

THE RESTRICTED ORGANIC TOOLBOX

Every household needs a good toolbox and a well-stocked first aid kit to deal with unexpected challenges that can't be handled in the usual way. And so it is with organic agriculture.

Many consumers believe that absolutely no synthetic substances are used in organic production. For the most part, they are correct and this is the basic tenet of the organic law. But there are a few limited exceptions to this rule, and the National List is designed to handle these exceptions. The National List can be thought of as the "restricted tool box" for organic farmers and handlers. Like the toolboxes or first aid kits in our cupboards to deal with critical situations when all else fails, the organic toolbox is to be used only under very special circumstances.

The organic farmer's toolbox contains materials that have been traditionally used in organic production. By law, they are necessary tools that are widely recognized as safe and for which there are no natural alternatives. This toolbox is much smaller than the "full-toolbox" used in conventional farming.

Organic farmers have restricted access to 27 synthetic active pest control products while over 900 are registered for use in conventional farming.

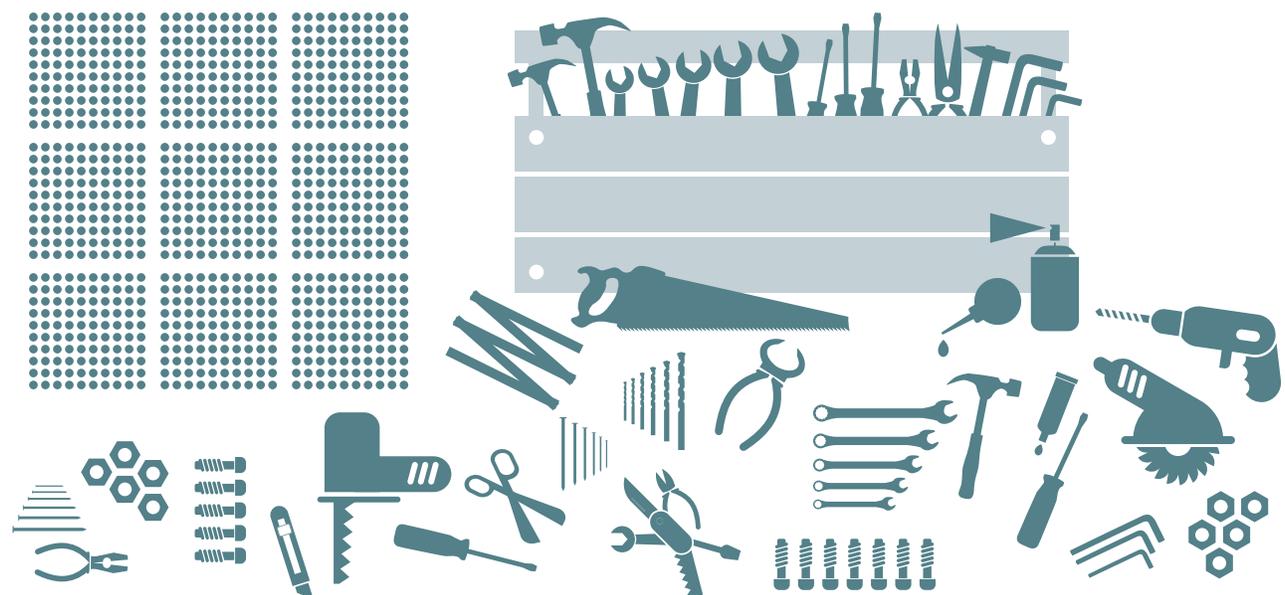
How do the synthetic pest control products allowed in organic farming compare to the pesticides allowed in conventional farming?

27 synthetic active pest control products allowed in organic crop production



The organic farmer must first use mechanical, cultural, biological and natural materials and move onto the toolbox only when and if they don't work. In this way the toolbox is "restricted."

