

# Organic Living

Tips and suggestions on choosing, buying, and the benefits of organic foods



## **Organic Foods: What Are They and Why Choose Them Over Regular Foods**

Organic foods are defined as that which has been grown without using fertilizers or pesticides. In fact, most organic farms must implement strict guidelines to receive their organic certification. These guidelines are so stringent that, for example; farmers must not use any wood stakes for planting that are chemically treated; must keep all machinery free from dust and foreign substances which could contaminate the crops; and must use animal feed that is purely organic in quality. Moreover, if any one of these contaminants were found in the crops, it would render the entire crop ruined.

Obtaining organic certification involves food production which can be certified. While every country has its own requirements, the standards used are much the same throughout the farming communities. Certification requires growing, storage, processing, packaging, and shipping which include total elimination of such chemicals as pesticides; antibiotics; food additives; and the like.

Also, the farmland has to be free of chemicals for three years; must keep detail records; must maintain physical separation of organic products from non-organic products; must have periodic inspections; and are subject to the same agricultural, and safety regulations which govern non-organic farmers.

As we learn more about toxins in foods, such as Mad Cow Disease, pesticides, antibiotics, and the like, choosing organic products – in addition to food – seems to have become a more widespread option for most people. Some of the foods which are organically grown are fruits and vegetables, such as: strawberries, peaches, raspberries, and blueberries.

Studies have shown that organic foods do have a higher consistency of vitamin C and contain the least amount of toxins than you would find in conventional foods. In addition, because organic produce has lower water content, the minerals and other nutrients seem to be more concentrated.

Furthermore, it has been shown that organic foods have a higher concentrate of antioxidants than regular foods. This is due to the fact that the natural chemicals, which the plant produces helps protect it against insects, and therefore, no pesticides are needed.

Note, however, that studies are still ongoing. Another factor which has engaged studies on organic foods is the taste factor. The Food and Agricultural Organization determined that “organically grown apples were found to be firmer and received higher taste scores than conventionally grown apples. Another study showed that organic tomatoes were sweeter and organic carrots had more carrot taste.”

### **Tips on How to Afford Organic Foods**

Due to the labor and upkeep of organic farming, the cost of organic foods is considerably high. While there are those who are willing to pay the extra cost due to their strong assertion that organic foods are safer, tastier, healthier, and environmentally beneficial – there are several ways in which you can avoid paying high prices for organic foods.

There are several websites you can visit which have detailed information on organic foods and other products. The main website for the Organic Consumers Association is the best place to begin. There are other organic consumer groups available, which offer additional information as well. In the mean time, here are some tips and suggestions for purchasing organic foods.

- Check the organic farms in your state and locate organic farmer’s markets, which have fresh products on a daily basis.
- You can also grow your own organic produce. Check with your local gardening supply store to find out how to begin an organic garden, and the supplies needed.

- You can also buy organic food online. The Organic Consumer Association is the best place to start. They have a wealth of information on where to buy organic foods and other products.
- You can also inquire at your organic restaurant where they obtain their food supply.
- To make organic food buying more affordable, cut down on your regular food budget. You may find you have quite a bit left over for organic shopping.
- Once you find an organic supermarket or farmer's market, buy in bulk. Just as you would at a conventional BJs or Costco Store, you can certainly load up on grains, nuts, and other organic foods.
- Always buy organic fruit and vegetables when they are in season. You can save quite a bit of money buying these in bulk as well. Just ensure you have proper storage facilities in your home.
- Just as you would use coupons to shop in your local supermarket, so too, look for online coupons for organic foods as well.
- Finally, perhaps you could join a co-op, which is a member-owned business that provides groceries and other products to its members at a discount. Many of the products are organic, and much of the produce comes from local family farms. To find a co-op near you, check out the website for co-ops in your area.



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## Benefits of Organic Foods

While we all know that most foods produced commercially have some form of pesticides or insecticides embedded in them, studies show these harmful chemicals can cause health problems.

According to scientists, their research with rats concluded that those who consumed organic or diets with the least amount of fertilizer displayed an improvement in their immune systems; had better sleeping habits; lost weight; and had a higher concentrate of vitamin E in their systems. Another disturbing fact is that “over three hundred pesticides were approved by the federal government, and of those seventy-three were possible causes of cancer.”

Organic farms, which are not exposed to toxins, grow healthy foods without the use of conventional machinery and chemicals. This is an important factor in that the animals raised on organic farms are also bred under healthy conditions, and therefore, the organic certification status remains intact. These animals are given the highest quality of food, living conditions, and expert health care. This is one of the benefits of organic farms and the products it produces.

