



CASEY CHRISTIE / THE CALIFORNIAN

Soonjo and Johna Chung stand near an apple orchard on Johna's Orchard in Tehachapi.

# USDA soon to enforce label rules

Starting Oct. 21, agency to start certifying what merits organic seal of approval.

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Truth in advertising isn't always a sure thing, but when it comes to organic food it had better be the truth and nothing but the truth.

That's the word from the U.S. Department of Agriculture which, on Oct. 21, will begin certifying what can be labeled organic. Until now, there has been no federal law governing the use of the word "organic" and some products currently labeled as such won't be able to use the term anymore.

Most states, including California, are tightening their label rules to mirror federal mandates.

Sam Vorhees, an agricultural biologist with the Kern County Agricultural Commissioner's office, said America's organic producers need to be of one mind.

"This way, if a product says 'California organic' it will have met the same criteria as an organic products from Florida or Nebraska," Vorhees said. "The goal here is to standardize the rules."

A new green-and-white label bearing the USDA initials is the seal consumers should look for when shopping for organic fruits, vegetables, meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products. Organic fruits and vegetables must be grown without the use of conventional pesticides, while dairy and poultry products must come from animals who have been given no antibiotics, animal byproducts or growth hormones.

The USDA will certify that items meet one of four new categories:

- 100 percent organic
- Organic (meaning it contains 95 percent or more organic ingredients)
- Made with organic ingredients (at least 70 percent of the product is organic)
- Contains organic ingredients (though the word "organic" must not appear on the front of the package.)

Vorhees said consumers should remember that a 'certified organic' label doesn't guarantee the product hasn't been treated with some sort of pest-fighting spray. Some organic growers spray nothing on their crops, but many use pesticides developed from natural, rather than synthetic, sources.

"It's a common misconception," Vorhees said. "There are approved pesticides that can be used."

A list of USDA-approved materials can be found on the agency Web site at [www.ams.usda.gov/nop/](http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/).



Apple sauce is one of the items made at Johna's Orchard in Tehachapi.