

USDA toughens up regulation of organic products for first time since 1990

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(CNN) — The US Department of Agriculture is taking steps to improve the transparency and standards for products that are currently considered organic.

For the first time in more than 30 years, the USDA is increasing the regulation of organic products, including production, handling and sales, and putting “layers of protection” around the agency’s organic seal.

“The Strengthening Organic Enforcement rule is the biggest update to the organic regulations since the original Act in 1990, providing a significant increase in oversight and enforcement authority to reinforce the trust of consumers, farmers, and those transitioning to organic production. This success is another demonstration that USDA fully stands behind the organic brand,” USDA Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Jenny Lester Moffitt said in a statement.

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The rule goes into effect on March 20 and those impacted will have a year to comply with the changes.

The Organic Farmers Association is “thrilled” to see the publication of the final rule and believes that the Strengthening Organic Enforcement rule will help provide “a level playing field” for organic producers, Lily Hawkins, policy director for the association, said in an email Thursday.

“Stopping fraud in the organic market and enforcing USDA National Organic Program regulations has long been a top priority for organic farmers. This long awaited new rule is something that we have advocated for for years,” Hawkins said in the email.

“When cheaply produced products are fraudulently sold as organic, it undermines consumer confidence in the organic label and harms organic farmers who are doing things the right way,” she added. “This rule is a crucial step to protect organic producers and consumers who pay a premium for organic products.”