Substituting organic foods can alleviate the high concentration of pesticides found in most regular foods. As mentioned earlier, fruits and vegetables, which are important in any diet regimen, do sustain high levels of pesticide residue. Therefore, the benefit of consuming organic fruits and vegetables is quite obvious.

Whether or not organic farming will ever fully take the place of regular farming is still debatable. It has been estimated that “without the production of artificial nitrogen fertilizer, the carrying capacity of the world's fertile land is enough for only about 60 per cent of the current population of six billion people. As the world's population approaches an estimated nine billion by the year 2050, our dependence on artificial fertilizer will almost certainly become even greater.”

While organic food production has increased, some scientists believe there will be a gradual incorporation of organic and regular farming which will allow “adequate and sustainable food production with minimum disruption to the environment.”

Regardless of whether or not these two methods will reach that point, there is certainly growing concern about the health factors association with foods that are currently available, and for which are being processed by conventional means. Individuals who have chosen organic foods have taken a giant step towards a healthier lifestyle, and while not everyone has joined in – it may soon become more of a necessity than a lifestyle.

### **Organic Foods and the Environment**

According to the World Health Organization, “there may be one million serious unintentional poisonings each year and, in addition, two million people hospitalized for suicide attempts with pesticides”; and, “on the basis of a survey of self-reported minor poisoning carried out in the Asian region, it is estimated that there could be as many as 25 million agricultural workers in the developing world suffering an episode of poisoning each year.”

Thus, organizations have formed to advise and inform society about the dangers of conventional farming and its relationship to the environment. The use of chemicals today has increased the toxicity of plants and other vegetation, and thus endangering our wildlife. We know that preserving our rain forests and wildlife habitats are critical to our eco-system.

However, it is also clear that by using organics, we can alleviate the toxic conditions permeated throughout our waters, plant life, wildlife and soil. In addition, it has been concluded that organic agriculture does contribute to a more positive environmentally sound eco-system. Moreover, with many countries

suffering from hunger and other devastating diseases, it is suggested that organic farming has a critical role in feeding the world's population.

There is a current debate concerning the viability of increasing organic activity. The struggle seems to be over the fact that organic farms require much more land and clean-up; that this would require additional de-forestation; and it would shrink even further the land which has already been preserved for wildlife and plant growth.

This is a conundrum which most environmentalists and agriculturalists face. As more land is decreasing due to the population increase, it remains to be seen if choosing organic farming is a means which will justify the end.

Many believe that organic farming is critical in keeping nature in balance. While organic farming is sustainable, no fossil fuels or other damaging chemicals are used to fertilize the soil or treat crops. In addition, because of the strict standards by which organic farming is implemented, the treatment of animals is much more humane and the process by which they are fed is natural; yielding much healthier animals.

So too, organic farming yields a much richer soil, free of contaminants, and provides a rich source of nutrients for the consumer. In addition, there are other reasons why organic farming is critical to our eco-system and environment.

- Without chemicals our water resources are preserved, thus there is a decrease in pollution of water that may be contaminated by toxins used in conventional farming.
- Keeping the soil free from pesticides and insecticides is critical to organic farming.
- Organic farming keeps all natural areas in balance.

- Organic farming is not only better for the environment, but for business as well.
- It is estimated that in each of the food groups, an organic alternative is available.
- Our wildlife remains unharmed.
- Toxins will not pollute the environment.

### **What is the future of organics?**

Whether or not organic farming becomes a permanent alternative to conventional farming is still a question many experts are struggling over. Considering the means by which one would have to convert land to organic status; the stringent rules which one would have to follow; and the destruction and cleaning of areas to make way for organic farming is now the problem facing many.

While organic foods have become a staple for most, it is difficult for farmers to maintain and/or market their products. Experts feel it is necessary to inform consumers regarding the clear advantages of running and/or obtaining organic products and farming, and the benefits to the environment. Apparently consumer awareness has not been fully cultivated, and thus the supply and demand for organic foods and products is barely two per cent. However, the demand for organic fruits and vegetables is at ten per cent.

Although there are many organizations who are trying to inform the public as to the problems associated with global warming and other environmental issues, organic production is caught somewhere in the middle.

While on the one hand, one would need to clear a forest to achieve organic certification; environmentalists are fighting to keep our forests intact. It's a

double-edged sword; and there doesn't seem to be a clear cut solution to the problem.

The local organic farming communities are thriving; but the question remains: Can organic farming be accomplished on a global scale to further the preservation of the environment and its eco-system. Time will tell.

