

*April 23, 2005, 8:31PM*

## **Finally figured out what organic is? Brace yourself**

**Even more terms are cropping up to describe the method of growing**

**By KATY MCLAUGHLIN**  
**The Wall Street Journal**

Just when shoppers got familiar with the term "organic," a slew of alternative terms have started popping up.

The rapid commercialization of the organic movement has provoked a backlash by some of the very farmers and activists who popularized organic farming. They are trying to popularize other terms, many of which are increasingly appearing on labels and menus. These include "biodynamic," "Food Alliance Certified," "local" and even "beyond organic."

Terms like these were unnecessary when organic first came into wide usage during the 1970s. Then, organic was a kind of umbrella word, covering everything from a healthier diet to commune-style farming. Today, the definition of organic — which, as of October 2002, is governed by federal law — is much narrower. It covers specific chemicals and practices that can and can't be used. Only food producers who comply with the federal rules can call their food "certified organic."

The goal of the new terminology is to describe practices not included in the government's regulations. For example, the Food Alliance label indicates that food was grown on a farm that met with specific standards for the treatment of farm workers, wildlife habitat and pesticide use. Currently, 220 farms are certified, up 33 percent since last year, says Food Alliance, a nonprofit devoted to sustainable agriculture that receives funding from foundations and companies that pay to become certified.

Another term, biodynamic, describes farms that are almost complete ecosystems (meaning, for instance, that livestock animals create manure to fertilize fields, and that natural predators, such as certain insects, provide pest control). In 2004, 150 farms and food producers applied for certification, up from 75 the year before. Use of the term is overseen by Demeter USA, a nonprofit in Junction City, Ore., funded by fees charged for certification.

Other terms, such as "local," "sustainable," and "beyond organic" aren't overseen by special agencies but are used by various food producers to indicate alternative practices.

For definitions and assessments of some of the new terminology online, go to the Consumers Union Web site at [www.eco-labels.org](http://www.eco-labels.org).

The government's rule on organic was supposed to simplify things. But many consumers don't realize that "organic" doesn't indicate food proven to be more healthful.

Some consumers also tend to assume that organic means no chemical pesticides were used. But organic regulations do allow for certain chemicals. Some farmers who call themselves "beyond organic" indicate they use less pesticide than organic farmers.