



# ORGANIC CERTIFICATION AT FARMERS' MARKETS



## **Introduction**

BC Farmers' Markets play a critical role in linking local producers and processors, and their products, to consumers. Farmers' markets can also provide a venue where consumers learn about a farmer's production practices, and values. A percentage of farmers' markets in BC require vendors that market their products as "organic" to provide proof of organic certification. These farmers often display their certificates and signage that promotes the benefits of their organic operation and products. Consumers and vendors at these farmers' markets can be confident in the market's practices, truthfulness of advertising, and in the organic label. However, some farmers' markets allow un-certified organic producers to market their goods as "organic". Unfortunately, this practice causes consumer confusion, weakens vendor relations, and erodes confidence in the markets' practices.

## **Compelling Reasons for Organic Certification**

There are many reasons why farmers' markets should require certification of all of its organic vendors.

- 1) **Supports a universal enforced standard** – Certification is the only legitimate way to verify organic claims and guarantee the product is organic from field to fork.

Some farmers say that they use organic methods, and feel that they don't need to bother with certification, especially if the farmers' market does not require them to. However, growers using organic methods might not fully adhere to the national organic standards and not even realize it. Some people might think that they know the organic standards, but unless they have been inspected and certified there is no assurance that they comply with all of the organic requirements that support a biologically intensive farming system.

- 2) **Communicates to consumers** – Using the organic program logo(s) is a strong visual message telling customers that the producers meet the highest standard for organics. There are a growing number of well-informed consumers that only want to purchase certified organic products and expect farmers' markets to provide that certainty.
- 3) **Immediate credibility with new customers** – It takes time to build trust in the vendor and farmers' market. Organic certification allows the vendor and new customer to quickly build a strong relationship since organic credibility is a non-issue with product that is certified.
- 4) **Ease of marketing and product identity** – Certification provides a single word reply to the questions "Are your vendors organic?" Yes!

- 5) **Prices** – Organic certification can be used to justify the slightly higher prices that come with increased manual labour and certification expenses.
- 6) **Formalizes commitment** – Certification formalizes farmers’ commitment to organic practices, and by association, it formalize the farmers’ market’s commitment to organic.
- 7) **Record-keeping in organic certification supports success** – while record-keeping is time consuming and possibly painful for many folk, it is not a barrier to certification. Producers who keep good records are good business people, and have greater chances of succeeding and returning as farmers’ market vendors year after year, than those who do not. It reflects well on farmers’ markets to have successful and trusted vendors return each year.

References:

[Vegetable Growers Guide to Organic Certification](#) National Young Farmers Coalition (USA).

[As an Organic Farmer, I Choose Certification](#) Written by Jordan Marr, Peachland, British Columbia.

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## British Columbia Certified Organic Program

The British Columbia Certified Organic Program (BCCOP) is a voluntary agri-food quality program sanctioned by the Government of British Columbia through the Organic Agricultural Products Certification Regulation under the [Agri-Food Choice and Quality Act](#). The BCCOP was launched in 1993.



The ‘Checkmark’ logo is the official mark / symbol of the BCCOP. It, along with the phrase ‘British Columbia Certified Organic’, can be used to identify items produced in BC that contain >95% certified organic ingredients, and are certified by COABC [accredited certification bodies](#).

## Canada Organic Regime



The [Canada Organic Regime](#) (COR) is Canada’s national regulated system for organic agricultural products, developed in collaboration with the government and the organic sector. The [Organic Products Regulations](#) came into effect on June 30, 2009.

Operators who are ISO certified may use the Canada Organic Regime logo on products with >95% organic content. Three COABC accredited certification bodies deliver ISO certification under the COR.

**All organic products certified under the BC Certified Organic Program (BCCOP) are produced according to the [Canadian Organic Standards](#) and [Permitted Substances Lists](#), which COABC adopted in 2009. COABC has its own [Organic Management Standards manual](#) which contains additional guidance on the certification process under the BCCOP.**

***WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO PROGRAMS & LOGOS?*** *In terms of organic production and processing standards, and organic product integrity – absolutely nothing! Both logos mean that the product was produced according to the same organic standards, and was inspected and certified by a certifying body under government regulation. Consumers can be assured of the organic integrity of products bearing either one or both of these logos – absolutely no Question about it!*