We are Evernorth, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to creating an organically aligned world.

EVERNORTH
PURITY FOR THE PEOPLE

# The Difference Between Natural and Organic

**EVERNORTH FOUNDATION · ORGANIC LIVING · GUIDES & REFERENCE**

By Victoria Vera, Founder, Evernorth Foundation · Published November 2026

**SYNOPSIS**


- Natural origin alone does not tell us how something was grown, treated, processed, or produced.
- Natural materials are not always one and the same as organic materials.
- “Natural,” “clean,” and “plant-based” do not establish organic sourcing.
- A certification is only as meaningful as what it covers, whether the finished product or individual ingredients.
- Reading beyond the promise on a label, to verified organic certification and full ingredient disclosure, is where purity begins.



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Organic applies to the food we eat, the fabrics we sleep in and wear, the materials our homes are built and furnished with, and the products we use to clean them and care for ourselves. When something is not organic, it may carry synthetic chemicals, pesticide residues, and other contaminants left by the way it was grown, treated, or manufactured. Evernorth believes every area of our lives is as important as the next, and that addressing all contaminants is the only way to make a genuine difference. Doing that can feel daunting, even unattainable. But I assure you, it is attainable. The first step is knowing where these contaminants are found.

**THE EVERNORTH STANDARD**

At Evernorth, we believe organic is best. Words like “natural” are often used in ways that suggest the same standard, yet natural origin alone does not tell us how something was grown, treated, processed, or produced.

We make this distinction because people deserve to understand what they bring into their homes and lives. Organic is the standard that guides our choices and recommendations.

## What “Natural” Means, and What It Doesn’t

“Natural” appears on countless labels, yet its meaning differs based on the product, and even at its strictest, it still does not mean organic. For many of us, seeing “natural” on a label feels like enough. We live in a time saturated with environmental contaminants, and natural origin alone does not mean something is pure. Often, it has been treated with chemicals.

For most foods, the FDA has never set a formal definition. Its long-standing policy is


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only that nothing artificial or synthetic has been added that would not normally be expected in the food. That policy does not address how the food was grown, including the use of pesticides, or how it was processed.

For meat and poultry, the USDA allows “natural” only when the product has no artificial ingredients or added color and is minimally processed, and the label must explain what “natural” means. It does not tell you how the animal was raised, including whether antibiotics, growth hormones or genetically engineered feed were used.

Natural materials are not always one and the same as organic materials.

“Natural,” “clean,” and “plant-based” do not establish organic sourcing.

As always, “natural” depends on the ingredient list.

## What “Organic” Means

Unlike “natural,” “organic” is defined by law. In the United States, anything sold or labeled as organic must meet the USDA organic regulations and be certified by a USDA-accredited certifier.

Certified organic farming may not use synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, irradiation, or genetic engineering, and most synthetic pesticides are prohibited.

On food, the wording on the label tells you how much of it is organic:

- **“100% organic”:** every ingredient is certified organic.
- **“Organic”:** at least 95% of the ingredients are certified organic.
- **“Made with organic”:** at least 70% of the ingredients are certified organic. These products cannot carry the USDA organic seal.

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## Reading a Certification

Purity calls for fully understanding labels and certifications. Look beyond the claim to the standard behind it.

**USDA Organic.** For food and other farm products. The seal appears only on products labeled “100% organic” or “organic.”

**GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard).** For textiles such as bedding, towels, clothing, and curtains. A GOTS “organic” label means at least 95% certified organic fibers. A GOTS “made with organic” label means at least 70%. Look for GOTS certification, and check what it covers.

**GOLS (Global Organic Latex Standard).** For latex in mattresses, pillows, and toppers. GOLS-certified latex contains at least 95% certified organic raw material.

**Useful, but not organic certifications**

**OEKO-TEX® STANDARD 100.** The label indicates that the certified item was tested for harmful substances. Check for organic certification separately.

**EPA Safer Choice.** For cleaning and household products. Every ingredient is reviewed by the EPA for safety. It is a good alternative when an organic option is unavailable, but it does not certify organic sourcing.

## Finished Product or One Ingredient?

A certification on one part of a product does not always cover the whole.

Look at the full ingredient list and whether organic certification covers the finished product or only specific ingredients.

When choosing something new, check the outer fabric and filling separately. An organic cotton cover can still have polyester stuffing.


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An organic outer fabric may still be combined with synthetic layers or treatments, particularly in blackout, stain-resistant, or water-resistant designs.

Check whether a certification covers the finished mattress or specific materials.

Where a certified-organic option is unavailable, look for clearly identified organic ingredients and full disclosure of the rest of the formula.

## Where to Begin

We understand that replacing everything in your home is no small undertaking. Small changes add up over time. Start with the things you and your family use most often, and make changes as your needs and budget allow.

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**Sources:** U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA); USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS); USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, National Organic Program; Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS); Global Organic Latex Standard (GOLS); OEKO-TEX®; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Safer Choice.

About the author. Victoria Vera is the founder of Evernorth Foundation and a research analyst and area expert in how food, products, materials, and environmental contaminants impact human wellness.

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