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THE BUYER'S GUIDE · NOW ORGANIC

The Buyer's Guide to Sourcing Organic Ginger & Turmeric

What to verify before you order, from a supplier that controls the chain from farm in Peru to juice in the Netherlands.

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Why we wrote this guide

We sell organic ginger and turmeric. We also spend a large part of every week on the other side of the table, buying, testing, and rejecting raw material across multiple origins. This guide is written from that second seat.

Most sourcing guidance is either a sales pitch in disguise or a wall of regulation no buyer has time to read. We wanted something different: a short, practical, vendor-neutral checklist that helps you ask sharper questions and sidestep the few mistakes that quietly cost the most money. Nothing in here only works if you buy from us, it works whoever you buy from.

Use it however suits you, read it end to end, or jump straight to the section you need. If it makes your next purchase a little safer, it has done its job.

DISCLAIMER

This guide is provided for general information only. It is not legal, regulatory, or food-safety advice, and it is no substitute for your own due diligence. Regulations, limits, and test methods referenced here change over time and vary by market; always verify against the rules currently applicable to you and against your own specifications. NOW Organic accepts no liability for decisions made on the basis of this document.

Why two identical-looking containers are not the same purchase

Two pallets arrive. Same label: organic ginger, certified. Same commodity code, same certification logo, the same line on your purchase order. On paper, the same purchase.

In reality they can be worlds apart, in active content, in microbial load, in moisture and fibre, in pesticide residue, and occasionally in whether the product is even what the label claims. Two lots that cost roughly the same per kilo can perform completely differently in your product and carry completely different risk.



Same commodity code, two different products: active content, moisture and authenticity all vary by lot.

And here's the uncomfortable part: the Certificate of Analysis you're handed often won't show you the difference. A generic "typical values" sheet looks reassuring and tells you almost nothing about the specific lot on your dock today. It describes what the product usually looks like, not what you actually bought.

That gap is where sourcing decisions quietly cost money. It rarely shows up as a line item called "bad sourcing." It shows up as a batch that fails QC on arrival, a production run held while you scramble for a replacement, a spot purchase at a premium because your buffer ran out, an off-spec finished product that gets reworked or written off, and, in the worst case, a recall when an authenticity problem reaches the shelf.

None of this is exotic. It's the ordinary downside of treating ginger and turmeric as interchangeable commodities bought on price, when they are agricultural products with wide natural variation and a long, well-documented history of adulteration.

We've spent years buying, testing, and rejecting organic ginger and turmeric across multiple origins, because we don't just trade it, we run the whole chain ourselves, from the farms in Peru through pressing and bottling in the Netherlands. We sit on the buyer's side of the table as often as the seller's. This guide is the short version of what we've learned the hard way, written for the person who has to sign off on the purchase and live with the result.

No fluff and no sales pitch, just the checks that separate a safe purchase from an expensive one.

Inside the full guide: how to choose the right form for your product, how the major origins really differ, the quality clauses that protect you, the turmeric red flags most buyers never test for, and a 15-minute scorecard to screen any supplier before you commit.

Start with the right form, not the lowest price per kilo

The most expensive sourcing mistake isn't paying a little too much per kilo. It's buying the wrong form for what you're making, and only finding out after the first production trial, when the texture is off, the colour drifts, or the active level won't hold to end of shelf life.

Ginger and turmeric reach you as fresh root, juice, puree, cold pressed, fibers, or dices (IQF). Each behaves differently in a formulation, and, this is the part price lists hide, each carries a different real cost once you account for yield, processing effort, storage, and shelf life. The cheapest form per kilo is frequently the most expensive form per finished unit.



From root to juice to powder to concentrate: each form carries a different real cost per finished unit.

A first look at the logic:

- **Fresh root:** maximum flexibility and the “clean label” story, but the shortest shelf life and the most processing on your side. Best where you have the capacity to handle it.
- **Juice:** a clean, fresh, bright profile; the natural fit for shots and functional drinks where taste leads and you want minimal processing.
- **Puree:** body and texture; useful in sauces, dressings and applications where mouthfeel matters.

- **Cold Pressed:** extracted without heat, so the aromatics and actives stay closest to the fresh root; the premium choice for shots and raw-positioned drinks where retention of gingerol and curcuminoids is the whole point.
- **Fibers:** the fibrous fraction recovered after pressing; useful where you want added fibre, body, or a whole-root claim in bars, bakery and blends rather than a clean liquid.
- **Dices (IQF):** individually quick-frozen cubes that lock in fresh quality and give you precise, ready-to-dose portions with a long frozen shelf life; strong where you have cold chain and consistency matters.

There's a second layer most buyers miss: the form interacts with the active compounds. Drying and heat convert ginger's gingerol into shogaol, shifting both pungency and profile, so a powder is not simply a "dehydrated juice." The form you choose quietly decides how your product tastes and how it holds up.

