

GET THE FACTS

ABOUT ORGANICS IN ALBERTA



LET'S TALK ABOUT CERTIFIED ORGANIC TURKEY

The Christmas season comes with many decisions. What colour scheme of ornaments should we use on the tree? Which box of chocolates will Aunt Ruth like best? And perhaps most importantly, what kind of turkey should we buy for Christmas dinner?

It's official: Canadians love eating turkey for Christmas dinner. According to the [Turkey Farmers of Canada](#), 2.4 million whole turkeys were purchased in Canada during the Christmas season of 2018. That's equivalent to 39% of all turkeys sold in Canada in 2018.

With all this buzz around Christmas turkeys, there are plenty of options when it comes to buying one. You can head to your local grocery store and pick up a frozen one, or visit a butcher shop or market to find farm-fresh turkeys. And of course, you could look for a Canada organic turkey at any of those places.

No matter which type you choose, it's great to know what "organic" means when it comes to turkey. And what would an article about turkey dinner be without a few [cooking tips and tricks](#) for roasting your turkey to perfection this Christmas season?

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH ORGANIC TURKEYS?

When it comes to organic turkeys, a few questions always come up around the holidays:

- Do organic turkeys taste better? Are they easier to cook?

- How can you tell if a turkey is organic and where can you find one?
- Are organic turkeys raised differently than conventional turkeys? Does it matter?
- Are organic turkeys raised differently than other organic poultry?

Let's get the facts, and learn the answers to all these questions and more!

DO ORGANIC TURKEYS TASTE BETTER? ARE THEY EASIER TO COOK?

Some organic turkey fans say organic turkeys taste better, but there aren't any scientific studies to back it up. Fresh or frozen, conventional or organic – the taste test is up to you!

Another common thought is that organic turkeys are easier to cook because they tend to contain less water than your typical frozen turkey from the grocery store. This can be true of both organic and conventional unfrozen turkeys and allows you to nicely roast (or brown) the outside of the turkey, while leaving the inner meat nice and moist.

Not sure how to cook your turkey? The Turkey Farmers of Canada have a great [Whole Turkey Calculator](#) tool to help you cook your turkey to perfection.

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF A TURKEY IS ORGANIC AND WHERE CAN YOU FIND ONE?

Typically, organic poultry products are well-stocked and well-marked on shelves at grocery stores, butcher shops, or markets – especially at Christmas. You can be certain the turkey you're buying is organic if you find the Canada organic logo on a turkey's packaging. You may also find provincial organic logos alongside the national logo.



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Some other labels you might see include “free-range,” “humanely raised,” or “antibiotic-free.” These options are not necessarily better or worse than organically labeled turkeys, but it is important to note that only turkeys with the Canada organic logo have been raised according to the organic standards, which include minimum space requirements, care, feeding, transport, and slaughter regulations that are audited by a third party certifying body each year.

ARE ORGANIC TURKEYS RAISED DIFFERENTLY THAN CONVENTIONAL TURKEYS? DOES IT MATTER?

In line with the organic regulations in Canada, organic turkeys are:

- Not given antibiotics
- Fed an organic mix of grain and vegetable matter on a daily basis
- Raised in spacious shelters or barns according to specific safety guidelines and stocking allowances (i.e. a certain number of birds per metre)
- Allowed to freely roam and graze in outdoor exercise areas (when weather and ground conditions permit)
- Transported and slaughtered according to humane animal practices outlined in the standards

Many conventional farmers choose to raise their turkeys under similar conditions. For example, Canada has not allowed the use of added hormones in any poultry – conventional or organic – [since 1963](#). Additionally, all Canadian poultry follows strict guidelines to prevent antibiotic residue in meat and other poultry products.

So, what’s the difference?

The main difference between conventional and organic turkeys is that Certified Canadian Organic turkeys have had their living and processing conditions audited by a professional certifying body. No matter which type of turkey you choose, you’ll have a delicious and safe meal to share with family on Christmas day (and maybe even [leftovers to use in a few unique recipes](#)).

ARE ORGANIC TURKEYS RAISED DIFFERENTLY THAN OTHER ORGANIC POULTRY?

In most cases, the Canadian organic regulations treat all poultry similarly, including chickens, geese, ducks, and turkeys. However, there are a few specific differences. Most of them are practical. For example, turkeys grow to be larger than chickens, so they need more room and larger outdoor access doors (also known as popholes).

Other details vary when it comes to turkeys. For example, chickens need to be given outdoor access 25 days after hatching, whereas turkeys need outdoor access by at least 8 weeks of age.

There are organic poultry farms that raise different flocks of birds – some of which are organic and some of which aren’t. In this case, farmers have to separate the flocks so they are raised and processed completely separately. This helps ensure organic turkeys are raised according to the organic standards in Canada.

It’s also important to consider that turkeys are often produced seasonally. They’re raised in greater numbers closer to occasions like Thanksgiving and Christmas. Organic farmers that produce seasonally still have to meet all of the basic organic standards for space, housing, and care. In many cases, farmers will create a ‘winter garden’ for their flock, which is essentially a screened shelter that allows birds outdoor access year-round, but protects them from snow and inclement weather.

WHERE CAN YOU BUY AN ORGANIC TURKEY FOR CHRISTMAS?

If you’re interested in trying an organic turkey this Christmas, there are plenty of places to find fresh, organic turkeys in Alberta. Ask the meat department in your local grocery store, visit a butcher shop, or check out the many all-season farmers markets in Alberta to find an organic turkey. And remember to check for the Canada organic logo! Happy Holidays!

WAYS TO LEARN MORE

Do you want to learn more about what organically-grown means in Alberta? Would you value monthly updates on Alberta’s local organic sector – including legislation, farming practices, genetically modified organism (GMO) regulation, and more? Now you can receive it the way you want to:

- By Email – become a [member](#) of Organic Alberta and we’ll deliver our latest article directly into your inbox.
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