

8. Certified Organic Processing and Handling in British Columbia

Information on certified organic processing and handling enterprises in British Columbia was obtained from the certifiers, from the certifier websites, and personal communications with processors. Fifteen certifiers reported processing and handling operations in British Columbia; PACS and QAI had the most clients followed by PROCERT and FVOPA (see Appendix 1 for listing of CBs). Only 18 enterprises are certified by regionally accredited CBs. Numbers of certified enterprises increased by 42% from 2003 to 2004; and by 29% from 2004 to 2005.

The processing category includes a wide range of enterprises carrying out many different roles in the industry such as: on-farm processing of farm products; companies manufacturing organic products from raw or processed ingredients; and custom processing/packaging operations. The handler category includes distributors, brokers, traders and egg graders. Additionally, some facilities are dedicated to organic product lines, whereas others process or handle conventional products in addition to organic products.

While farmers will often indicate that there is a lack of a processing market for their organic produce, many food processors will indicate that there is a lack of a stable, consistent supply of local ingredients. The volumes required by processors are often very large and needed on a regular basis. Large manufacturers of certified organic food products typically source raw ingredients from outside the province, in the prairies and eastern Canada, the US, and Latin America. Large processors will sometimes actively recruit new growers who can supply them with consistent volumes of uniform, quality ingredients. Some processors do purchase products from British Columbia producers (such as several fruit crops, green beans, grains, and second grade vegetables); however, this represents a very small portion of the total volume of organic products processed in the province. On-farm food processors utilize smaller volumes; however, products from their own farms typically supply these operations.

Organic Standards for Processing Food

All organic standards require a processed food product to contain at least 95% certified organic ingredients for it to be labeled organic. When non-organic ingredients are used, processors must prove that organic alternatives were not available. Products with 70-95% certified organic ingredients may be labeled as containing organic ingredients and products with less than 70% organic ingredients may only indicate the organic status of its specific ingredients on the ingredient list.

The integrity of organic food products must be maintained from the farm to the consumer. In order to certify that a food product is organic at the retail level, processors, packers, manufacturers, handlers, and distributors must adhere to a program as detailed and verifiable as that required of farmers. Certified organic processors are required to develop annual production plans from the receipts of raw material to the release of product, which includes a transparent audit trail of: inputs, materials processes, decontamination processes and monitoring, sanitation practices, packaging, storage, and product identification. Irradiation and GE ingredients are prohibited in certified organic food processing.

Non-certified co-processors may be used by certified organic producers or processors in the manufacturing of organic products, provided the licensee submits an application to their CB with the information required for certification, and arranges for access to the facility for an organic verification officer.

Table 8.1 Certified Organic Processing and Handling in British Columbia - 2005

Total Enterprises		Processor/ Manufacturer	Seed/Feed	Handlers	Retail
2004	2005				
124	160	98	5	56	0

Table 8.2 Types of Processors and Handlers in British Columbia – 2004

Product Type	# of Enterprises
Dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt, butter, ice cream)	7
Milling, grains and flours	5
Breads & baked goods, breakfast cereals, waffles	6
Pastas	1
Soy products	6
Misc. Fruit and vegetable products	3
Jams/jellies/pickles	3
Oils & nut butters	6
Juice, smoothies & fruit concentrates	3
Coffee roasters	4
Rice cakes	2
Chocolate	2
Baby foods	1
Brewery	2
Meat/slaughter/cut & wrap	2
Nuts (drying/cracking)	2
Body care products	1
Handler/distributor	
Fruit (packer/handler/broker)	11
Vegetable (packer/handler)	2
Egg grading	5
Milk - bulk tank/hauler	2
Food Distributor	3
Teas (packaging & distribution)	2
Traders (grains, chocolate & wild blueberries)	3

The numbers shown in Table 8.2 add up to less than the total in Table 8.1 as some CBs did not identify operations by type. A list of certified organic processors and handlers in British Columbia is included in [Appendix 2](#).