

more for the vinegar but it delivers so much more flavor. If we didn't have a taste steward on board or someone working with our buyers to get the flavor we wanted, conventional wisdom would have led us to a cheaper selection, but it wouldn't have delivered the desired flavor, and we know that flavor is what will bring consumers back to the brands we produce.

If you can't afford to visit farms during your selection process, talk to potential suppliers on the phone, visit their websites, invite them to your plant or meet with them at All Things Organic and Natural Foods Product Expo. When you start asking questions the suppliers who don't have the right answers will disappear and the ones who deserve your business will remain.

Recipe Synergy

Assuming you have chosen the most flavorful ingredients, now you need to formulate them in a way that maximizes and stabilizes the flavor and shelf life of the end product.

A Mercedes and a Chevy are both made with glass and metal, but driving the Mercedes is a much nicer experience. Recipes are no different. You need a skilled flavor designer who can integrate and balance the ingredients in a formula that's not too sweet, too tart, or too spicy. They need to create a product that doesn't just look good: it also has to excite the palette without overwhelming it. It has to taste as good as it is for you.

To achieve that synergy no single ingredient can overshadow everything else in the formula. In a lime cilantro dressing for example, you don't want the cilantro too strong or the lime too sharp. When balanced, lime and

cilantro marry beautifully together in a flavor profile that's not really lime or cilantro but an entirely new offspring of the two ingredients. Good designers will have some basic ideas or parameters to start with. For example, if they are making a salad dressing, they know where they want the pH to be, how much oil is needed, and what kinds of herbs and spices they want. That's the skeleton of a formula. From there, they experiment to find the best final taste profile.

To hone our recipes down to the perfect mix, we do a lot of subjective taste tests with customers—especially children who are brutally honest about how they experience new tastes. We offer them samples of each sample batch and encourage them to give us tons of feedback. Sometimes we redo a recipe over and over until everyone we give it to says "Wow!"

Natural Preservatives for Enhanced Flavor

Once you have that perfect formula you need to stabilize it in a way that will maintain its rich flavor within a reasonable shelf life. Organic processors are continually challenged to create organic recipes that hold onto flavor and freshness without the support of additives and synthetic flavor boosters. You can't use artificial preservatives to battle the impact of product degradation and ambient *lactobacillus*, and the herbs and spices can't be fumigated or nuked so you have inherently higher bacteria counts to deal with.

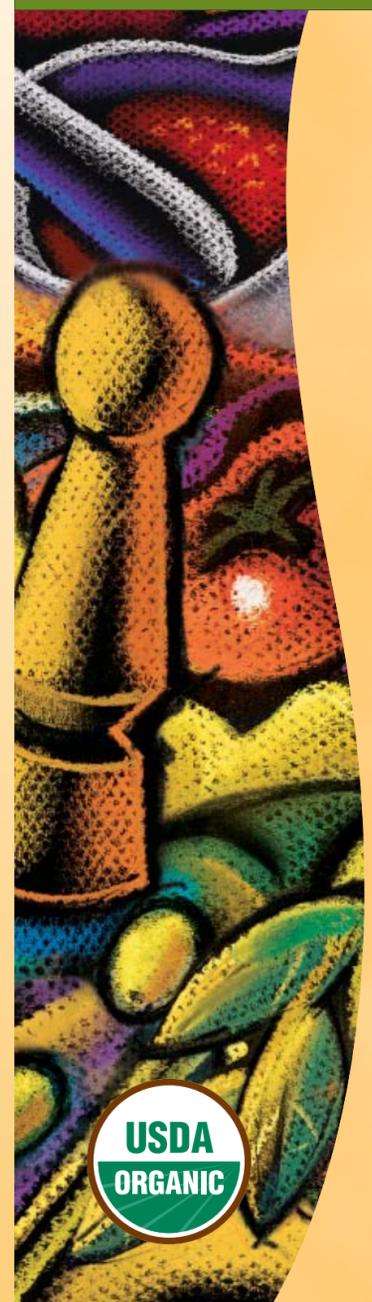
You've got to come at this process in a natural way that reduces microbes and enhances flavor. That may mean working in smaller batches so that

products are fresher and sent to market sooner. And it means finding natural elements that can maintain your product's flavor integrity.