Origin, Peru vs. China vs. India

Origin is not a detail to settle after price. It sets your baseline for quality, organic integrity, and supply risk before a single quality clause is written, and it's very hard to "spec your way out of" a weak origin later.



Origin sets the baseline for active content and organic integrity before any clause is written.

Ginger

China is the world's volume supplier and usually sets the reference price the rest of the market is measured against. That scale is a real advantage on cost and availability, but it comes with a heavier track record on pesticide residues and organic-integrity questions, concerns that stop being abstract the moment "organic" appears on a finished label and you have to stand behind it. Much of China's crop moves through conventional cultivation systems where pesticide and other chemical inputs are common, which means an organic claim on Chinese-origin material rests entirely on the integrity of certification and testing rather than on how the crop is typically grown. That isn't a reason to rule it out, but it does shift the burden of proof onto the buyer.

Peru sits firmly at the premium end and tends to be the origin buyers gravitate toward when quality has to be defensible. It is Andean- and jungle-grown, predominantly cultivated by smallholder farmers under organic methods rather than as a conventional commodity crop, and it has grown into one of the world's major ginger exporters on the strength of that positioning rather than on price. It is valued for a high and relatively consistent gingerol profile, which matters wherever the ginger has to do something, not just flavour, and, just as importantly, for the fact that organic integrity is the default rather than the exception. Where China requires you to verify that a given lot lives up to its label, Peru's structural reality does much of that work for you: the crop is organic by norm, the chains are shorter, and traceability back to the grower is the rule. India and smaller origins fill specific niches on price, profile, or proximity, but rarely combine clean cultivation, consistent potency, and defensible traceability the way Peru does.

Turmeric

India dominates global turmeric, on the order of four-fifths of world production, with deep varietal diversity. That diversity is also the catch: curcuminoid content varies enormously by variety and region, so the word "turmeric" tells you very little until you know the variety, the region, and the curcuminoid basis on the COA. India also carries by far the heaviest adulteration record, and it is well documented rather than anecdotal: peer-reviewed sampling across South Asia has repeatedly found turmeric cut with lead chromate, a toxic industrial pigment added to brighten colour, with the highest readings in northern Indian markets running orders of magnitude above the legal lead limit. Crucially, this is a supply-chain problem. The contamination is typically introduced by wholesale traders, not at the farm, which is exactly why an opaque, loosely traced sourcing chain is the real risk factor (see Section 4). It makes independent lead testing and full traceability non-negotiable for any Indian-origin material.

This is precisely where Peru stands apart. Peru carries no comparable adulteration history: its turmeric moves through shorter, organically certified, traceable channels rather than the open bazaar trade where colour-enhancement fraud takes hold, so the structural conditions that produce lead-chromate contamination simply aren't there. For any product carrying an organic claim, where integrity, clean traceability, and authenticity assurance matter more than the absolute lowest unit cost, that difference is decisive. Other origins are worth considering at the margins, but Peru is the one that holds up under scrutiny.

Quality that protects you

This is the section that prevents the costly batch. Specify these clauses, and, just as important, verify them per lot, not once at onboarding and never again.

Active content, on a stated basis

For ginger, specify gingerol percentage (typically 6-gingerol), measured by HPLC. For turmeric, specify curcuminoid percentage, and insist on the basis, because “% curcumin” and “% total curcuminoids” are different numbers, and suppliers are not always quoting the one you think. A colour reading, however confident, is not a measurement of active content. If the method isn’t stated, assume the cheapest method was used.

Microbiology and reduction method

Total plate count, yeast and mould, E. coli, Salmonella, enterobacteria, and crucially how the microbial load was reduced. Under EU organic rules, irradiation is not permitted; steam treatment is. This is a common, quiet failure point: a product can be microbiologically clean and still be non-compliant for organic because of the method used to get it there. If a supplier is vague about the reduction step, treat that as a finding, not a footnote.

Contaminants

Pesticide residue, for organic, within both EU MRLs and organic requirements, which are not the same bar, plus heavy metals and mycotoxins. For organic specifically, residue testing is where “certified organic” either holds up or quietly doesn’t.

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The turmeric trap: adulterated powder often looks brighter and more uniform than the real thing.

Authenticity, the turmeric trap

Turmeric is one of the most adulterated spices in the world, and most buyers never test for it. The documented tricks: lead chromate added to brighten the yellow, a genuine recall and health risk that has triggered real-world withdrawals; synthetic dyes such as metanil yellow and Sudan colours; and bulking with starch, chalk, or spent (already-extracted) turmeric. The danger is that adulterated turmeric often looks better than the real thing, brighter, more uniform, so visual inspection actively works against you. The only defence is specifying authenticity testing and refusing lots that can't demonstrate it.

