



The Cornucopia Institute

Cottage Cheese Scorecard Scoring Criteria

Milk Quality

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

Certified organic cottage cheese that used the lowest rated milk (“one-cow” on the Dairy Scorecard) received 500 points. Brands that used higher rated milk received 100 points per cow, up to five-cows, or 900 points. Conventional cottage cheese received zero points, which reflects the value of even the lowest rated organic milk.

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.

Ingredients

A hallmark of quality cottage cheese is a very short list of ingredients. Additives such as preservatives, nutrients, colors, flavors, stabilizers, thickeners and so forth can be problematic in themselves, but also they can reflect a product that is low-quality, has been overly processed, is designed to sit on a store shelf for long periods of time, or is otherwise cheaply made.

Brands that use two ingredients or fewer (milk and salt) receive 250 points.

Carrageenan

Research links carrageenan to gastrointestinal inflammation, including higher rates of colon cancer, in laboratory animals. Yet it is still found in many foods, including some certified organic foods. Brands that are carrageenan-free receive 300 points.

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. Because colors, organic or conventional, are an unnecessary additive, cottage cheese that does not include colors receives the full 100 points. Brands that use organic colors receive 50 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. Because flavors, organic or conventional, are an unnecessary additive, cottage cheese that does not include flavors receives the full 100 points. Brands that use organic flavors receive 50 points. Brands that use conventional flavors receive zero.

Sweetener

For the purposes of this scorecard, Cornucopia does not take a position on the myriad types of sweeteners found in cottage cheese (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 organic cottage cheese that states the type of sweetener used 100 points. Cottage cheese that simply lists "organic sugar," which could come from a wide variety of agricultural products, receive zero points, as do any brands with conventional sweetener.

Amount of Sugar

This is a non-scoring criteria listed for informational purposes. It should be noted that just because a cottage cheese 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 cottage cheese. 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 cottage cheese should not require an additive to serve these functions.

Cottage cheese that avoids preservatives receive 100 points.

Thickeners/Gums

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

Cottage cheese that uses no thickeners or stabilizers receive 100 points. Those that use certified organic thickeners such as tapioca flour, locust bean gum, carob bean gum, gum acacia, or corn starch receive 50 points. Cottage cheese that use pectin or conventional thickeners receive zero points.

Non-GMO Project Verified or USDA Organic

Genetic engineering is banned in organics. Conventional products that carry the Non-GMO Project Verified label can also be trusted to not contain GMOs. Cottage cheese that carries either label receives 100 points.

Corn or Food Starch/Maltodextrin

This is an informational, non-scoring criteria for those who wish to avoid corn starch.

Sodium

This is an informational, non-scoring criteria for those who wish to limit their intake of sodium

Vitamin A Palmitate

While milk sold at retail in the United States is required to be fortified, no such requirement exists for cottage cheese. Nevertheless, some cottage cheese adds synthetic nutrients, particularly vitamin A. While added vitamin A can be important for one's diet, many people prefer to avoid synthetic nutrients in general. For this reason we list synthetic nutrients for informational purposes.