

The Difference Between USDA & NPA All Natural and USDA Organic

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The main difference between USDA Organic and USDA All Natural is the area of concentration covered. **Organic concentrates on the farming aspect of food production.** No synthetic (non-biological) fertilizer can be used in the growing of crops. No synthetic pest management can be used on the crops. The soil is also tested to make sure non-biologicals have not been used for 5-7 years.

Organic livestock can only be fed with crops that meet the above criteria. Ranchers are also not allowed to give their animals any synthetic antibiotics or hormones while the animals are being raised. This is where the organic process stops. Once the crop or animal is raised under the above criteria and given to the production facilities, it is no longer controlled by the USDA Organic umbrella.

USDA All Natural concentrates on the processing aspect of food production. The USDA and Natural Products Association (NPA) have very strict guidelines** covering this aspect of production.

First, let's examine the farming aspect of USDA All Natural. Similar to Organic, no synthetic fertilizer can be used during the growing cycle. No non-biological pest management can be used during the growing cycle of the crops or raising of the animal. One difference between USDA All Natural and USDA Organic concerns the growing cycle; while All Natural concerns itself with the current growing cycle, Organic covers a 5-7 year period.

In other words, with USDA All Natural crops there could be trace amounts of synthetic fertilizer or non-biological herbicides still in the soil. Fortunately, these miniscule amounts are measured in nanograms (millionths of a gram) and have not been shown to have any effects on humans. All Natural livestock can also be fed from crops that have these nanograms of residue in the soil.

Once the crop is grown or the animal is raised and given to the production facility, the strict guidelines of USDA & NPA All Natural kick in. For instance, all machinery that touches the product must be steam cleaned rather than cleaned with bleach, as they can be under USDA Organic labeling.

The next major area of concern is packaging. USDA Organic can be packaged in a Styrofoam tray and cellophane wrap. Non-natural paper can also be used to separate items. In contrast, with a USDA & NPA All Natural certification, only natural products, like rice paper, are allowed to touch the food.

Another major difference is in freezing. USDA Organic can be frozen using conventional methods (slow freezing, below 32° F), which allows crystallization. USDA & NPA All

Natural only allow blast freezing, which means the item was frozen at 50° below zero instantly. This prevents crystallization and eliminates almost all anaerobic bacteria (bacteria that do not need oxygen to live) like E. coli.

Under USDA & NPA guidelines, food products must also be vacuum sealed, which eliminates all aerobic bacteria (bacteria that need oxygen to live) like salmonella.

In my opinion, the benefits of cleaning processing machinery with steam rather than bleach, and the elimination of both anaerobic and aerobic bacteria outweigh the nanograms of synthetic fertilizer residue that may possibly remain in the soil.

Let me stress that this is an opinion. One has to choose which is more important for themselves and their families. USDA Organic is a very good program, as is USDA & NPA All Natural. Both have their strong points and weak points. The concept of this article is to explain the programs, highlight their strengths and weaknesses and let the reader decide.

*** The NPA standard for all natural will be published in the spring of 2012.*