

CULTIVATOR

20^{YEAR} ANNIVERSARY

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News from The Cornucopia Institute

cornucopia.org

How Cornucopia's Scorecards are Made

Cornucopia's organic scorecards have been used by more than 4.2 million eaters! How do they get created?

We spend thousands of hours consulting with insider sources who trust us and bring us tips, and we are continually building new ties with retailers, policy experts, and organic advocates who are our eyes and ears in the field.

It all starts with the creation of a thorough survey. Questions addressing multiple aspects of organic farming seek to uncover whether a brand merely meets the bare minimum required by the organic rules or exceeds them – and by how much.

These surveys are routinely updated to reflect changing regulations, industry data, expert input, and *your* feedback. For example, our recently updated Organic Egg Scorecard accounts for increasing consumer concerns with the environmental and animal welfare impacts of eggs.

Next, we send surveys to the brands. And we follow up with help from trusted partners across the food system (farmers, distributors, retailers, and eaters like you!), who encourage producers to participate.

Completed surveys fill our inbox, and we go to work fact checking.

If we do not receive a survey, we conduct our own research to



Behind the scenes of a flyover investigation (see p. 4) to observe grazing practices and herd and pasture condition.

bring transparency to agricultural practices and, in some cases, uncover what some producers are actively trying to hide.

Our research is informed by satellite photographs, maps, public records, and relationships. (Off-the-record interviews with whistleblowers and other industry insiders often yield confidential information that informs our ratings but is not shared publicly.)

We operate with a small team, yet our organic investigator can make several on-site visits every year. With your support, we will visit more mid-sized brands in the future.

Often, the inner workings of a brand are entirely opaque. Cornucopia knows you share our belief in transparency, and we rely on you to apply pressure at

the brand and store level to get unresponsive brands to cooperate.

Once scorecard updates are born, we pass the baton to you. When you purchase brands on our scorecards, even lower-rated brands, you're refusing the toxic chemicals that are part of the corporate-owned food system. And when you invest in top-rated brands (*4s and 5s), you're standing up for the paragons of a brighter food future. Your method? Your shopping cart.

**When you can't find or afford a 4 or a 5, a 3 is a solid choice. While they lack the transparency and stellar farming practices of 4s and 5s, these brands are not among the most industrialized operations either.*



20 Years Later: Is Organic Better?



Thirteen operations in Texas produce more “organic” milk than 916 dairies in Wisconsin and New York combined.

A letter from Cornucopia's executive director

Dear friends,

Twenty years on from Cornucopia's founding, the organic industry has aged – not so gracefully. Economies of scale and consolidation of control have corrupted integrity. Big Food had its cut of the young and popular industry from the beginning.

Back then, founders Mark Kastel and Will Fantle were already reading the tea leaves. Our very first web post warned of profiteers looking for loopholes and shortcuts in organic production.

There are now about 18,000 certified organic operations in the US, and organic food is sold in most grocery stores. The *Who Owns Organic?* chart has ballooned and shines light into the hidden corners of corporate ownership. (We're working on an update as this issue goes to the printer.) Thirteen operations in Texas produce more “organic” milk than 916 dairies in Wisconsin and New York combined.

After two decades of observing organic farming, regulation, and greenwashing, we know the effects of government bureaucracy and corporate shenanigans. Cornucopia exists to protect our organic food future.

Organic is a safe haven. For many of us, it's a necessity. People with auto-immune disorders and other illnesses cannot tolerate the pesticide residues and toxic ingredients so often found in the conventional food system. Parents rightly expect safe, clean, nutrient-dense food for their children.

Organic food is existential.

Which is why Cornucopia assembles our organic scorecards and other tools with careful attention, intense curiosity, and 20 years of committed watchdog experience. We out operations for lying and for breaking rules, and we've learned about organic from the best farmers around the country. Many discerning co-ops and independent retailers consult our website to bring you the safest and most nutrient-dense foods when they stock their shelves.

Your passionate support has fueled this movement. Many of you have been our loyal partners since the very beginning.

We are truly in this together.

It is only possible to deeply love something if you *know* it deeply. We – and you – are part of a diverse network of insiders, researchers, and informants who love organic.



Keep in touch, ask questions, and keep fighting to make it better.

For people and food over corporations and commodities,

Melody Morrell
Executive Director

P.S. Why are authentic organic food and farms important to your life? What are your hopes and dreams for the food system in the next 20 years and how will Cornucopia play a role? Email cultivate@cornucopia.org and we'll record your messages in a new video.



Where a 4 or 5 Rating is the Price of Admission

Erewhon, a certified organic retailer in Southern California known for its careful curation of organic food, is hitching its brand to The Cornucopia Institute's Organic Scorecards.

The retailer is in the process of changing its sourcing guidelines for organic chicken eggs; going forward, it will allow only egg brands rated a 4 or 5 on Cornucopia's Organic Egg Scorecard. Other grocery categories rated by Cornucopia's scorecards will eventually get the same litmus test.

As the grocery industry is shaped by an influx of organic food brands, Cornucopia's Organic Scorecards allow Erewhon's 10 locations to retain a commitment to providing "the best [food] the Earth has to offer."

"Cornucopia has a long history of work in organic integrity, and it's something we value a lot," says Russell Heiman, director of category management at Erewhon. "These new standards communicate a level of accountability — that we're adapting to changes in the industry to meet the expectations of our customers."

This past spring, Erewhon launched its private label Regenerative Organic Certified (ROC) Eggs, rated a 5 on the Organic Egg Scorecard, the highest endorsement for organic food quality and trustworthiness. Erewhon's label is a rare store brand that sources eggs from a single entity that is also fully transparent.