Degradation and freshness

Gingerol and curcuminoids are not stable forever. Heat, light, oxygen, and pH all degrade them, and gingerol converts to shogaol over time and temperature. A COA from six months ago, or from before a long shipment, may not describe what's now in the drum. For active-driven applications, the age of the analysis matters as much as the numbers on it.



Read every COA against your own spec, by lot, and confirm the method, not just the number.

How to read the COA

Lay it beside your spec and check four things, in order. One: does every value sit inside your range, not merely “present” or “compliant” to the supplier’s own looser spec? Two: is the method correct, HPLC for actives, recognised methods for micro and contaminants, not a colour proxy? Three: is it batch-specific and traceable to the lot you’re buying, or a generic typical-values sheet recycled across shipments? Four: is the analysis recent enough to be meaningful for compounds that degrade? A supplier who can only produce a typical-values sheet is telling you something, listen.

Supply and continuity

A flawless spec is worthless if the product doesn't arrive when your line is running. Build continuity into the conversation early, while you still have leverage, not during a shortage when you don't.

Cover the basics first: realistic lead times tied to an actual production and shipping calendar, not a best case; minimum order quantities and how flexible they genuinely are when your needs change; and harvest seasonality per origin, so you understand when fresh supply is abundant and when it's tight and priced accordingly.

Then ask the question most buyers underweight until it bites them: single-origin versus multi-origin risk. A supplier dependent on one harvest, in one region, in one country, is a supply gap waiting to happen, one bad season, one logistics disruption, one regulatory change, and your continuity is their problem becoming yours. Ask, before you sign, how they cover a failed harvest: do they hold buffer stock, can they switch origin without breaking your spec, what is their track record the last time a crop came up short? The time to learn the answer is now, not the week your buffer runs out.

Finally, match the contract to the risk. Spot buying maximises flexibility and maximises exposure; annual or framework agreements trade some flexibility for price stability and priority of supply. There is no universally right answer, only the right answer for how critical this ingredient is to your product.

The 15-minute supplier scorecard

Score any current or prospective supplier 1 to 5 on each dimension below. It turns a vague “they seem reliable” into a decision you can put in front of your team and defend. Anything that scores low is not a dealbreaker by itself, it’s a question you now know to ask before you commit.

1

Certification & compliance

valid, current organic certification plus the relevant food-safety standards for your category. 5 = everything current and verifiable; 1 = gaps, lapses, or “in progress.”

2

Traceability

5 = traceable to farm level; 1 = traceable only to a trader or an unnamed “EU origin.”

3

Quality consistency

5 = batch-specific COAs and a demonstrable history of meeting spec; 1 = generic sheets and “trust us.”

4

Authenticity assurance

5 = actively tests and documents against adulteration, especially on turmeric; 1 = has never been asked and it shows.

5

Supply reliability

5 = clear lead times, MOQ flexibility, buffer stock, multi-origin cover; 1 = single point of failure.

6

Transparency

5 = straight answers on origin, method, and limitations; 1 = evasion, deflection, or vagueness under questioning.

7

Technical support

5 = helps you match form to application and solve formulation problems; 1 = quotes a price and disappears.

A supplier that scores strongly across all seven is genuinely rare. The point of the scorecard isn't to find perfection, it's to make the weak spots visible before they become your problem, and to compare suppliers on the same terms instead of on whoever sent the nicest email.

From shortlist to sample

Two final steps turn a shortlist into a confident decision.

The RFQ

Send a precise request: specify form, origin, active basis, certifications, and exactly which documents you expect back, batch COA, full specification sheet, certificates, and a representative sample. Ask for the commercial terms in the same breath: MOQ, lead time, Incoterms, payment terms, and contract options. Then read the reply as data. A supplier who answers a precise RFQ precisely, on time, in full, without dodging the hard questions, is showing you how they'll behave once you're a customer. A vague or slow reply is also showing you, just less flatteringly.

The sample

When it arrives, evaluate it against your scorecard and your spec, not against your hopes. Run a proper sensory check; run the lab tests that actually matter for your application; and place it side by side with your current supply so you're comparing, not guessing. Test a representative lot, not a hand-picked showpiece, and where it matters, ask for a second sample from a different batch to see consistency, not just a single good day. A sample you don't properly test is just a free gift, and free gifts don't tell you anything about the tenth container.

Test us against your own scorecard

We wrote this guide because we spend as much time on the buyer's side of the table as the seller's, and because we actually run the chain we've been describing, from the farms in Peru through pressing and bottling in the Netherlands. That means the things this guide tells you to demand, farm-level traceability, batch-specific COAs, authenticity testing, organic integrity, aren't a wish list to us. They're how we already work.

So put it to the test. Request a sample and the full dossier, batch COA, specifications, and origin documentation, and run us through the scorecard on page [x], exactly as you would any other supplier. That's the fairest test there is, and it's the one we'd want you to apply.



From farm in Peru to juice in the Netherlands, one chain, one accountable owner.



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