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Jasmine Pearl Certification Status Change

Since our founding in 1997, Rishi has been fully committed to sourcing the highest quality organic teas and botanicals in the world. This is borne of our personal taste and belief that organically grown foods are simply more natural and healthier for people than conventional alternatives. In practicing our direct trade sourcing, we also understand firsthand how organic and sustainably managed agriculture is vital for the health of our planet.

When we started out in the tea trade, we were one of the very first companies to import organically grown teas into the US—several years before USDA NOP regulations were established for tea in 2002. Today, over 95% of the botanical ingredients that we source are certified organic.

It is with this sincere commitment to organic tea that we wish to share with you an important update on the jasmine tea market and notify you of a certification status change on one of Rishi's signature jasmine tea products.

Rishi has sourced a variety of organic jasmine teas for over a decade, including several grades of loose leaf Jasmine Green Tea, Jasmine Pearl, and Jasmine scented White teas. Most of these teas will remain certified organic moving forward, but from the 2015 harvest we are no longer able to offer organic certified Jasmine Pearl tea. In the spirit of transparency, we want to provide you with a full picture outlining the reasons for this market-driven change, starting at the farm.

Jasmine teas have a unique seasonality for harvesting and processing. The base teas are harvested in springtime, typically from late March through the end of April. Spring teas are chosen for their delicate sweetness and umami flavor, which pairs beautifully with the sweet fragrance of jasmine. The base teas are reserved in storage until the jasmine trees (grown in southern and southeastern China) blossom in mid to late summer, ushering in the scenting season.



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The jasmine tea scenting process is based on centuries-old artisanal techniques. Fresh jasmine blossoms are collected during the daytime and brought to a scenting room where the base teas are stored. The tea leaves are spread out in a thin layer on scenting tables, and the jasmine blossoms are scattered across them. Over the course of the evening, the jasmine blossoms open up and express their sweet aromatic essence into the tea leaves. In the morning, the blossoms are picked out by hand and discarded. Because the tea leaves take on moisture when they are perfumed with the jasmine blossoms, they are dried at a low temperature the next day to maintain a stable moisture content level. After drying, they are spread out to cool, and are ready for an additional round of scenting using a freshly picked batch of jasmine blossoms. The number of “rounds” of scenting is important for understanding the various styles of jasmine tea.

How does this affect the organic status of jasmine tea? Flowers, especially very sweet and fragrant flowers like jasmine, naturally attract insects. As a result, pesticide application is nearly universal at jasmine tree farms. In fact, there is no known production of jasmine flowers on a commercial scale that does not rely upon the use of pesticides. In the trade industry, this is referred to as a “lack of commercial availability” for organic jasmine flowers. Under USDA guidelines, a small fraction of an organic product can contain a conventional ingredient only if there is no commercially available organic source for that ingredient. For jasmine scented tea, it has been allowable under these guidelines to conduct the scenting process using flowers that are treated with pesticides, so long as those flowers are removed from the final tea product.

The more “rounds” of scenting a jasmine tea undergoes, the more fixed the aroma will become. At the same time, there is an increasing risk that the flowers will impart trace amounts of pesticide residues into the tea.

Loose leaf jasmine teas typically receive between 3-4 rounds of scenting with blossoms for a fixed, sweet fragrance. Jasmine Pearl tea, with its densely rolled shape, requires somewhere between 9-12 rounds of scenting to achieve a similarly fixed aroma. It takes many more rounds of scenting for the flower essence to permeate the pearl shape. Because of this longer contact time



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with the flowers, the risk for unacceptably high trace pesticide residues is far greater with Jasmine Pearl tea than it is with loose leaf jasmine tea.

At this time, we believe the responsible thing to do is to reclassify Jasmine Pearl as *EU-Compliant Conventional*. To clarify, the “EU Compliant” standard indicates that this tea can pass the very strict European Union import regulations for conventional tea. The EU’s regulatory limits on pesticide residues for conventional tea are the most stringent in the world. Please know that the base tea for our Jasmine Pearl is still certified organic and is made from the same high-quality spring harvest tea buds as years past. It is a favorite among the Rishi staff and is a tea we drink ourselves every day.