



Farmers Market Managers: Guide to “Organic” at Your Market

Many shoppers look for organically grown goodness when they shop at farmers markets. To appeal to these shoppers, some farmers are labeling their fare “organic” without knowing the rules attached to that label. This can cause issues between market vendors who are qualified to use the organic label and those who aren’t. Also, it can damage a market’s reputation if shoppers lose trust in how vendors are presenting their fare.

Misuse of “organic” at a market usually happens because vendors simply don’t know about the law. This guide will help you educate your vendors and manage the use of “organic” at your market.

National Standards

There is a federal law that regulates farmers’ use of the word organic. The law sets national standards for farmers who grow organically, covering everything from the seeds they use to the way they handle produce after harvest. These exacting standards ensure the integrity of the organic label, and provide assurance to shoppers who rely on the label when buying food.

A farmer must be certified organic by a USDA-accredited certifier in order to label products as organic. Certifying agents help farmers adhere to the standards, and notify them about changes. Farmers pay for this certification, and deserve the right to use “organic.” These farmers have a certificate they can post in their stall or show you or shoppers to confirm



their produce meets national organic standards. Other farmers who post signs or tell shoppers that their produce is organic can be reported and fined. They might use similar growing practices as certified organic farmers, but by law, they cannot use “organic” to label or describe their produce. The only exception is for “exempt” organic farmers.

Exempt Organic Farmers

While only certified farmers can use the USDA Organic Seal (shown at the top of this page), farmers who sell less than \$5,000 per year directly to consumers and follow all the organic standards—and have documentation to prove this—may call their produce organic.

These farmers must adhere to organic standards and keep up with changes without the help of a certification agency. And, they don’t have a certificate that makes it easy to verify their organic claim.

MOSES has a checklist you can give these farmers to help them know the standards they need to follow. The checklist also gives you a way to feel confident that a farmer’s use of “organic” is allowed by law. It also helps you assure your market’s certified organic farmers that their market neighbors who have “organic” signs are following the same strict rules that they are.

Look for this checklist at:

mosesorganic.org/farmers-market