The most effective method is through the use of natural antioxidants such as rosemary extract, one of the most powerful antioxidants in the vegetable kingdom. It reduces microbial activity without chemicals and preserves products like oils and salad dressings naturally while enhancing their flavors. There are also citrus extracts, and ingredients such as garlic that do double duty—adding flavor and preserving freshness.

The point is that you need to get back to basics. Organic should be synonymous with real gourmet. From the growers to the chefs, truly organic people are passionate about what they do. They are committed to great taste and they will be the ones who win the hearts of mainstream consumers, giving them earth-friendly products that taste better than their contemporary chemical-laden counterparts. ■

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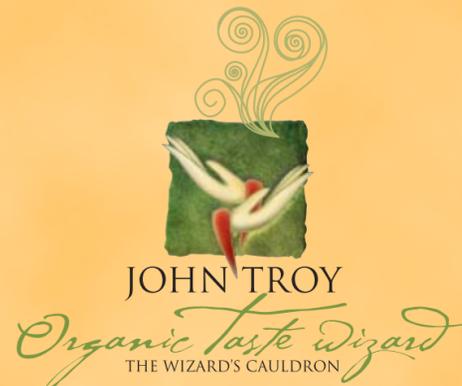


THE Wizard's CAULDRON IS...

a reliable source
for your store brand, private label or proprietary brands of organic dressings, sauces and condiments.

John Troy, the Organic Taste Wizard is an organic product developer and Tastemaker. He designs and crafts superior flavor profiles for your new product offerings.

The Wizard vertically integrates your new organic products with innovative production methods, packaging and fulfillment. The result is an attractive product offering that tastes as good as it is for you



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Organic Processing

Strategies for Best Practices in Food, Fiber and Personal Care

Spice Up Sales With Great Flavor

Simple Steps to Sanitation

Nature's Path to Cereal Success

Is Your Company Certifiable?

In Good Taste

How to Develop Flavorful Organic Foods

By John "The Wizard" Troy



Picture a loaf of organic wheat bread sitting on a store shelf. The package is emblazoned with a label that declares it "100 percent organic" and a list of healthy non-toxic ingredients. On the back is a picture of a smiling family having a picnic in a wheat field, lit golden under the fire of a setting sun. It's an alluring marketing effort that may well cause consumers to buy it—once. But if with the first bite of their healthy organic sandwich they realize what they actually bought tastes more like a barn floor than a tasty bread, there won't be a second purchase.

It's a problem that stems in part from stereotypes and in part from actual experience. Mainstream consumers may be intrigued by the idea of genetic integrity, soil conservation and the organic certification process. They may want to save the earth and eliminate pesticides from their food—but only if the products they buy taste good. It

doesn't matter that a product is loaded with genetic integrity, that it's made by artisans and is organically sound. Sexy packaging and earth-friendly promises may capture their attention, but to keep them coming back for more you need to win their loyalty with exceptional flavor.

Yet the organic industry seems to have forgotten that vision. In their quest to infiltrate the mainstream with mass-produced organic products many producers have lost sight of the fact that flavor is the most important feature of any food product. Mired in the battle to control costs they are making ingredient selec-

tions and formulas based on price not quality, which is the death knell for an organic product.

Begin At the Source

Building a tasty organic product isn't easy. There are a few organic ingredients, such as traditional soy or vanilla (see box, p. 26) that will enhance the flavor of a recipe, but for the most part, to get great taste you need good, fresh, wholesome ingredients. If you are making a ginger soy sauce you have to load it with freshly grated ginger. A Caesar dressing needs rich flavorful Romano cheese to give it the strong cheese notes that makes it distinctive. Since you can't use artificial preservatives or flavor enhancers and organic raw materials typically cost more than their mainstream counterparts, balancing taste and price is an ongoing challenge for organic producers. But, if the goal is to generate demand for your products on a large scale, taste has to be your ultimate focus.

Don't make the error of diluting your product with mediocre-tasting ingredients trying to meet price points. Taste begins with the ingredients you select. Fortunately, most organic ingredients have a fuller taste than non-organic because they simply have more nutrients. Even so, there is a broad range of flavors and freshness among organic products, depending on where you get them, how old they are and how they were handled.