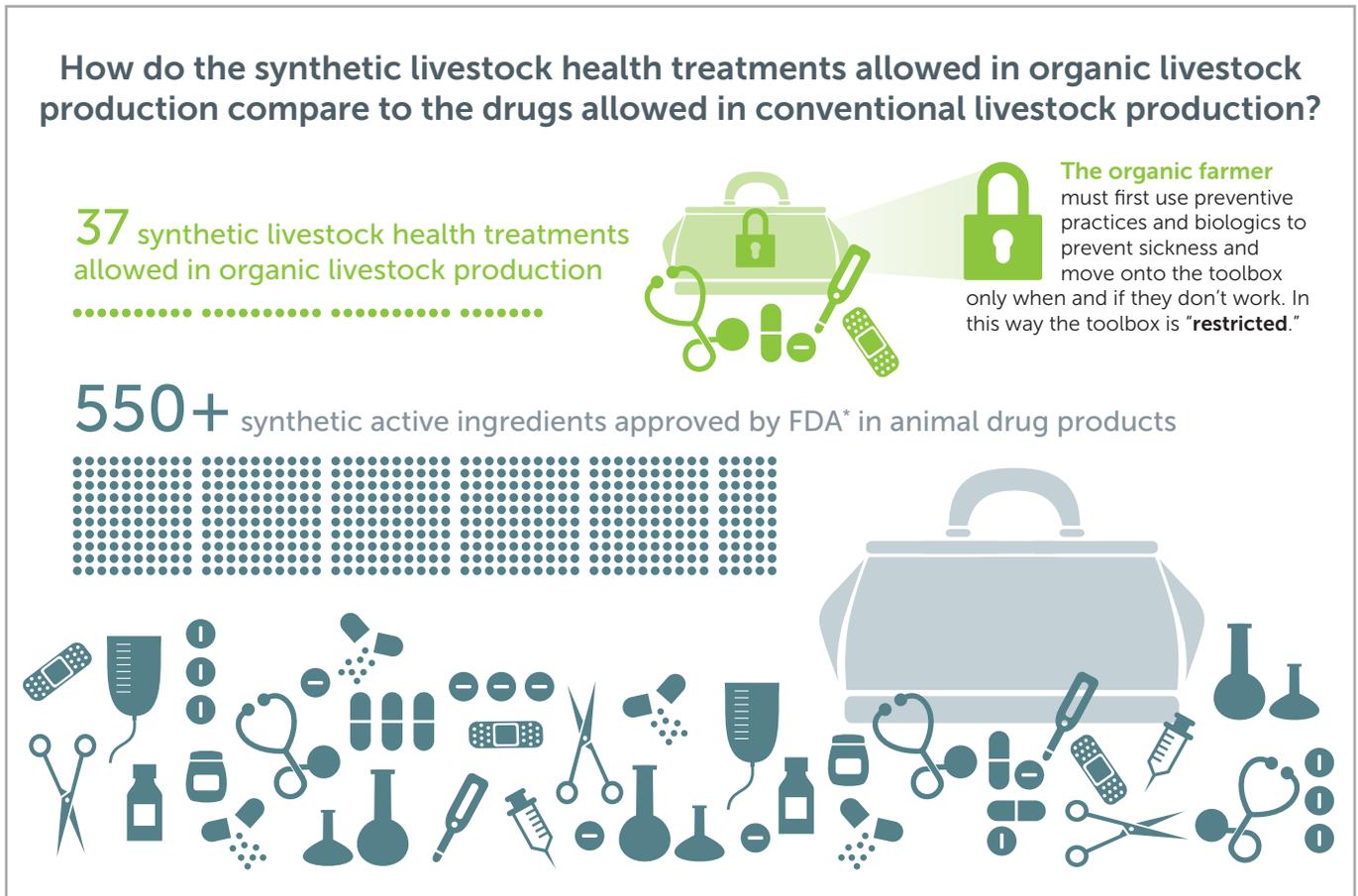
900+ synthetic active pesticide products registered for use in conventional farming by EPA*



*Ware, George W and Whitacre, David M. The Pesticide Book 6th Edition. 2004

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Organic ranchers have restricted access to 37 synthetic livestock health treatments, while over 550 synthetic active ingredients are approved in conventional animal drug products.



