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## **DESPITE STRICTER FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS, WHOLE FOODS MARKET REMAINS COMMITTED TO ORGANIC CERTIFICATION**

### *CCOF Completes Third-party Certification of All 273 U.S. Whole Foods Market Stores*

(AUSTIN, TEXAS. July 15, 2009) Whole Foods Market (NASDAQ: WFMI), the country's first national certified organic grocer and CCOF, one of the oldest and largest USDA-accredited third-party organic certifiers, announced today that each of the grocer's 273 stores in the United States has been individually certified, complying with stricter guidance on federal regulations.

"This news underscores our unwavering commitment to the overall integrity of organic and offers assurance to our shoppers," said Joe Dickson, quality standards coordinator for Whole Foods Market. "Our stores are an organic product's last step in the journey from farm to shopping cart. It's important for Whole Foods Market to maintain its certification as an organic retailer so our customers can trust that the organic food they choose has been sourced, stored, handled and marketed according to organic requirements."

After the USDA organic standards went into effect in 2002, a number of retailers became voluntarily used a "group certification" model in which a certifier inspects a certain number of stores along with the overall company and its systems for monitoring compliance. Whole Foods Market was the first national chain to be certified under the USDA's national organic standards in 2003. In November 2008, the USDA's National Organic Program declared there could no longer be "group" certified stores and that each store must be certified individually.

"When we learned from the USDA that retail certification would become more challenging and comprehensive, our leadership unanimously decided to commit the resources to comply with the USDA's enhanced guidance for retail certification," said Margaret Wittenberg, vice-president of quality standards and public affairs for Whole Foods Market. "This program is such an important part of Whole Foods Market's commitment to organic integrity."

Under this program, CCOF verifies that Whole Foods Market:

- Examines the current organic certification status of organic products
- Maintains a record-keeping process that demonstrates an audit trail for organic products.
- Ensures organic products are appropriately protected from commingling with conventional products and contamination with prohibited materials

- Trains store Team Members in handling practices for organic products

“We are very pleased to have been selected by Whole Foods Market as their certifier, since we share a commitment to organic integrity and support for strong USDA standards,” said Peggy Miars, executive director of CCOF. “This was our largest retail certification to date, and we’re pleased that we were able to deliver the rigorous service and support necessary to certify Whole Foods Market’s 273 U.S. stores nationwide.”

“Whole Foods Market selected CCOF to certify our stores nationwide because of CCOF’s experience in the field and its reputation for upholding and protecting organic integrity, and they certainly delivered. In inspecting and certifying each one of our stores individually, CCOF’s team has been extremely thorough and has helped us improve as an organic retailer,” said Dickson. “Their inspectors verified that our team members across the country ensure that our products – from national brands to small local growers – are being sold with integrity.”

The USDA’s National Organic Standards require those who handle organic food –farmers, processors, packagers, etc. – to be certified, but do not extend the requirement to retail stores. Whole Foods Market opted to voluntarily have its stores certified to ensure that the integrity of the organic supply chain is intact.

“We believe that our customers benefit from having *everyone* who handled their organic food certified, not *everyone except the retailer*,” said Dickson. “While some certified retailers may have just a few departments certified, and focus on shrink-wrapped organic produce, we’ve opted to go all out. In our stores, every department that handles organic food is certified – produce, meat, bulk, cheese, even stores with organic salad bars are certified.”

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**About Whole Foods Market®:** Founded in 1980 in Austin, Texas, Whole Foods Market ([www.wholefoodsmarket.com](http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com)), a leader in the natural and organic foods industry and America’s first national certified organic grocer, was named “America’s Healthiest Grocery Store” in 2008 by *Health* magazine. The Whole Foods Market motto, “Whole Foods, Whole People, Whole Planet”™ captures the company’s mission to find success in customer satisfaction and wellness, employee excellence and happiness, enhanced shareholder value, community support and environmental improvement. Thanks to its more than 50,000 Team Members, Whole Foods Market has been ranked as one of the “100 Best Companies to Work For” in America by *FORTUNE* magazine for 12 consecutive years. In fiscal year 2008, the company had sales of \$8 billion and currently has more than 275 stores in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Whole Foods Market, Fresh & Wild™, and Harry’s Farmers Market® are trademarks owned by Whole Foods Market IP, LP. Wild Oats® and Capers Community Market™ are trademarks owned by Wild Marks, Inc.

**About CCOF:** CCOF (California Certified Organic Farmers), a nonprofit organization, was founded in 1973. CCOF’s mission is to certify, educate, advocate and promote organic through:

- A premier organic certification program for growers, processors, handlers, and retailers,
- Programs to increase awareness of and demand for certified organic product and to expand public support for organic agriculture, and

- Advocacy for governmental policies that protect and encourage organic agriculture.

CCOF certifies more than 2,000 organic operations in 35 states and three foreign countries and serves over 350 supporting members - consumers, suppliers, businesses and individuals - interested in supporting its work.