



The Cornucopia Institute

Organic Yogurt Scorecard Scoring Criteria

Milk Quality

The most important component of any yogurt is the milk from which it is made. For this reason, the first criteria we used to score yogurt brands is milk quality, as determined by our [Organic Dairy Scorecard](#).

Yogurts that used the lowest rated milk (“one-cow” on the Dairy Scorecard) received zero points. Brands that used higher rated milk received 100 points per cow, up to five-cows, or 500 points.

Brand Commitment

Brand commitment to organics, as measured by the percentage of offerings a brand sells that are certified organic, is important because a brand that is wholly invested in the organic label has an incentive to maintain the integrity of the label. This is not merely a theoretical point – the organic marketplace is rife with certified products that exploit one loophole or another in order to reduce costs. Cornucopia’s scorecards are designed to help consumers identify products that adhere to the letter and spirit of the organic regulations.

The number of points awarded equals the percentage of products a brand sells that are certified organic, up to 100.

Colors

The USDA permits conventional (non-organic) coloring agents in organics due to an alleged shortage of certified organic colors. Cornucopia does not believe that there is a shortage anymore, if there ever was. Yogurts that do not include colors, or use certified organic colors, receive 100 points. Brands that use conventional colors receive zero.

Flavors

As with colors, natural (non-organic) flavors are permitted in organic products, even though organic flavors are available and frequently used by the higher-quality brands. Yogurts that do not use flavors, or use certified organic flavors, receive 100 points, while those that include natural flavors receive zero.

Sweetener

For the purposes of this scorecard, Cornucopia does not take a position on the myriad types of sweeteners found in organic yogurt (cane sugar, honey, maple syrup, etc). We do however believe in the principle of transparency with regard to ingredients and ingredient labels. For this reason, we award yogurts that state the type of sweetener used 100 points. Yogurts that simply list “organic sugar,” which could come from a wide variety of agricultural products, receive zero points.

Amount of Sugar

This is a non-scoring criteria listed for informational purposes. It should be noted that just because a yogurt is certified organic does not mean that it can't include an alarmingly high amount of sugar.

Preservatives

Similar to conventional flavors and colors, the USDA allows the use of conventional citric acid, and the various citrates derived from citric acid, in certified organic products. These substances have a number of uses in yogurt. They can function as a preservative, a flavoring (adding tartness), and, in the case of calcium citrate, as an added nutrient. Cornucopia believes high-quality yogurt should not require an additive to serve these functions.

Yogurts that avoid preservatives receive 100 points.

Pectins/Gums

Pectins/Gums includes all additives designed to thicken or stabilize the product. In the context of yogurt, a stabilizer is anything that prevents the whey – the translucent liquid found in yogurt – from separating, which many consumers find distasteful.

The most common thickener in organic yogurt is pectin, which is typically derived from the rind of a variety of fruits, most commonly apples and citrus. Like natural flavors and conventional colors, the USDA permits the use of conventional pectin in certified organic products. Because it is derived from the exterior of conventionally-grown fruits, pectin can be a source of pesticide residue.

Yogurts that use no thickeners or stabilizers, or use certified organic thickeners such as tapioca flour, locust bean gum, carob bean gum, gum acacia, or corn starch, receive 100 points.

Yogurts that use pectin or conventional thickeners receive zero points.

Synthetic Nutrients

While milk sold at retail in the United States is required to be fortified, no such requirement exists for yogurt. Nevertheless, some certified organic yogurts add synthetic nutrients. It is our opinion that organic consumers do not choose organic because they want processed, synthetic additives, even allegedly beneficial vitamins, in their food. On the contrary, a primary reason for choosing organics is the elevated levels of nutrients in the food itself.

For this reason, yogurts that avoid synthetic nutrients receive 100 points.