

organicconsumers.org

The website of the Organic Consumers Association, an advocacy group that has promoted the debunked link between vaccines and autism and has published conspiracy theories about 9/11 and COVID-19.



Proceed with caution: This website severely violates basic standards of credibility and transparency.

Score: 20/100

Ownership and Financing

The site is owned by the Organic Consumers Association, a 501(c)3 nonprofit group based in Finland, Minnesota. The group reported revenue of \$3 million in 2018 on its most recent filing with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. \$2.9 million came from contributions and grants. The group has a related 501(c)4 social welfare organization, the Organic Consumers Fund.

The site generates revenue from advertisements and also solicits donations.

Content

OrganicConsumers.org states on its About OCA page that it seeks to “protect consumers' right to safe, healthful food and other consumer products, a just food and farming system and an environment rich in biodiversity and free of pollutants.”

In addition to its own content, the site runs excerpts or entire articles, with credit, from other sites, ranging from local newspapers to national outlets such as Bloomberg. It also publishes content from other sites that promote alternative medicine, such as Mercola.com, named after controversial anti-vaccination advocate Dr. Joseph Mercola, as well as from advocacy organizations such as the Environmental Working Group.

Credibility

Numerous articles on OrganicConsumers.org have promoted debunked or unsubstantiated claims on a range of topics, including the supposed dangers of vaccinations and the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- ✗ Does not repeatedly publish false content (22points)
- ✗ Gathers and presents information responsibly (18)
- ✗ Regularly corrects or clarifies errors (12.5)
- Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly (12.5)
- ✗ Avoids deceptive headlines (10)
- ✗ Website discloses ownership and financing (7.5)
- ✓ Clearly labels advertising (7.5)
- ✗ Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest (5)
- ✗ The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information (5)

Criteria are listed in order of importance.

[More information.](#)

For example, a March 2020 article headlined, “Planet Coronavirus: Survival, Resistance and Regeneration,” stated that “It’s not clear yet whether COVID-19 was weaponized in one of the world’s numerous, and secretive, chemical and biological warfare laboratories (such as the ones in Fort Detrick, Maryland, or the one in Wuhan, China) and then was accidentally or deliberately released, or whether its toxic potency was accelerated by ‘normal’ genetic mutations as it passed from bats and pangolins through humans.”

To support this theory that the virus may have been “weaponized,” the article cited an unsupported claim by a University of Illinois law professor named Francis Boyle. “Boyle suspects COVID-19 is a weaponized pathogen that escaped from Wuhan City’s Biosafety Level 4 facility, which was specifically set up to research coronaviruses and SARS,” the article stated.

While a laboratory in Wuhan, China, does work with dangerous pathogens, there is no evidence to support Boyle’s belief that the COVID-19 virus was “weaponized” in that facility. There is also no evidence that the virus originated in a weapons laboratory, either in China or the U.S., or that it was deliberately or accidentally released. A March 2020 study published in the journal Nature Medicine concluded that the virus “is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus.” An earlier study, published in February 2020 in the journal Nature, found that the COVID-19 virus is “96% percent identical at the whole-genome level to a bat coronavirus.”

A June 2017 article on the site, titled “Not Just Autism, Major Yale Study Shows Vaccines Tied to Multiple Brain Disorders,” stated: “While science and the government continue to maintain there’s no causal relation between the vaccines and the disorders, parents, multiple studies, and other countries have reported otherwise. Now, it seems, some very brave and unabashed scientists have been able to show a correlation of what many have known for quite some time.”

The story references a January 2017 study conducted by Yale researchers and others, published in the journal *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, that found that disorders such as anorexia and obsessive compulsive disorder “may be temporally related to prior vaccinations.” However, autism was not covered in the research, and the published study stated in its introduction that “the association of the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine with autism spectrum disorder has been convincingly disproven.”

An April 2018 article, headlined “Enough Already: Autism Needs to Be Declared a National Health Crisis,” stated that: “Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) began skyrocketing in the late 1980s, concurrent with a massive expansion of the childhood vaccine schedule and a corresponding increase in children’s exposure to neurotoxic vaccine ingredients such as mercury and aluminum.” While it is true that more children in the U.S. have been diagnosed with autism in recent decades, the *OrganicConsumers.org* article asserts with no evidence that because reported cases of autism increased after the CDC recommended more childhood vaccines, that vaccines caused the increase in autism cases.

