

ORGANIC FOODS

Organic foods have become more popular and more widely available in recent years. You might have heard some people say that organic foods are more expensive, but safer and healthier. Organic farming is also better for the environment. So, are organic foods worth the extra cost?

What are organic foods?

Organic foods are foods that are produced and processed according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) standards for organic foods. Organic foods must not be grown using chemical fertilizers or pesticides, or processed with chemical ripening, food irradiation or contain genetically modified ingredients. Organically raised animals are fed 100% organic feed and raised without the use of antibiotics or growth hormones. Animals must also be provided with year-round outdoor access.



How do I know if a food is organic or not?

You can identify whether products are organic or not by looking for the USDA organic seal. Only products certified 95 percent or more organic (contain 95% or more organic ingredients) can carry this USDA seal.

Organic vs. Conventionally grown foods

There has been ongoing debate on whether or not organic foods are better than conventionally grown foods. Some of the main differences between them include:

- **Price:** The cost of organic foods is usually higher due to the more expensive farming methods.
- **Pesticide:** Organic foods generally have less pesticide residues.
- **Nutrition:** The nutritional content of organic foods and conventionally grown foods are similar. However, some organic foods may contain higher levels of cancer-fighting antioxidants.
- **Taste:** Some people find that organic foods taste better.

Should I buy organic or conventionally grown foods?

Buying organic or conventionally grown foods depends largely on your personal preference, concern for the environment and health, and budget. Certain types of produce are known to have higher pesticide residues so you may want to consider buying organic. Here is a list compiled by the Environmental Working Group, a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting human health and the environment, which you can use as a guide when purchasing fruits and vegetables:

**Dirty Dozen Plus
(Highest pesticide residue)**

- Apples
- Strawberries
- Grapes
- Celery
- Peaches
- Spinach
- Sweet bell peppers
- Nectarines
- Cucumbers
- Cherry tomatoes
- Snap peas
- Potatoes
- Hot peppers
- Kale/collard greens

**Clean Fifteen
(Lowest pesticide residue)**

- Avocados
- Sweet corn
- Pineapples
- Cabbage
- Sweet peas
- Onions
- Asparagus
- Mangos
- Papayas
- Kiwi
- Eggplant
- Grapefruit
- Cantaloupe
- Cauliflower
- Sweet potatoes

Just because a food is labeled “organic” does not automatically make it a healthy food.

For example, organic ice cream and cookies are still high in fat and sugar even though they may be made with organic ingredients. Remember to always wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating to remove dirt and bacteria. Whatever you decide to buy for you and your family, arm yourself with credible information and choose wisely.

For more information:

<http://fnic.nal.usda.gov/food-labeling/organic-foods>

<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/healthy-eating/organic-foods.htm#labels>