
What is PCC's standard for produce?

PCC is a strong advocate of organically grown produce that is certified under the [National Organic Program](#) (NOP). While we support other agricultural certifications, USDA certified organic is the only one backed by a federal law, setting strong, ecologically beneficial standards, such as fostering soil fertility, crop rotation, and prohibitions against synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. That is why PCC's foundational standard is a commitment to have 95% of our produce department certified organic. We prioritize locally or regionally produced organic crops and are committed to transparency on produce grown using new soilless systems, like hydroponics. We also do not sell any produce that is at high risk of being genetically engineered (GE) unless it is Non-GMO Project Verified, verified non-GE through testing, or certified organic, which prohibits the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and GE breeding techniques. Read PCC's full produce standard [here](#).

What is PCC's position on produce grown hydroponically or through similar growing methods?

PCC is a vocal advocate for growing methods that focus on cultivating healthy soils and [do not support hydroponics](#) and other soilless growing methods being certified organic. The reality, however, is hydroponically grown produce is widely available on the market, and it can be certified organic. Hydroponic producers, however, are not required to disclose their growing method. Therefore, PCC will label any hydroponically grown produce items that are marked as such on the box when delivered to the store. We continue to advocate for regulations that would require disclosing growing methods and create more transparency, especially for items certified as organic.

Does PCC sell any produce that has been genetically engineered?

No. Produce that PCC sells should not be a product of GE. PCC has long been an advocate of non-GE foods and transparency on foods that are made using GE techniques. Fresh produce that is at high risk of being GE (such as corn) must either be certified organic or verified as non-GMO. Ideally, we seek out producers who are Non-GMO Project Verified if they aren't organic, but oftentimes fresh produce does not have third party certifications like packaged and processed foods. In those cases, we require independent testing and verification that the crop is not GE before we will sell it in our stores. For more answers to common questions about GE foods, see the [GE Ingredient and Labeling Standard FAQ](#).

Why does PCC carry some produce from outside the United States?

While supporting seasonable, locally grown organic produce, we also recognize that some foods, especially warm-weather crops, cannot be grown in our climate or can only be grown for a short window during the summer months. And some of those items—such as oranges, bananas, and grapes—shoppers expect to find in our stores all year. We source as much tropical fruit from US producers as possible, but due to seasonal growing limitations or supply constraints, we broaden our sourcing to other countries as needed to ensure we're stocking the items our shoppers want to buy. We work hard to make sure that the majority of our produce, even if imported, is still certified organic. The

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) accepts the organic certifications from some other countries that have been approved as equivalent to the USDA organic program and produce from those countries, [including Mexico](#), can be sold in the US under the USDA organic seal. Organic fraud is a concern, both for imported items and domestic crops, and we do our best to ensure we're sourcing from reputable and trustworthy suppliers. PCC also advocates at the national level for [stronger regulations and policies](#) that improve organic supply chains to minimize the chances of fraud occurring.

Why does PCC prioritize organics from further away over local produce?

PCC values and supports local and regional producers as instrumental to economic health and food security. Organic certification holds a higher priority than locally grown produce for a number of reasons. Current research indicates that how a food is grown plays a bigger role in its carbon footprint than how many miles it travels.ⁱ We also support organic because it is better for the environment and human health in terms of pesticide use. PCC advocates at both the state and federal level for more funding and support to help farmers transition to organic and address some of the financial and systemic barriers to pursuing an organic certification.

Is organic produce completely free of pesticides?

Organic produce is not completely free of all substances classified as pesticides, but the substances used in organic production are significantly less toxic and are supposed to be used with more selectivity and restraint than in non-organic agriculture.ⁱⁱ Organic regulations, with a few select exceptions, prohibit the use of synthetic pesticides like glyphosate, which are extremely harmful to humans and the environment. Many pesticides used in non-organic agriculture also greatly threaten pollinators, which are critical to food production and ecosystem health. The chemicals permitted in organic agriculture are derived from natural sources, such as neem oil—an oil from the neem tree with pest repelling properties that's been used for hundreds of years by farmers to control crop pests.

While organic regulations prohibit using synthetic pesticides, [organic food can potentially be contaminated](#) with them due to pesticide drift from nearby conventional fields or cross-contamination through processing. Some recent studies have found glyphosate content in organic hummus, but at much lower levels in most samples (there were some outliers) compared to the conventional products.ⁱⁱⁱ Higher levels of pesticides could also indicate potential fraud, which is why testing, monitoring, and auditing of organic operations is so important to maintaining the integrity and safety of organic foods.^{iv}

Does PCC sell produce certified as regenerative and is it the same thing as organic?

Regenerative agriculture is similar to organic philosophically, but certified organic produce meets standards laid out by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which is backed by a federal law known as the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA). PCC has been a longtime supporter of organic, because it is backed by federal law, and we have been vocal advocates for maintaining the integrity and trustworthiness of the organic seal. That being said, PCC supports certifications that go above and beyond the requirements of organic regulations and would sell from farms certified as regenerative, or similarly, biodynamic, as long as they also have a USDA organic certification. To learn more, see the *Sound Consumer* article [Eleven Questions and Answers About Regenerative Agriculture](#).

Is organic truly better for the environment than conventional agriculture?

PCC, and many organic experts, firmly stand by the assertion that organic and regenerative farming methods are inherently better for the environment, people, and animals than conventional agriculture. There is robust scientific evidence that continues to grow supporting this position, despite some of the emerging studies that claim to prove the opposite. For example, a paper published in *Nature Communications* analyzed farms that were transitioning from

conventional to organic production and claimed organic to be worse in terms of greenhouse gas emissions because of how much lower the crop yields would be, which would require more land converted to agriculture. Long term studies are revealing, however, that while organic may have lower yields initially, there is no difference in the long run and organic farms have shown to be more resilient to extreme weather events such as flooding or drought.^v Organic farming is better for the environment, and by extension contributes less to climate change, because it fosters healthy soils, carbon sequestration, and biodiversity, and minimizes synthetic chemical inputs (fertilizers and pesticides) that are derived from fossil fuels and, in the case of synthetic fertilizers, are also potent greenhouse gases.^{vi}

ⁱ Christopher L. Weber and H. Scott Matthews, "Food-Miles and the Relative Climate Impacts of Food Choices in the United States," *Environmental Science & Technology* 42, no. 10 (May 15, 2008): 3508–13, <https://doi.org/10.1021/es702969f>.

ⁱⁱ "Wait, Organic Farmers Use Pesticides?," *Rodale Institute* (blog), May 7, 2019, <https://rodaleinstitute.org/blog/wait-organic-farmers-use-pesticides/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Alexis M. Tempkin, Ph.D and Olga Naidenka, Ph.D, "EWG Tests of Hummus Find High Levels of Glyphosate Weedkiller," The Environmental Working Group, July 14, 2020, <https://www.ewg.org/research/glyphosate-hummus/>.

^{iv} Erin Westbrook and Matthew Veenstra, "Avoiding the Aura of Fraud in Organic Certification," Food Dive, November 3, 2020, <https://www.fooddive.com/news/avoiding-the-aura-of-fraud-in-organic-certification/587216/>.

^v Lisa Held, "The Real Climate Impact of Organic Farming," FoodPrint, February 18, 2020, <https://foodprint.org/blog/the-real-climate-impact-of-organic-farming/>.

^{vi} Lisa Held, "Can Organic Farming Solve the Climate Crisis?," *Sound Consumer (PCC Community Markets)*, March 2021, <https://www.pccmarkets.com/sound-consumer/2021-03/can-organic-farming-solve-the-climate-crisis/>.