

What should I know about using salt and preservatives in organic food?

Salt plays an important role in processed food products both for its flavoring properties and as a preservative. For those reasons both salt and sea salt are allowed in organic products as long as the salt or sea salt does not have any prohibited additives. Here we discuss the use of salt, prohibited additives, and answer common questions.

Are additives allowed in the salt I use in my organic products?

Though salt and sea salt are allowed in all categories of organic products, anti-caking/free-flow agents and whiteners are generally not allowed in these products. Common anti-caking/free-flow agents that are not allowed include:

- Calcium silicate
- Ferric ammonium citrate
- Sodium ferrocyanide
- Magnesium silicate
- Magnesium carbonate
- Propylene glycol
- Aluminum calcium silicate
- Sodium aluminosilicate

Makers of organic products must be able to show that the salt does not contain any of the above flow agents, anti-caking agents, or any whiteners. The producer may need to contact the manufacturer of the salt to get a statement of what is in the salt, or may be required to locate a salt that is free of whiteners and anti-caking and flow agents.

There is one exception to this rule, salt formulated with magnesium carbonate is allowed in products labeled as “made with organic ingredients.” However, using salt formulated with magnesium carbonate is prohibited in products labeled “organic” (products containing at least 95% organic ingredients) or “100% organic”.

It is possible that salt could be formulated with an anti-caking or flow agent not on the list above. Questions on other possible anti-caking or flow agents should be directed to a certifying agency and they will evaluate that ingredient.

Can I use iodized salt in my organic product?

7 CFR 205.605

Yes, but organic food producers who want to use iodized salt must submit the list of ingredients in the salt to their certifying agent for review and approval. Iodized salt typically consists of salt, an iodizing agent, and a stabilizer for the iodine.

Note that non-synthetic potassium iodide is on the list of allowed substances in organic foods so non-synthetic potassium iodide could be used to iodize the salt in all categories of organic

products. Common stabilizers like nonsynthetic sodium bicarbonate and sodium carbonate are allowed for use in organic production and could be used to stabilize an iodized salt.

Do I need to list salt in my ingredients or include it in my organic system plan?

7 CFR 205.301

Yes, if a producer utilizes salt in an organic product, then salt must be included in all ingredient lists and profiles, and included in the organic system plan. While it is accurate that all organic ingredient *calculations* must be made with water and salt excluded, it does not mean that the salt is left off of organic ingredient product profiles or left out of the organic system plan. Use of salt must be disclosed to the certifying agent for compliance with the organic standards.

What *can* I use to act as a preservative in my organic product?

Producers looking for alternative substances to act as preservatives are limited to:

- Organic agricultural substances
- Allowed *non*-agricultural (non-organic) substances
(7 CFR 205.605)
- Allowed non-organic agricultural substances
(7 CFR 206.606)

Note that most common food preservatives like sodium benzoate, or polysorbate 60 and 80 are prohibited by the organic standards.

What about sulfites, nitrites and nitrates? Can I use those ingredients in my organic product?

7 CFR 205.301(f)(5)

Sulfites, nitrites and nitrates are prohibited in organic products. Specifically, for products labeled as "100 percent organic" or "organic" and all ingredients identified as "organic" in the ingredient statement, no sulfites, nitrates, or nitrites can be utilized or added during the production or handling process. There is one exception: wine containing added sulfites may be labeled "made with organic grapes."

Does an organic salt exist?

Salt is a mineral, not a product of agriculture, and therefore cannot be certified organic. Something could be labeled an organic salt but that would mean that there were other ingredients in the product that were certified organic, but not the salt itself.

Why are additives put in salt?

Generally, additives are put in salt to make the salt free flowing and to avoid the lumping of salt.

What is iodized salt?

Iodized salt is a common table salt with a small amount of sodium or potassium iodide added to help reduce the chance of iodine deficiency in humans.

If I use sea salt instead of traditional table salt in my products, is there anything special I should know?

No, there are no special considerations for using sea salt in organic products. Sea salt and salt are treated the same.

For Further Reading & Questions

The full text of the [USDA organic regulations](#) can be found online at the U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO) website in the Electronic Code of Federal Regulations (e-CFR).

Specifically, these regulatory sections may be helpful to those with questions about the use of salt and preservatives in organic foods:

[7 CFR 205.600 - 205.606](#) The National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances

For general information about the National Organic Program, visit www.ams.usda.gov/nop.

Further questions may be directed to your certifying agency.

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