

VOA Special English Agriculture Report

PROPOSED ORGANIC FOOD REQUIREMENTS

This is Bill White with the VOA Special English Agriculture Report.

The United States Department of Agriculture has proposed national requirements for organic food products. The proposal comes more than two years after the first federal effort to establish such rules failed to win public approval.

Organic food is one of the fastest growing areas in American agriculture. The Agriculture Department estimates that American farmers sold 6,000 million dollars worth of organic food last year.

Organic farmers do not use chemicals to increase their crops or to control insects, weeds and disease. Many people believe eating organic food is more healthful than eating food produced with chemicals. And people are willing to pay more for organic food products.

The Agriculture Department says there are more than 12,000 organic farmers in the United States. Most of the farmers produce only a small amount of food. However, the number of organic farmers is increasing at a rate of about 12 percent each year.

Currently, different private and state organizations establish organic food requirements in the United States. Each organization uses its own rules to decide which products may be called organic.

The new proposal describes the methods and substances that may be used in producing and treating organic crops and farm products. It establishes rules so that Americans know exactly what they are buying when they purchase organic food.

The proposal bars the use of genetic engineering, the technology of changing the genes of living things. It bars the use of waste products to fertilize organic food. It bars irradiation treatments to kill bacteria on food products. The proposal also bars feeding antibiotic drugs to farm animals. It says farmers must feed animals only organic food.

The Agriculture Department says the new rules will help farmers export their organic products more easily. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman calls the proposal the most complete and strongest organic group of rules in the world. He said Americans will know what they are buying. And, farmers will know what is expected of them.

A group representing the organic agriculture industry welcomed the proposal. The group has sought national requirements for organic food for more than ten years.

This VOA Special English Agriculture Report was written by George Grow. This is Bill White.

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