

EXPLAINERS

Product of Canada vs. Made in Canada: what those labels actually mean

The maple leaf gets your attention. The wording tells you what actually happened in Canada — and how Canadian the product really is.

PUBLISHED 26 AUG 2026 BY NASTY CANUCK EDITORIAL DESK



Illustration: Nasty Canuck / AI-assisted.

A maple leaf can do a lot of emotional heavy lifting on a package. Legally? Not nearly as much.

If you're trying to buy Canadian, the words beside the maple leaf matter more than the maple leaf itself. **“Product of Canada,” “Made in Canada,” “100% Canadian,” and phrases such as “Packaged in Canada” do not all mean the same thing.** And food follows somewhat different guidance from non-food consumer goods.

Here is the useful version.

The short answer: “Product of Canada” is the stronger broad Canadian-content claim. “Made in Canada” generally tells you that the product underwent its last substantial transformation here, but some — or even many — of its ingredients or components may have come from elsewhere.

For food, “Product of Canada” is a high bar

For food, the [Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#) says a **Product of Canada** claim may be used when *all or virtually all* major ingredients, processing and labour are Canadian.

That does not necessarily mean literally every molecule came from here. Small amounts of ingredients that are not generally produced in Canada — certain spices, additives, vitamins, flavourings, coffee or cane sugar, for example — may be present without disqualifying the claim. CFIA guidance generally considers this kind of minor non-Canadian material to be **less than 2% of the product**. Imported packaging does not count against the food's Canadian-content status either.

So when you see **Product of Canada** on food, the reasonable takeaway is that the product is overwhelmingly Canadian in its significant ingredients, processing and labour.

There's another useful wrinkle: on food, the word “**Canadian**” by itself is treated as equivalent to a Product of Canada claim. A frozen lasagna labelled simply “Canadian,” for example, is expected to meet the same high Canadian-content standard.

“Made in Canada” answers a different question

A **Made in Canada** food claim focuses mainly on where the product underwent its **last substantial transformation**.

The CFIA uses pizza as an easy example. Cheese, dough, sauce and other ingredients can be combined and processed in Canada into something consumers recognize as a new product: pizza.

Those ingredients do not all have to be Canadian.

That's why a Made in Canada food claim needs qualifying wording such as “**Made in Canada from domestic and imported ingredients**” or “**Made in Canada from imported ingredients.**”

For a shopper, the distinction is useful. **Product of Canada** tells you much more about the Canadian origin of the significant ingredients as well as the processing and labour. **Made in Canada** tells you meaningful manufacturing or processing happened here, while some or all of the ingredients may have come from elsewhere.

They answer different questions about what Canadian contribution you're supporting.

And “100% Canadian” really does mean 100%

This one is refreshingly straightforward.

When food is labelled **100% Canadian**, CFIA guidance says all of the ingredients, processing and labour used to make it must be Canadian.

That's stricter than Product of Canada, because Product of Canada allows the limited exceptions for negligible non-Canadian material described above.

A maple leaf is not a magic Canadian-content detector

This may be the most useful shopping rule of all: **a maple leaf by itself does not establish that something is a Product of Canada or Made in Canada.**

There is no official Product of Canada or Made in Canada food logo. The maple leaf may appear with those claims, but it isn't required.

CFIA's current guidance goes further. When a food business or retailer uses a maple leaf on packaging, store shelves or online to suggest Canadian origin, the agency recommends putting a clear domestic-content statement nearby so consumers can tell what the maple leaf is supposed to mean.

So a red package, a maple leaf and some aggressively Canadian-looking design can certainly get your attention.

The wording still has to tell you what happened here.

"Packaged in Canada" means exactly what it says

Companies can use more specific Canadian claims when they accurately describe the work done here.

You may see phrases such as **Roasted in Canada, Refined in Canada, Canned in Canada, Prepared in Canada, Processed in Canada** or **Packaged in Canada**.

Those can be perfectly legitimate and useful claims. They just shouldn't be mentally upgraded into Product of Canada.

A food imported in bulk and packaged here has supported Canadian packaging activity. It has not changed where the food itself came from.

The same principle applies elsewhere: a precise claim often tells you more than a vaguely patriotic package does.

Non-food products use a somewhat different rulebook

This is where online explanations can get messy.

For **non-food consumer goods**, the Competition Bureau uses specific direct-cost benchmarks in its Made in Canada guidance.

The Bureau says it will generally not challenge a **Product of Canada** claim when the last substantial transformation occurred in Canada and at least 98% of the total direct costs of producing or manufacturing the good were incurred here.

For **Made in Canada**, the general benchmark is at least 51% of total direct costs incurred in Canada, the last substantial transformation occurring here, and an appropriate qualifier such as “Made in Canada with imported parts” or “Made in Canada with domestic and imported parts.”

That 51% number is worth remembering — but **do not casually apply it to food labels**. Food origin claims are handled under CFIA guidance. The Competition Bureau thresholds discussed here apply to its guidance for non-food consumer goods.

The Bureau also encourages more precise wording when a product doesn't qualify for a broad claim: **“Assembled in Canada with foreign parts,” “Sewn in Canada with imported fabric,”** or another description that accurately explains the Canadian contribution.

For shoppers, precision is useful information.

The Nasty Canuck shopping-aisle test

If your goal is to support as much Canadian content and activity as possible, here's a practical way to read the label:

- **100% Canadian** — for food, all ingredients, processing and labour are Canadian.
- **Product of Canada / Canadian** — strongest broad signal that a food is overwhelmingly Canadian in its significant ingredients, processing and labour.
- **Made in Canada from domestic and imported ingredients** — meaningful Canadian processing, with a mixture of Canadian and imported ingredients.
- **Made in Canada from imported ingredients** — the substantial transformation happened here, but the ingredients came from elsewhere.
- **Packaged / roasted / refined / processed / assembled / designed in Canada** — tells you the specific Canadian contribution rather than the origin of the whole product.
- **Maple leaf by itself** — keep reading.

Country-of-origin labelling is also mandatory for certain imported prepackaged foods, including wine and brandy, dairy products, honey, fish and seafood, fresh fruits and vegetables, eggs, meat, maple products and processed fruit and vegetable products.

And don't confuse a Canadian grade, inspection legend or Canada Organic logo with a Canadian-origin claim. Those marks can tell you something important about standards or certification without necessarily telling you the product was made here.

What if a claim looks suspicious?

If a food label or advertisement appears misleading, the CFIA accepts consumer complaints. The agency has specifically reminded businesses and retailers that origin claims on packages, store shelves and online must be accurate and not misleading.

For non-food consumer products, suspected deceptive Product of Canada or Made in Canada claims can be reported to the Competition Bureau. And sometimes the simplest route is still to contact the manufacturer or retailer and ask what the claim actually means.

The Government of Canada does not pre-approve food labels and does not have a list of brands or products labelled as Product of Canada or Made in Canada.

So when you're trying to buy Canadian, don't stop at the maple leaf.

Read what the company actually claims. If the wording is vague, ask. And don't let a decorative maple leaf do all the thinking for you.

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The live article at NastyCanuck.ca is the source of record and may contain corrections or updates made after this reprint was generated.

<https://www.nastycanuck.ca/product-of-canada-vs-made-in-canada/>

Reprint generated September 20, 2026.

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