

## 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 methods. 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.<sup>i</sup> 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 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.<sup>ii</sup> 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.<sup>iii</sup> 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.<sup>iv</sup>

## 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.<sup>v</sup> 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.<sup>vi</sup>

## Does PCC sell produce that is treated with Apeel?

“Edipeel,” produced by Apeel Science, is a plant-based, FDA-approved coating derived from the peels, seeds and pulp of fruit and vegetables. The coating, as well as a version meant for organic foods labeled as “Organipeel,” is meant to extend the shelf life of fruits and vegetables.

To our knowledge and our supplier’s knowledge, no producers or packers in our supply chain are using this substance on their produce. Apeel’s coatings are not widespread in the organic marketplace, so customers are generally unlikely to encounter it when they shop organic. In our discussions with folks up the supply chain and experts in the organic community, Apeel is mostly used only at the request of distributors, and we know that ours are not asking growers to apply it.

Given the low interest in Apeel, we opted to not add a prohibition in our formal standards at this time, as it did not seem necessary. That being said, we’re keeping an eye out for any changes in regulations, usage, or science related to this substance. We would also like to mention that based on our research, we believe much of the information and concerns promulgated on social media about Apeel products are not fully based in truth and are primarily driven by an organization that we understand to be an unreliable source of information. Most notably, the safety sheet being shared online is related to the produce coating, but for a surface cleaner from a UK-based manufacturer that coincidentally is also called APEEL; the substances are not the same product though.

To provide some additional background, the [National Organic Standards Board \(NOSB\)](#) reviews ingredients for allowed use on [Certified Organic](#) foods and works with the [United States Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#) to maintain a National List of allowed substances for organic production. The NOSB looks at ingredients, but they don’t look at products; products are reviewed by agencies such as the [Organic Materials Review Institute \(OMRI\)](#). OMRI reviews products and verifies that ingredients and sources of those ingredients comply with what is allowed on the National List. If a product meets the OMRI criteria, it can carry the OMRI listed label -- but the certification only applies to the intended use.

Ultimately, [a USDA-authorized third-party certifier](#) reviews an organic farmer/producer’s entire system as a whole to determine if both the products and the way they are applied meet Certified Organic Standards. This process is legitimate and rooted in a transparent, democratic public process with multiple steps of verification; it’s what makes Certified Organic the most transparent and traceable source of food in our food system, short of knowing your farmer or growing it yourself.

OMRI discusses its guidelines for what is allowed in fruit coatings [here](#), and added additional specifics after receiving questions about standards and compliance questions [here](#)

While we firmly believe that much of the information being spread about Apeel is potentially misleading and the risk of encountering it may be exaggerated, we are committed to the integrity of the organic label and will continue to monitor this product and any new science that emerges from reputable institutions.

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<sup>i</sup> 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>.

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

<sup>iii</sup> 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/>.

<sup>iv</sup> 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/>.

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

<sup>vi</sup> 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/>.