Erewhon knows exactly where the hens responsible for those



Is your favorite brand missing from our Organic Scorecards? Ask them to participate so they can be included — more and more retailers are using our scorecards to stock their shelves.

ROC eggs roam and what they eat: a cornucopia of 100 plant species. The grocer believes that its customers should have this same level of transparency when it comes to the rest of the eggs on their shelf.

As for vendors who don't make the cut? Cornucopia's Organic Egg Scorecard shows what it takes to produce the kind of high-quality food that eaters deserve.





Natural Prairie Dairy, in Lake Village, Indiana, as captured by Anne Ross.

A Tale of Two Dairies: O

Dairy 1: A picture is worth a thousand words. Organic Investigator Anne Ross took this one in June. We won't waste your time explaining what it shows. What cannot fit in a single photo are the massive barns full of cows.

Natural Prairie Dairy (NPD) is an industrial dairy with 4,000+ cows, built in one of Indiana's most ecologically significant areas. In a 2019 lawsuit, two environmental advocacy groups sued NPD alleging it violated federal law by filling ditches on protected wetlands without the required permit from the Army Corps of Engineers. The groups alleged NPD's activities threaten water quality and fish and wildlife habitat in the Kankakee River watershed.

NPD has never responded to Cornucopia's repeated requests to fill out a survey.

Through our investigations, Cornucopia offers the highest commitment to organic and



Traders Point Creamery, Indiana's first certified organic dairy.

n the Ground in Indiana

Dairy 2: “A commitment to organic is a commitment to health,” explains Jane Elder, the co-founder and owner of Traders Point, located on the northwest side of Indianapolis. Traders Point is a 5-cow-rated farm on Cornucopia’s Organic Dairy Scorecard. The dairy’s ethos: Organic includes healthy cows and people, but also nutrient rich soils and an unwavering dedication to environmental stewardship.

The herd of 40-50 cows is 100% grass fed. This diet results in milk that is not only rich in flavor, but also in nutrients such as Omega-3 fatty acids.

Organic production is often associated with the prohibition of toxic pesticides, but “organic” requires more of producers and offers more to consumers, including the conservation of natural resources and promotion of biodiversity.

*you real choice, spotlighting brands with the
d calling out those that fall short.*



Why are Ethical Eggs so Expensive?

The simple egg may be the most undervalued food item on the shelf. For the operations truly deserving of your food dollars, the 4s and 5s on the Organic Egg Scorecard, getting those eggs to you requires a staggering level of work and investment.

All organic egg operations promise the use of organic feed, far more expensive than its conventional counterpart and grown without synthetic pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers. By buying organic feed, these operations are opting out of the toxic food system and providing a huge environmental and human health benefit to us all.

Another upright practice that drives up the cost of production is ensuring that the birds have legitimate access to the outdoors, which is required by the organic regulations and expected by common decency.

The very best US egg farmers, the ones at the very top of our scorecard, go above and beyond these basic commitments to raise flocks with a deep reverence for how the animals behave and what makes them thrive.

For many of these operations, hefty investments are made before the first egg is even laid. Typically, they sacrifice the sticker shock of higher labor and land costs, along with the cost of raising breeds that forage well, for the long-term benefit of a healthy, happy flock that flourishes in the outdoors.

On these farms, birds spend much of their lives surrounded by fresh air and enjoying chicken yards that are designed specifically to promote high animal welfare. They have shade, bugs, and sprouts for snacking. Some spend their days in mobile coops that go from pasture to pasture, which requires extra labor and equipment costs. They have space to spread their wings, dust bathe, and behave like actual chickens, which socialize when they have ample space to move. Along the way, they spread their own manure to build the soil, rather than pollute it.

Add up all of these investments and it's not hard to imagine the true cost of a real organic egg — a food that requires immense care for the land, animals, and the environment, yet becomes commonplace the moment it enters your carton.

When you buy eggs from **top-rated organic** farmers, you help small and mid-sized producers survive in a greenwashed marketplace that pretends *an egg is just an egg*.



Photo courtesy of Happy Hens

The laying hens at Happy Hens in Southern California are rotated to fresh green pastures using mobile housing. The brand is at the top of Cornucopia's Organic Egg Scorecard.

How we serve you

20 Years Cornucopia has been advocating for an organic label you can trust

4.2 Million organic eaters have used our scorecards



498k people have consulted research on Cornucopia's website in the past 12 months

50% increase in the number of people who used our consumer tools in the past year



70% of Cornucopia supporters say it is VERY important that they purchase products from independently owned organic brands

992 co-ops and natural health food stores will be invited to partner with Cornucopia



>90% of our supporters have changed their purchasing habits because of our Organic Scorecards

Thank you to our survey respondents who shared information about how they use Cornucopia's tools.

Address Service Requested

As a donor of Cornucopia, you are a valuable member of the organic food movement. We are pleased to continue to bring you quarterly issues of the newsletter as a benefit of your support.

Independence Matters

As champions of organic food and regional, independent brands, **independent retailers and co-ops are a refuge for organic food shoppers.**

Cornucopia is grateful for its partnership with these grocers and their commitment to expanding consumer choice in the marketplace, uplifting their local economies, and sharing trustworthy information about the food system. These partners are crucial to Cornucopia's watchdog efforts, providing eyes and ears in the marketplace.

A big thank you to Kimberton Whole Foods, Cornucopia Natural Foods, Harvest Market, and LifeThyme All-Natural Market. These independent retailers have committed to promoting independent brands in their stores and have generously matched \$20,000 in gifts to Cornucopia to help bring our Independence Matters Project into grocery stores across the country.

Their unwavering commitment to protecting and promoting the brightest parts of the food system is in a class by itself. They exemplify bringing purpose into the profit margin.

Bob Kleszics, CEO of Harvest Market in Hockessin, DE

