



# NEWS RELEASE

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## GLICKMAN ANNOUNCES NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR ORGANIC FOOD

WASHINGTON, Dec. 20, 2000 - Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman today announced the final national standards for the production, handling, and processing of organically grown agricultural products.

"This is the strongest and most comprehensive organic standard in the world," said Glickman. For consumers who want to buy organic foods, the standards ensure that they can be confident in knowing what they are buying. For farmers, these standards create clear guidelines on how to take advantage of the exploding demand for organic products. And for the organic industry, these standards provide an important marketing tool to help boost exports since trading partners will now deal with only one national standard rather than multiple state and private standards. I have said all along that we would create national organic standards that farmers, consumers and the organic industry will embrace, and I think we have done just that."

Essentially, the new organic standard offers a national definition for the term "organic." It details the methods, practices and substances that can be used in producing and handling organic crops and livestock, as well as processed products. It establishes clear organic labeling criteria, and specifically prohibits the use of genetic engineering methods, ionizing radiation, and sewage sludge for fertilization.

All agricultural products labeled organic must originate from farms or handling operations certified by a state or private agency accredited by USDA. Farms and handling operations that sell less than \$5,000 worth per year of organic agricultural products are exempt from certification. Farmers and handlers have 18 months to comply with the national standards.

Glickman also announced that USDA will provide financial assistance to farmers in 15 states to help pay their costs for organic certification. The states selected are Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia, Utah, Nevada, and Wyoming. Payments will be limited to 70 percent of an individual producer's certification costs, up to a maximum of \$500.

The final standard includes several changes from the proposed rule issued in March --

- Enhancing market incentives for organic products by making product content requirements stricter before the term organic can be used on the main label, including, changing the percentage of organic ingredients in

**products labeled "Made with Organic Ingredients" from at least 50 percent to at least 70 percent**

- **Providing better information for consumers by allowing manufacturers to state the exact percentage of organic ingredients on the principal display panel**
- **Providing greater flexibility for organic farmers by simplifying requirements for composting of manure and by providing new options for dairy operations converting a whole herd to organic production**
- **Incorporating industry standard practices by allowing wine produced with sulfur dioxide to be labeled "made with organic grapes" and adopting 5% of the EPA pesticide tolerance as the pesticide residue level above which a product cannot be sold as organic**

Consumers will begin to see new organic labeling on products in their local grocery stores by the summer of 2001, with full implementation by mid-2002.

Organic farming is one of the fastest growing segments of U.S. agriculture during the 1990s. USDA estimates that the value of retail sales of organic foods in 1999 was approximately \$6 billion. The number of organic farmers is increasing by about 12 percent per year and now stands at about 12,200 nationwide, most of them small-scale producers. According to a recent USDA study, certified organic cropland more than doubled from 1992 to 1997. Two organic livestock sectors, eggs and dairy, grew even faster.

The final national organic standards rule, which takes into consideration over 300,000 public comments, will be published in the *Federal Register* on December 21, 2000. The rule, along with detailed fact sheets and other background information, is available today on the web at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop>.

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