The site has also published the results of unreliable research on GMOs, which are food items produced from plants or animals whose DNA has been altered. For example, a November 2017 article, titled “16 Health Problems That Improved in Patients Who Switched From GMO to Organic Diets,” claims that most people who reduced or removed genetically modified foods from their diets saw improvements in areas like digestive health, fatigue, weight, memory and food allergies.

These results were based on a survey written by anti-GMO activist Jeffrey Smith of the Institute for Responsible Technology. The site’s article did not mention that the survey responses came from people within the institute’s email database, who, as the full version of the November 2017 survey acknowledged,

“may be biased towards attributing health improvements to the elimination of GMOs based on expectations.” Instead, it asserts, “When people from all walks of life eat less GMO foods, a significant percentage get better quickly.”

The site also has promoted conspiracy theories involving the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. An undated article, headlined “The 9/11 Consensus Panel: Factual Evidence Contradicts the 'Official Story'” and credited to the conspiracy theory site Consensus911.org, challenges the assertion that Osama bin Laden was responsible for the attacks. “Although Secretary of State Colin Powell, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and the 9/11 Commission promised to provide evidence of bin Laden's responsibility for the 9/11 attacks,” the article states, “they also failed.” In an October 2004 video, bin Laden claimed responsibility for the attack, and the 9/11 Commission provided substantial evidence that bin Laden and his al-Qaeda organization were behind the deadliest terror attack in U.S. history.

Because the site has promoted false claims and debunked conspiracy theories, NewsGuard has determined that the site repeatedly publishes false content, does not gather and present information responsibly, and fails to avoid deceptive headlines.

The About Us page on OrganicConsumers.org discloses the association's position on a variety of issues, including favoring “natural health and wellness promotion” and opposing GMOs. Although some articles express views outside the organization's stated mission, such as those promoting Sept. 11 conspiracy theories, most of the website's content serves to promote its disclosed perspective.

Because OrganicConsumers.org is clearly the website of an advocacy organization and is transparent about its mission, NewsGuard has determined the criterion covering the separation of news and opinion does not apply..

No corrections policy is posted on the site, and although NewsGuard found five corrections on the site, the most recent correction was published in December 2011 — which does not meet the standard for regularly correcting errors.

The Organic Consumers Association responded to a NewsGuard message in August 2019 and asked for questions to be sent via email. The organization did not respond to two subsequent emails and a phone call seeking comment about the website's editorial standards, including its history of publishing false claims and its approach to corrections.

Transparency

Articles are generally credited to individual authors, along with information indicating whether the writer works for the Organic Consumers Association or for another group or site. No other biographical information or contact details are provided.

The site identifies Ronnie Cummins as the Organic Consumers Association's international director and co-founder and lists staff for the association, but does not specify who is in charge of the website's content.

The site's About OCA page includes the group's annual financial reports and 990 tax forms. The site says the group in 2016 took in more than \$1.7 million in contributions from foundations and corporations, but none are identified on the site, thus not meeting NewsGuard's standard for nonprofits' disclosure of ownership and financing.

Advertisements are distinguishable from editorial content.

The Organic Consumers Association responded to a NewsGuard message in August 2019 and asked for questions to be sent via email. The OCA did not reply to two subsequent emails and a phone call seeking comment on the website's lack of information on its financing, editorial leaders, and content creators.

History

The group was founded in 1998.

Correction: An earlier version of this Nutrition Label erroneously reported that there were no examples of corrections on the site. The label has been updated to reflect that the site has published multiple corrections, most recently in December 2011. NewsGuard apologizes for the error.

Editor's Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on April 14, 2020. An earlier update noted that because OrganicConsumers.org is the site of advocacy organization, NewsGuard determined that the criterion covering the separation of news and opinion is not applicable, and is therefore marked NA on the checklist.

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Send feedback to NewsGuard:[Click Here](#)

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Ownership and
Financing

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