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Your cannabis can't be certified organic – but now it can be kosher



By [Natalie Fertig](#)

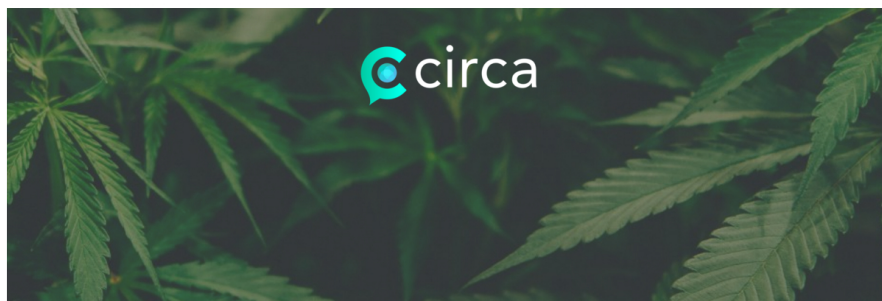


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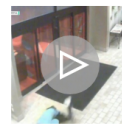
MODESTO, Calif. (CIRCA) — Today after work, you may walk into a grocery store and buy some organic apples. Or organic pasta. Or GMO-free eggs.

What you may not know about all of these is that their classifications are controlled and approved by the federal government. And because they are federal designations, they cannot be used for cannabis.

"It's like buying a car," explains Steve Howard of [Mirth Provisions](#), a company based in Oregon that makes cannabis-infused beverages. "You want to know what the motor you're buying is."



Circa Now



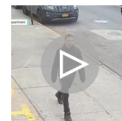
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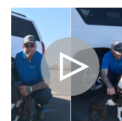
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Howard, who is VP of Innovation, Research and Development at Mirth, says that while agricultural products obviously aren't uniform, consumers want to know there's an absence of things like pesticide and additives in their cannabis.

"And the way of guaranteeing it is having a federal agency."

Until cannabis is descheduled from the controlled substances list, however, the cannabis industry is getting creative. There are many third-party certifications that have popped up; the most well-known of which is Clean Green Certified. What's hard, though, is creating enough trust and name recognition for a new certification process within an already-new industry.

"I'm in the industry, and it doesn't mean anything to me," said Howard. "From a farming practice standpoint, I would much rather trust a federal agency that has literally a century of developing safe agricultural products."

One farmer in California's Central Valley is getting clever, though. While he can't apply for organic certification, Mitch Davis is using another well-known classification to make his cannabis stand out from the pack and to assure consumers that it is extra clean and pure.

His cannabis is kosher.



Natalie Fertig / Circa

Davis is the owner of [Mission Kasher Cannabis](#), and he — along with Rabbi Levy Zirkind, director of Chabad of Fresno — started developing kosher certification standards for cannabis four years ago. Today, his cannabis products are 100 percent kosher-certified.

Kosher differs from organic in that it is more about the cleanliness of the process by which a product is made.

"You don't have to be organic to be kosher," explains Davis. "You have to not have bugs, not have pest infestation; you have to go through the inspection."

Like most certifying bodies, Rabbi Zirkind conducts surprise inspections. He checks plants for bugs, makes sure workers are wearing gloves and hair nets, and looks over the workroom for any foodstuffs. If he drops by after hours, the floors are expected to be spotless and waxed.

"What's great about being kosher is it puts an additional expectation on the employees," said Davis, standing in the drying room in Mission Kasher's processing facility. On ropes down either side of the room hang hundreds of cannabis stalks, some as long as an arm. In another room, employees trim down already-dried flower, removing stems and leaves to prepare the bud ready for sale.

"They know we're gonna get inspected," Davis adds. "They know it's random so everybody really tries to stay on their toes."



Pre-rolled cannabis joints in the processing room at Mission Kasher Cannabis in Patterson, California.

As Rabbi Zirkind walks through the processing room, he spies a chip wrapper tossed in a plastic box and points it out. It's quickly removed from the room.

"We are trying to make sure that the plant is pure," Zirkind explains later as he examines cannabis leaves in one of Mission Kasher's 12 greenhouses. "[It] has no — what we call aphids, thrips, or any other — what we call creepy crawlies if you want to use that term. We want to make sure that it's clean, and free of any other insects."

If there is a bug infestation, says Mitch, the whole batch is thrown out.

"I'm not even allowed to sell it. ... It gets destroyed."

But is it worth is?

"I think folks deserve to know that, you know, what they're consuming is healthy," says Josh Drayton of the California Cannabis Industry Association. He says California has been trying to come up with state-level organic certifications, but there isn't anything official yet.

"We're still trying to find workable ways ... to highlight products that do go above and beyond and are using higher quality ingredients," he explained.

Christine Smith of Portland, Ore.-based edibles company [Grön Chocolate](#) says she doesn't know enough about kosher to know if it would make an impact on her customers. It certain isn't something she has thought of before.

"I think part of that is that here in Oregon, the rules and testing for pesticides for solvents actually outweigh a lot of the [third party] certifications available," Smith explains. Oregon's testing standards are high, and Smith says that just buying from the regulated market should give consumers peace of mind in the state.

"I think part of the problem is that in every state's regulations are so completely and wildly different that its not nationalized enough," she explained.

But as long as cannabis is listed at Schedule I of the [Controlled Substances Act](#), there won't be a nationalized organic classification. And until then, Davis may be on to something - at least from a marketing perspective, thanks to name recognition.

"I think kosher is above the Clean Green," says Steven Howard. "I think the average consumer walks in and they'll choose the kosher one over a Clean Green one."

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About the Author



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Natalie Fertig joined Circa as a videographer in September 2017. She previously reported for McClatchy newspaper's video lab, and holds an MA in journalism from CUNY Graduate School of Journalis...



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