

# TAKING FOOD CERTIFICATION TO THE NEXT LEVEL: FROM “ORGANIC” TO “REGENERATIVE ORGANIC”



By

Richard M. Blau, Chair  
Nationwide Food Law Group

**GRAY | ROBINSON**  
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

The growing social acceptance of “organic” as an integral component of America’s food supply is undeniable. Organic food sales in the United States increased by 8.4% during calendar year 2016 to reach \$43 billion, marking the first time sales surpassed \$40 billion, according to the [Organic Trade Association's industry survey](#), released on May 24, 2017. The 8.4% jump contrasted to an increase of only 0.6% in overall U.S. food market sales. Moreover, organic fruits and vegetables, the largest organic food category, accounted for nearly 40% of all organic food sales, rising 8.4% to \$15.6 billion in 2016. Organic fruit and vegetables made up almost 15% of the produce that Americans consumed in 2016. Sales of organic meat and poultry rose more than 17% in 2016, to \$991 million in 2016. Organic dips and organic spices, although still smaller categories, recorded double-digit jumps in sales; organic dip sales increased 41% to \$57 million, and organic spice sales increased 35% to \$193 million.

Against this continuing growth in the organic category, sustainability-minded agriculturalists have joined together to take America’s food industry to the next level. A consortium of companies and organizations, including The Rodale Institute, Dr. Bronner's, Patagonia, Compassion in World Farming, Demeter, Fair World Project, Grain Place Foods, Maple Hill Creamery, and White Oak Pastures, have banded together create [The Regenerative Organic Alliance](#). The new organization’s core mission is to develop and promote adoption of a “*regenerative organic*” certification, which will be administered by international certification specialist NSF International.

Regenerative Organic Certification builds upon the near 100-year legacy of organic movement visionaries like J. I. Rodale and Dr. Rudolf Steiner, and provides step-by-step “best practices” guidance for sustainable farming and ranching operations, agricultural transportation, livestock slaughter, and processing facilities that produce food, cosmetics, and fiber.

According to The Regenerative Organic Alliance, the new certification standard is essential to nourish agricultural practices that enrich rather than degrade the soil, and value animals and workers.

Regenerative Organic Certification leverages existing organic, animal welfare, and social fairness certifications, and includes additional ecological land management requirements. The founders' goals include:

- Increase soil organic matter over time and sequester atmospheric carbon in soil, which at a global scale can help mitigate climate change.
- Model high-bar pasture-based animal welfare.
- Provide economic stability and fairness for farmers, ranchers and workers.
- Create resilient regional ecosystems and communities.

After publishing the first draft of the Regenerative Organic Certification framework in September of 2017, The Regenerative Organic Alliance received hundreds of comments from farmers, ranchers, certifiers, and other stakeholders in our agriculture and food system. The organization reviewed all of the feedback to update and refine its certification program. The updated version of Regenerative Organic Certification was unveiled during [Natural Products Expo West](#), which was held on March 7-11, 2018, in Anaheim, California.

Pilot audits will launch in the coming months. The new organization's goal is to have *Regenerative Organic Certified*<sup>™</sup> products on shelves within the next two years.

As it begins launching pilot programs with producers, brands, and certifying bodies, The Regenerative Organic Alliance is working with various outside parties to build educational and other tools to help producers incorporate regenerative organic practices into their operations, and to recruit other brands who are interested in committing to creating *Regenerative Organic Certified*<sup>™</sup> products. The Regenerative Organic Alliance will oversee Regenerative Organic Certification, regularly seeking input from experts in farming, ranching, soil health, animal welfare, and farmer and worker fairness to periodically reevaluate certification requirements and update the certification, as necessary. A list of the Regenerative Organic Alliance board members can be found [here](#).

More information regarding The Regenerative Organic Alliance is accessible online [here](#) or by contacting GrayRobinson's [Nationwide Food Law Practice](#).