*FDA Approved Animal Drug Products (Green Book)

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Before organic farmers can use any of these substances, however, they must develop a pest and disease management plan that describes how they will first prevent and manage pests without the use of National List inputs.

The restricted toolbox can only be opened when mechanical, cultural, and biological controls are insufficient to control pests, weeds and disease. This is foundational to organic farming.

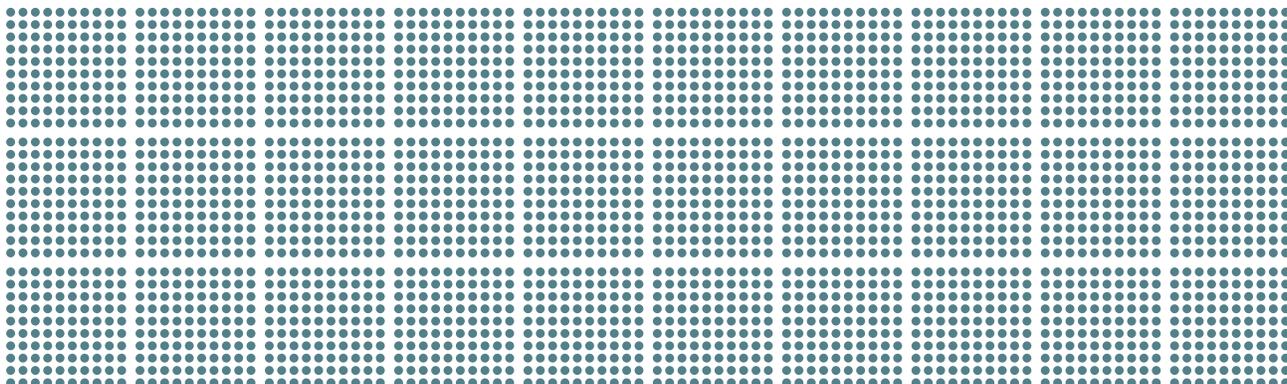
The National List is also designed to cover the up to 5% non-organic minor ingredients allowed in organic food processing. These ingredients are essential in organic food processing but difficult or impossible to obtain in organic form, either because the supply is very limited or the ingredient is a non-agricultural, like baking soda, and cannot be certified organic. A total of 67 non-agricultural minor ingredients are allowed in an organic processor's "pantry," while the conventional food processor's pantry is bulging with more than 3,000 total allowed substances.

How do the materials allowed in organic processed foods compare to the materials allowed in all other food?

67 non-agricultural minor ingredients allowed in organic processing



3000+ substances comprise Everything Added to Food in the United States (EAFUS)



Compared to the 67 non-agricultural minor ingredients allowed in organic processing, more than 3,000 total substances comprise an inventory often referred to as Everything Added to Food in the United States (EAFUS), and this is only a partial list of all food ingredients that may be lawfully added to conventional food.

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The restricted toolbox used in organic production and handling represents the best and least-toxic technology our food system has developed.

NOSB regularly reviews the tools in the organic toolbox to assure they still meet the organic criteria set forth in the law. Under the rigorous Sunset process, NOSB and organic stakeholders review the contents of the toolbox every five years to make sure that organic's allowed tools continue to be safe for humans, safe for the environment, and necessary because of the lack of natural or organic alternatives. There is no other regulation like this in the world.

Now more than ever, organic agricultural practices are needed on more acres to address significant environmental challenges for our planet. Now more than ever, the supply of organic ingredients, particularly grains and animal feed, is falling behind consumer demand. We face the dual challenges of encouraging more farmers to convert to organic and making our food production more sustainable. NOSB's challenge is to protect the integrity of organic, while at the same time providing producers and handlers with enough flexibility to allow them to comply with organic standards and to also expand organic acreage.

Like the toolboxes and first aid kits of households that are prepared for unexpected emergencies should they arise, the organic toolbox provides the tools to safely meet the challenges of today's organic world.