

## ***Cornucopia Yogurt Scorecard***

This scorecard is based on information from ingredient labels and, in the case of organic brands, a combination of survey responses and site visits related to the development of The Cornucopia Institute's organic dairy scorecard. **The yogurt scorecard rates brands as a whole, not individual products or flavors.**

Our objective is two-fold. First, we want to provide a practical tool for consumers so they can better navigate the overwhelming number of yogurt brands now available and choose the safest and healthiest products for their families. Second, we want to hold manufacturers and marketers accountable for turning yogurt — an ancient, wholesome food — into a convenience/ junk food loaded with sweeteners, preservatives, thickeners, milk replacements, and artificial flavors and colors.

We encourage consumers to read all labels carefully. Many lower rated brands do offer relatively healthy choices. For example, Dannon, the lowest rated yogurt on our scorecard, offers a plain variety with no added sugar, thickeners, preservatives, or anything beyond milk and cultures. This could be a good choice. However, the vast majority of Dannon's offerings need to be closely scrutinized. In fact every problematic ingredient we researched can be found somewhere in Dannon's product line, which is why Dannon is rated so poorly.

Finally, we strongly encourage consumers to seek out USDA Certified Organic products. Organic food dramatically reduces exposure to toxic agrochemicals. In addition, peer-reviewed, published research indicates that organic milk is nutritionally superior to conventional milk, which often comes from dairy cows confined in feedlots and fed a diet of GMO grain. Whether purchasing plain yogurt and adding your own fruits (the healthiest option) or purchasing some of the higher rated brands that include natural sweeteners such as maple syrup and honey, organic is the best choice for your family. .

For further discussion, please see our yogurt report, *Culture Wars* (<http://www.cornucopia.org/yogurt/>).

### ***Column heading explanations***

**Organic Score** – Conventional brands receive zero points. Organic brands receive 100 points times the number of cows they received on our dairy scorecard (1-5 cow rating scale). Studies indicate that organic dairy products offer superior nutrition in addition to lower levels of chemical residues. (<http://www.cornucopia.org/dairysurvey/index.html>).

**Thickeners and Stabilizers** – Brands that don't use thickeners or stabilizers (such as carrageenan, guar gum, and pectin) receive 100 points.

**Carrageenan** – Brands that don't use carrageenan receive 100 points. Research funded by the National Institutes of Health indicates that carrageenan can act as a potent intestinal inflammatory agent causing a myriad of negative health outcomes, including potential cancer.

**Artificial Sweetener(s)** – Brands that don't use artificial sweetener(s), such as aspartame, sucralose, and saccharin, receive 100 points.

**Type of Added Natural Sweetener** – Type of natural sweetener is rated as follows: brands that add food-based sweeteners (honey or maple syrup) receive 100 points, brands that add cane sugar receive 75 points, brands that add agave receive 25 points, and brands that add corn syrup or high fructose corn syrup receive 0 points. Brands that do not add any additional sweeteners also receive 100 points. These scores are based on metabolic impact and the level of industrial refinement/processing.

**Amount of Added Natural Sweetener** – Brands receive 100 points for 12 grams of sugar per 6-ounce serving or less (the amount of natural sugar, primarily lactose, that is commonly found in non-fat yogurt; full fat has less sugar). For every additional gram of sugar above 12, 10 points are subtracted. Brands that include 22 or more grams of sugar per 6-ounce serving receive 0 points. (That’s more sugar than in a Twinkie (18 grams) or in 4 Oreo cookies (18 grams)!)

**Added Coloring** – Brands that don’t use added coloring receive 100 points. Even “natural” coloring commonly comes from industrial food processing operations typically using synthetic chemicals in their production. There is an advantage in eating pure, whole foods with the lowest number of overall added ingredients.

**Added Artificial Coloring** – Brands that don’t use added artificial coloring receive 100 points.

**Added Flavors** – Brands that don’t use added flavors receive 100 points. Even “natural” flavors commonly come from industrial food processing operations typically using synthetic chemicals in their production. There is an advantage in eating pure, whole foods with the lowest number of overall added ingredients.

**Added Artificial Flavors** – Brands that don’t use added artificial flavors receive 100 points.

**Synthetic Nutrients** – Brands that don’t use synthetic nutrients receive 100 points. Minimally processed whole foods, like the highest rated brands of organic yogurt, naturally offer superior nutrition. Some scientific evidence disputes the value of isolated and synthetic vitamins and minerals added to food or consumed as dietary supplements.

**Milk Protein Concentrate** – Types of added milk protein are rated as follows: brands that don’t add milk protein concentrate or whey protein concentrate receive 100 points, brands that add whey protein concentrate (a byproduct of cheese, yogurt, and other domestic dairy manufacturing) receive 50 points, and brands that add milk protein concentrate (commonly imported from countries that do not meet the same high standards as those in the U.S.) receive 0 points. These concentrates are used in some cases to displace fresh milk, economically injuring dairy farmers in the U.S. Sometimes they are used to create “fake” Greek yogurt rather than going through the more expensive and traditional straining process. Other times companies add these materials as a marketing gimmick to boost their protein content.

**Preservatives** – Types of preservatives are rated as follows: brands that don’t add preservatives receive 100 points, brands that add citric acid or lemon/lime juice concentrate receive 50 points, and brands that use any other preservatives receive 0 points.