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## Processed food and the Soil Association - some common questions answered.

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### Q Why does the Soil Association certify processed food?

We live in a processed food age. To only certify food which hadn't been processed in some way would really limit the amount of organic food that you could buy. As the Soil Association is concerned about public health, the standards ensure that the product is kept as near to its natural state as possible. This is because a healthy diet can be undermined by eating overly-processed foods. The standards ban any additives that have been linked with health problems as well as limiting the amount of processing aids that can be used.

### Q What needs to be on the label of a Soil Association certified food product?

Any food product sold as 'organic' falls under the EU labelling legislation (no: 2092/91). This means that the product must have been inspected and certified by a registered certification body. It must bear the EU code number and prefix of that certification body (or the one that has approved the final processing or packing operation). In the case of the Soil Association Certification Ltd (our certification subsidiary) this would be organic certification - UK5. However most companies licensed with Soil Association Certification Ltd will use our symbol on their products as clear identification that it has been produced and processed to our highest standards.

If there are any non-organic ingredients in the product, they must appear on the ingredients list in the same colour, size and style of lettering as the organic ingredients. All labels must gain written approval from SA Certification Ltd before use.

The Soil Association is calling for clearer labelling on food. This will give consumers more information to help them in their buying decisions. Organic production standards prohibit the use of GM materials.

### Q. Why do some organic foods have non-organic ingredients listed on the label?

There are two categories of processed foods that can be given the Soil Association symbol.

- For a product to actually be called 'organic' on the label, food has to contain a minimum of 95% organic ingredients (excluding water and other non-agricultural ingredients).
- The second category has to contain between 70 and 95% organic ingredients. These products cannot actually be called 'organic' on the label, but instead must state "product made with [here they must include the percentage of organic ingredients]% organic ingredients". Any processed product containing less than 70% of organic ingredients cannot be certified, nor labelled as organic or containing organic ingredients.

All non-organic ingredients have to be from very limited lists that are identified as not

available in organic form. As more organically produced ingredients become available the number of the permitted non-organic ingredients will be reduced. Declarations that the ingredients are not produced from GM sources are obtained for all non-organic ingredients.

### **Q Is irradiation permitted under SA standards?**

The use of ionising radiation is prohibited under SA standards. If you notice that some organic products you have bought do last a long time this can be due to sophisticated refrigeration and storage methods. In addition many growers choose modern varieties that naturally have longer shelf lives.

### **Q Why are additives allowed in organic food?**

The list of additives and processing aids permitted for use under the Soil Association's standards is based on that in the EU regulation (currently some 35 additives are allowed, compared with over 500 in non-organic foods). This list is then further reduced by the Soil Association's standards committee who decide on the inclusion of individual additives by addressing the following points:

- Is it absolutely essential to the processing of certain products? (the Soil Association are, of course, keen to encourage the availability of as wide a range of organic foods as possible whilst still maintaining product quality and integrity)
- Does it, or its production process, have any significant adverse effects on human health or the environment?
- Is there a food safety justification for its inclusion?

Our standards are constantly under review by our standards committees, who always welcome our members' and supporters' comments. These are taken into account during each review process.

How can I support the work of the Soil Association?

The Soil Association is a membership charity, we urgently need your support to continue our work. As public support for the Soil Association continues to grow, our ability to influence the thinking and policies of government and big business grows with it. In this way we help to develop a truly healthy and sustainable future. Join us today and help us to continue campaigning for sustainable agriculture and organic food. You can join the Soil Association on our website, over the phone or by writing to us.

### **Further Reading**

Please see the Soil Association website library, [www.soilassociation.org/library](http://www.soilassociation.org/library), for more information

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