

How can I tell if it's organic?

So what is certification?

The organic certification program was set up in the 1980s in Australia to ensure that what was claimed to be organic indeed was just that. It required an independent setting of Standards and an independent team of assessors (known as auditors or inspectors) to ensure that farmers, processors and others in the production chain were complying with rules and regulations laid down by the organic community.

Australia does not have domestic legislation for the term and is unlikely to for some years yet, so the only way to ensure something is organic – unless you produce it yourself – is to seek and rely on a certification mark such as the Australian Certified Organic (ACO) “Bud” logo to confirm that it has been independently certified to truly national and international Standards for organic production.

“the only way to ensure something is organic...is to seek and rely on a certification mark such as the “Bud” logo. Ask your retailer if they are certified and request to see their certificate of compliance ”

By reading the label it should say that the produce is certified organic or certified biodynamic. If it is not certified and carrying a logo you cannot be sure that the produce is organic. There should also be a unique certification number for each certified operation, along with a batch code or other traceable system such that each product can be traced back to their point of origin.

There are two levels or categories to certification:

Farmers require a minimum of three years of organic management before they can carry a certification stating “Organic”. There is a transitional certificate called “In Conversion to Organic” which can be borne after the first 12 months of organic production until this three year period is complete. In both instances, foods bearing either label confirm that those products are being produced organically on farm and it is just that the “In Conversion” product has arisen from a farm that has been in the organic certification program and been producing organically for less time.

International and domestically produced products and labels

You will occasionally notice products imported from overseas. Again because of lack of domestic protection and legislation in Australia, it is essential you insist on there being a certification mark on the product. The most likely ones you will come across are from the US – which will have a USDA (US Department of Agriculture), a European Union (EU) logo or reference to the Standard 2092/91 which refers to the European organic legislation, and lastly occasionally a JAS (or Japan Agriculture Standard) logo. These independent logos and standards mean that the product and the producer have been assessed in accordance with international standards by a third party organisation.

So why purchase certified organic products?

Firstly it's the only way to guarantee the product you are purchasing is organic and has been confirmed by an independent inspection process. Associated with the growth of the industry is the unfortunate appearance of a small number of outlets and producers/manufacturers claiming to be organic without any certification to support these claims. Again if in doubt ask to see their certificate of compliance.

Secondly what a great investment in Australia's sustainable agricultural future – which you can play an active part in! Every time you purchase certified organic products you are investing in the future of our country, its hard working and caring farmers and their families. This is a future we can ill afford not to invest in and we have the power in our own hands every single day of our lives to make this difference. If it is one thing we actively and positively do every day of our lives it can be this simple act of asking for and purchasing certified organic products.

