

# Certifications proliferating on product labels

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KANSAS CITY — The US Department of Agriculture’s organic seal remains prominent on many product labels, and increasingly, it is gaining company. Other certifications and sustainable promotions are emerging, gaining in sales and becoming familiar to more consumers.

The “little butterfly,” which signifies Non-GMO Project certification, flutters on products globally. More consumers are becoming curious about regenerative agriculture, and Upcycled Certified enjoyed a successful first year.

US organic food sales rose to \$57.5 billion in 2021, up 2% from 2020 and compared to about \$28 billion in 2012, according to a survey released in June by the Organic Trade Association, Washington. Grand View Research, Inc., San Francisco, projects the global organic food and beverages market to reach \$564.22 billion by 2030 by having a 13% compound annual growth rate from 2022 to 2030.

The Hartman Group, Bellevue, Wash., surveyed over 2,800 US adults in February and found 83% said they used organic products at least occasionally and 34% said they used them weekly or more often. The survey also examined other issues. When asked about hydroponic farming, 73% said they already use it, were very interested or were somewhat interested. Other percentages were 67% for certified transitional organic and 67% for regenerative agriculture, which focuses on issues like soil health.

This year's Food and Health Survey from the International Food Information Council, which was released in May, revealed 39% of respondents said they regularly buy products labeled as natural, which led clean ingredients at 27%, raised without antibiotics at 25%, no added hormones or steroids at 25%, locally sourced at 25%, organic at 25%, non-GMO at 23%, plant-based at 15%, fair wage or fair trade at 14%, small carbon footprint/carbon neutral at 13% and bioengineered/containing bioengineered ingredients at 7%.

A US Trend Index from Frito-Lay, a business of PepsiCo, Inc., published June 29 found interest in sustainability issues among consumers who snack daily. Top values driving purchase decisions included snack companies' attention to sustainability practices at 77%, attention to community impact around food access at 78% and treatment of employees at 87%. The poll of 2,200 US adults was conducted online May 26-27.

"Today's consumers are seeking more information about their foods and beverages than ever before, and product packs that include how ingredients are produced and sourced are capturing shopper attention," said Michelle French, director of global sustainability programs for Chicago-based ADM.

She pointed to Nielsen data showing 73% of global consumers said they felt more positive about companies that are transparent about where and how products were made, raised or grown.

"With that, food and beverage manufacturers are pursuing more credentials for farming and sourcing practices they can share with consumers," Ms. French said. "This demand is especially heightened around ingredients derived from natural sources such as plants, fruits, vegetables or botanicals, due to consumers' desire for closer-to-nature ingredients and shopping their values.

"We support our customers in reaching these targets through our ambitious sustainability programs, including responsible sourcing and regenerative agriculture programs. Notably, we work with growers to identify and implement practices that can reduce environmental impact, sequester carbon in the soil and improve on-farm economics and labor conditions."

## **Non-GMO Project growth**

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The Non-GMO Project, Bellingham, Wash., was established in 2007 and has a longer history than some other certification organizations. Over the past 15 years Non-GMO Project verification has grown, now appearing on over 3,000 brands representing over 50,000 products and over \$26 billion in sales.



All Fiberstar products are Non-GMO Project certified, said Tasha Olson, director of quality and food safety for the River Falls, Wis.-based company. Fiberstar recently certified all its facilities as organic under the USDA’s National Organic Program and under the European Union’s organic program, she said, and is in the process of identifying and developing a line of organic citrus fiber.

Fiberstar also is in the process of gaining Upcycled Certified for its Citri-Fi citrus fiber ingredient, a byproduct of citrus juicing that is comprised of soluble and insoluble fiber that remain intact, Ms. Olson said. The process takes leftover fibrous materials and converts them into food ingredients that may be used in a variety of foods, including bakery, dressings, sauces, beverages, dairy, frozen foods, processed foods, meat substitutes and dairy alternatives.

“Because of this, Citri-Fi will be a perfect fit for the upcycled certification,” Ms. Olson said.

The Upcycled Food Association, Greenwood Village, Colo., was founded in 2019 to focus on attracting investments to the upcycled industry, improving the upcycled business network, improving the upcycled supply chain and increasing consumer demand for upcycled products. The association defines upcycled food as foods using ingredients that otherwise would not have gone to human consumption, are procured and produced using verifiable supply chains, and have a positive impact on the environment.

The association launched Upcycled Certified in June of 2021. The mark was on over 200 products before the certification’s first anniversary.

Citri-Fi has been around longer, entering the market early this century.

“Today, the industry refers to it as upcycled,” Ms. Olson said. “It has been a cornerstone of our environmental and sustainability story.”

Regenerative Organic Certified goes beyond organic practices to include soil health, animal welfare and social fairness qualifications. The Regenerative Organic Alliance, which was formed by farmers, business leaders, and experts in soil health, animal welfare and social fairness, created Regenerative Organic Certified in 2017.

“Regenerative agriculture is a new term to our customer base,” Ms. Olson said. “We have seen an uptick in interest within 2022. However, the more removed your product is from the field, the more education on the methods of agriculture and concepts of regeneration are needed when explaining to the customer.”

## More sustainability programs

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OFI, a business of Singapore-based Olam International, has worked with the Non-GMO Project and the Rainforest Alliance on specific accreditation programs, said Shari Mahon, vice president of global innovations – spices for OFI.

*Photo: OFI*

“Including a range of claims can help brands differentiate and provides consumers with the confidence that the company they’re buying from shares more than one of their personal values,” she said.

Sustainability means more than creating or driving positive environmental impact, Ms. Mahon said.

“Consumers and food brands are increasingly looking for a broader societal and social impact such as empowering communities through education and skills development or reducing gender inequality by creating opportunities for women farmers,” she said. “This can include supplying fully traceable coffee that also protects the habitats of endangered animals, improving farmer livelihoods, and orchards with innovative beekeeping programs, or empowering women in traditional growing communities to take on roles previously only held by men.”

Last year OFI partnered with Agri-Neo, Toronto, to launch organically pasteurized dried onions, which may be used in bread sticks or dry-roasted fava beans as well as in other snacks like sour cream and onion potato chips.

Neo-Pure, a process developed by Agri-Neo, is certified organic by the USDA’s National Organic Program and the Canada Organic Regime, Ms. Mahon said. The Neo-Pure process uses organic actives to provide broad-spectrum inactivation of harmful organisms such as



pathogens, viruses, mold, yeast and other indicator microorganisms.

“Neo-Pure is a non-thermal pasteurization process that has been specifically developed to preserve food quality,” Ms. Mahon said. “At a time when wait times and prices for irradiation treatments are skyrocketing, Neo-Pure pasteurized onions offer a cost- and time-efficient alternative, with the added benefit of fully organic positioning.”

ADM participates in numerous certification and rating programs, Ms. French said. They include Fair Trade, 2BSvs, the International Sustainability and Carbon Certification, ADM Responsible Soy, Sustainable Agriculture Initiative Platform, Red Tractor, Food Alliance, the Roundtable on Responsible Soy Association and the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil.

Agricultural practices, particularly for soy, corn and wheat ingredients, help in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving soil health and protecting water quality, she said.

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