other options. Produce bag contents are subject to change based on availability.

### OO News

We'll send out an email regarding some of these items soon, but as a special bonus for those of you who actually read the newsletter, you get to find out about these shocking items first. (Everyone now: *Whoooooo!*)

First, we now take Discover card. If you would like to switch your credit card billing over to Discover, call us and we will get that set up for you.

Second, we're continuing to have troubles with our dairy supplier not being able to provide us with the items we've ordered, which makes it difficult for us to fulfill your orders. We hope to figure out a solution soon. In the meantime, unfortunately, whole chickens are unavailable.

Finally, we'll likely be making some minor route changes in late February, mostly in the northwest and southeastern parts of town. Only a few of you will actually switch delivery days, but some of you may start receiving your produce at different times. We'll let you know when this will start!

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ers and lobbied in favor of the legislation, sees things a bit differently. She contends that all Congress did was to roll back the legal definition of organic to pre-January 2005 standards.

If the court's ruling took effect, argues Givens, such "synthetic" ingredients as the carbon dioxide found in soda would have to be banned.

"Our position is that the standards as they were developed over a decade of conversation are what needs to be in place," she says. "The amendment doesn't allow more things, and the approval process of new ingredients is the same."

Industry surveys pin the value of the organic-food industry at roughly \$14.4 billion in sales last year, or about 2 percent of the food industry on the whole, according to Givens. Since 1990, domestic organic food and beverage sales have grown approximately 20 percent each year, compared with a growth rate of only 3 percent to 5 percent in the non-organic sector.

But in the middle of this ongoing debate stands the consumer, who is positioned to gain from the expansion of the organic market - economies of scale will likely drive down the price of such healthier fare, which can fetch in some cases as much as double the price of their non-organic counterparts - but who could lose if the end result is a less-than-authentic product.

## Recipes

### Paula's Collard Greens

- 1/2 pound smoked turkey wings
- 2 tsp salt
- 1 tsp black pepper
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tbsp seasoned salt
- 1 tbsp hot red pepper sauce
- 1 bunch collard greens
- 1 tbsp butter



In a large pot, bring 3 quarts of water to a boil and add smoked meat, salt, pepper and garlic powder, seasoned salt and hot sauce. Reduce heat to medium and cook for 1 hour.

Wash the collard greens thoroughly. Remove the stems that run down the center by holding the leaf in your left hand and stripping the leaf down with your right hand. The tender young leaves in the heart of the collards don't need to be stripped. Stack 6 to 8 leaves on top of one another, roll up, and slice into 1/2 to 1-inch thick slices. Place greens in pot with meat and add butter. Cook for 45 to 60 minutes, stirring occasionally.

### Seven Flavor Beef

Marinade:

- 8 oz sliced flank steak
- 1 tbsp minced lemongrass
- 1/2 tsp peeled and minced fresh ginger
- 1/2 tsp minced garlic
- 1/2 tsp fish sauce
- 1/2 tsp sesame oil
- 1/2 tsp honey
- 1 tsp dried red chili flakes
- 1 tsp Chinese five-spice powder
- 1 tsp kosher salt
  
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1/4 cup thinly sliced red onion
- 1/2 bunch thinly sliced green onion
- 1 cup bean sprouts
- 2 tbsp hoisin sauce
- 1 tbsp ground peanuts
- 20 Thai basil leaves

Combine all marinade ingredients in a nonreactive baking dish for 1 hour. Heat oil in a wok and heat over high heat. When oil is hot, add red onion, green onion, and bean sprouts and sear for 1 minute, stir-

ring. Set aside on serving platter. Add beef to very hot wok and sear until rare. Add hoisin sauce and toss until coated. Add ground peanuts and basil and cook until meat is medium rare. Serve meat over onions and bean sprouts.

### Avocado Buttercream Frosting

- 8 ounces avocado meat
- 2 tsp freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1/2 lb powdered sugar, sifted
- 1/2 tsp lemon extract

Peel and pit the avocado. Place the avocado into the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment along with the lemon juice and beat until lightened in color, approximately 2 to 3 minutes. Add the powdered sugar a little at a time and beat until smooth. Add the lemon extract and mix to combine. If not using right away, store in the refrigerator.

### Crunchy Sprouts With Beef

- 1/2 lb flank steak
- 2 cups crunchy sprouts
- 1/2 med yellow onion
- 1 tbsp peanut oil
- 1/2 cup chicken stock
- 1 tbsp dark soy sauce
- 1 tbsp dry sherry
- cornstarch paste
- 2 tsp salt
- 1 tsp szechuan peppercorns

Rinse bean sprouts; drain. Separate layers of onion and slice into thin strips to match sprouts. Cut steak into slices across the grain 1/4" wide by 2" long. Mix stock, soy sauce and sherry in a cup. Heat dry wok to medium and add Szechuan peppercorns, stirring constantly until peppercorns exude a strong aroma; remove from heat. Crush peppercorns with salt, using rolling pin or blender. Sift to remove coarse pieces. Store in closed jar.

In large bowl, cover onions with boiling water; drain in 10 minutes. Add sprouts, cover both with boiling water; drain in 3 minutes. Sprinkle with about 1/2 tsp. Szechuan pepper/salt. Add oil to hot wok. When oil starts to smoke, add steak, and stir-fry briskly for 1 minute or until meat loses pinkness. Push meat aside in wok; add stock mixture and bring to boil. Dribble in thin cornstarch paste until light gravy is formed. Mix with beef. Pour over sprouts and onions in a serving bowl. Serve.