



Everything you wanted to know about organic

» From soil to food service, **Dr Andrew Monk (the Good Doctor)** can answer all of your questions relating to the practical use of standards in Australia. This includes the widely employed Australian Organic Standard (AOS), owned by BFA members, as well as new proposed base standards for Australia.

Q: Why is additive 160b (Annatto) an allowable additive in organic food? It is well known for causing a huge number of adverse reactions in sensitive persons, especially children (ADHD type reactions). If you wish to know about books and websites providing this information I can send these to you. I do feel that this organisation should be far more careful about which additives it allows in foods, or there is no point in buying organic products. I look forward to your reply.

A: Colours and flavours are allowed in organic foods where they are naturally derived (not only "legally natural"). Certain ingredients are not permitted where known to be carcinogens. E.g. we removed talc as a processing aid last year for this reason, following consumers querying this, and we would similarly remove other ingredients where this was shown to be the case.

Having said this, there is allowance (with clear labelling) for such ingredients as sulphur in wines - even though this is known to be the cause of asthma and allergies in some people (including me!). It is about balancing these issues with the keeping of a very restricted list of processing aids and additives that are functional for allowing processors to deliver foods that will be consumed by the average consumer, while also delivering on expectations of being natural and healthy.

With all the above it might also be advisable to write to the food company in question and seek their views, as ultimately they also make decisions on what works in the marketplace and what is supported by consumers.

Q: I have some questions relating to fat soluble toxins such as PCBs, PBDEs and Dioxins:

1. Are they only of concern in animal fats or are they also contained in vegetable fats?
2. Are they more of an issue in fish? If so why is that?
3. Are organic meat, poultry, eggs and dairy less likely to contain these things?

If so why?

A: 1. My understanding of these toxins is that they bioaccumulate, and also can ultimately be found anywhere (including in our own bodies). Animals are most likely to harbour these contaminants more so than vegetables, albeit not eliminating the chance of that.

2. Yes. Bioaccumulation is the main reason, and therefore animals further up the food chain are more likely to contain these toxins.

3. Yes for a number of reasons. We can never say anything (in this world) is free from contamination due to toxins being inherent in our environment; however the organic industry regulates certified operators both by prescribing third party testing of products while also, where potential risks are noted, requiring the operator to conduct monitoring and testing. In addition there is the requirement for certified organic feed from agricultural sources and prohibition of some other sources of feeds - further reducing the risk from contamination.

Q: Can a bottled sauce or other processed product contain any non-organic GM ingredients and still be certified organic?

A: No. There is a small allowance of 5% non organic ingredients (only where they cannot be sourced organically), however these must be natural, non-GMO, not irradiated etc. There remain very strict prohibitions on that portion of ingredients.

Q: What are ACO (Australian Certified Organic)'s activities and position in relation to contamination/ cross-pollination/ cross-breeding, by GMO's of organics, non-organics, and wild food and other plants and animals?

A: The AOS is quite explicit about GMOs - prohibiting them from being present in organic foods and fibres and

disallowing their use in organic and biodynamic production processes. This will not be changing - even with the recent ending of the GMO moratoria in NSW and Victoria.

ACO, as a certifier, operates on a risk-based management system in relation to GMOs and other contamination potentials. Until recently the main risks have been from imported seeds. All organic farmers either need to ensure that their seeds are from certified organic sources only or otherwise confirm that they are neither treated with chemicals nor at risk of GM contamination.

Now that the pollen from GM canola may well be present in the environment in the coming years in Australia, further risk management practices are being put in place by the organic industry, including identification of known risks, crop management to prevent potential cross-contamination, and where relevant, testing regimes established to confirm no presence of GMOs in organic end-products or on farms.

Dr Andrew Monk is Chair of the BFA Standards Subcommittee and is a member on the Standards Australia organic technical committee. Email standards@bfa.com.au.

All of your organic questions answered

To submit your question for possible publication, please contact standards@bfa.com.au or fax 07 3350 5996. (Please note that in the case of high volumes of questions, your questions may not be answered unless you are a current BFA member).

For further information on organics and to download the Australian Organic Standard free of charge visit www.bfa.com.au.