Don't assume that because a company is an organic supplier that their products are top notch. There are artisans throughout the organic system who deliver wonderful, delicious ingredients but there are also those

only in it for the money, who sell stale or lower-quality products. It's easy to fall into the habit of buying the lowest price materials without determining whether they are the best tasting, but in the end it will actually cost you more. If you buy pepper that has no bite, chilies that have no heat, or spices that taste like sawdust, they will cost less but they deliver little for the price. You'll end up using more ingredients to reach your desired flavor and you still won't achieve a taste that spurs your customers to buy more.

The Best Job in the World

The only way to know who has the best-tasting products is to taste them. A taste steward should be involved in

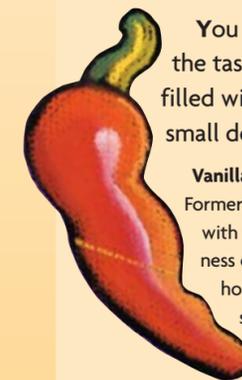
every vendor selection process, sampling and selecting the ingredients based on flavor, texture and consistency. The taste steward doesn't have to have special credentials or an overly sensitive palette to take on this job. Everyone is an expert on what tastes good, so just choose someone who understands the flavor you want and is willing to search for the best-tasting ingredients.

Also, don't assume a local grower is your best option, because the ingredient you need may be halfway around the world. When we designed a ginger soy sauce for a customer, we searched high and low for a ginger that carried enough flavor to make the sauce explode with flavor in our mouths. We

discovered through extensive research that the freshest, snappiest tasting ginger in the world is grown in the rich dark volcanic soil of a small organic farm in Hawaii.

Similarly, when we started tasting Balsamic vinegars we discovered a huge variety of tastes. To be sure we made the best selection, we went to Italy and visited the producers. We walked in the vineyards and got to know the artisans, tasting their products to educate ourselves on their distinctive properties. As a result of our selection process, we know that we chose the best Balsamic available on the market, which means we can consistently deliver a superior tasting Balsamic vinaigrette. We pay a little

Need a Taste Boost?



You can't use conventional flavor boosters to enhance the taste of your products, but the organic world is filled with rich and wonderful ingredients that, used in small doses, will kick the flavor of any recipe up a notch.

Vanilla. This popular organic extract is a wonderful flavor booster. Formerly relegated to cookies and pastries, chefs are becoming braver with vanilla, adding it to sauces and dressings to warm the sweetness of a recipe. Vanilla can also be used to bend the sweetness of honey tasting or fruity products, or to deepen the flavor of a jerk sauce, adding a layer of complexity to the taste experience.

Balsamic vinegar. The organic world is doing wonders with this amazing ingredient. Balsamic is the king of vinegars. It has sweet flavor and a very low pH, so it delivers acidity without a sharp taste. The key however is choosing a quality producer. Making Balsamic vinegar is truly an artisan process. It begins with a special kind of grape grown in certain regions of Italy that is cooked down and aged in special wood to take on a sweet and complex profile unlike any other flavor in the world. It's the perfect vinegar for fat free-salad dressings or it can be used on its own without any oil. It's also great in steak sauces and stir fry mixes.

Chipotle pepper. This popular smoked jalapeno imparts a nice little smoky heat without the use of additional smoke flavors. Traditionally associated with Mexican food, it's a nice addition to any dish that requires a little fire. The Chipotle heat is

stimulating to the palate and a nice addition to almost any dish. The flavor is a good juxtaposition against sweet tastes, such as mangoes and raspberries, or it can be used to wake up the taste of a barbecue sauce or mayonnaise.

Cayenne, Tabasco, capsicum. A dash of Tabasco or cayenne pepper wakes up the palette, and just a little bite of capsicum is a handy flavor enhancer. Don't add so much that it makes the dish taste like hot sauce, just enough to enliven its natural flavors.

Traditional soy. This is the ingredient to truly watch. Another artisan product, traditional organic soy is most familiar in Asian fusion techniques, such as teriyakis, soy gingers and Worcestershire. The flavor profile is growing in popularity as consumers become accustomed to more Asian flavors, like Thai peanut sauces and wasabi that have a fiery nose and horseradish-like heat. Soy's popularity also stems from growing research that shows soy inhibits abnormal cell growth that results in certain types of cancer.