



What organic food is-

Organic does not have the non-specific meaning of natural, pesticide-free, free-range, consumers determining for themselves whatever purity it indicates. The organic label will show the certifying body that approved the food as organically produced, and we can learn exactly what standards were met for this approval to be offered. A product cannot make an organic claim unless it has been certified or the producer earns less than \$5,000 a year. When an item has been approved by a certifying agency, we can be sure that certain conditions have been met.

In 2002, the US government developed regulations for organic food. Organic food — including produce, meat and the grain fed to animals — must be grown without pesticides, chemical fertilizers, antibiotics and growth hormones in most cases.

The website www.ams.usda.gov offers the following statements regarding USDA organic certification:

“The U.S. Department of Agriculture has put in place a set of national standards that food labeled "organic" must meet, whether it is grown in the United States or imported from other countries. After October 21, 2002, when you buy food labeled "organic," you can be sure that it was produced using the highest organic production and handling standards in the world.”

“Organic food is produced by farmers who emphasize the use of renewable resources and the conservation of soil and water to enhance environmental quality for future generations. Organic meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products come from animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones. Organic food is produced without using most conventional pesticides; fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients or sewage sludge; bioengineering; or ionizing radiation. Before a product can be labeled "organic," a Government-approved certifier inspects the farm where the food is grown to make sure the farmer is following all the rules necessary to meet USDA organic standards. Companies that handle or process organic food before it gets to your local supermarket or restaurant must be certified, too.”

Foreign certifiers must meet USDA approval, which means their regulations at least equal if not exceed the USDA standard.

If a product is not organically certified, it does not necessarily follow that the product is inundated with chemicals. The producer may have decided that certification was not worth the effort and fees. Plus the organic seal does not tell us if the produce was grown locally or imported from across the globe; it does not tell us if the animal was raised humanely; it does not tell us if the laborers were exploited.

When given a choice a consumer may want to consider purchasing locally grown food even over certified organic. The reasons for this would be to support small businesses and small agriculture not because it's environmentally better in a quantified way, but because the quality of the local land is supported by local producers. Also in some cases small producers are raising food organically, but lack the funds and support to get certified.

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~A Wholistic Way To Life~

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Organic vs. Natural-

Natural and organic are not interchangeable terms. Truthful claims, such as free-range, hormone-free, and natural, can still appear on food labels but only food labeled "organic" has been certified as meeting USDA organic standards.

To use the term "natural" on a food label, the USDA requires only three things: (1) the product must be minimally processed, (2) the product cannot contain any artificial ingredients and (3) the product cannot contain any preservatives. The USDA has no specific restriction on management practices during the life of the animal.

For the most part, the term "organic" is simply a guarantee of what the food does not contain. An organic label does not guarantee good nutrition. The limitations of the "organic" designation are even more evident when it comes to animal products. For example organic meat may be free of unwanted chemicals, but it is considered to be nutritionally inferior to grassfed meat, which is designated as natural.

Natural beef is produced to fit into a specific branded beef program, and therefore, the owner of the brand sets the requirements and is responsible for regulating compliance. This makes the natural beef program's integrity extremely important.

Why should we care about organic food consumption-

Being aware, informed and conscious of our role as consumers will help us make better food choices.

The vast bulk of food consumed in the US uses large amounts of fossil fuel in its production and distribution by relying on petrochemical pesticides and fertilizers for growth and traveling long distances to market. The focus is on producing cheap food. This current food system depends on a supply of cheap and plentiful crude oil and human labor. It consumes enormous resources and severely damages the environment. Plus it sets up a vicious circle of producing cheap food to feed the low wage people who work as laborers within this system. In trying to keep food cheap the US has opened its market to foreign grown food. Industrial agriculture including industrial-organic is not sustainable long-term.

But by expanding the organic market, local farmers may be helped. The USDA surveyed farmers' markets and found that over 30% of farmers selling direct were organic. In comparison, just 1 percent of all US farms practice organic agriculture. So for smaller-scale farmers selling direct, organic food has become a key component of their identity. By bringing more people into the organic fold, the pool of consumers considering local food will likely increase too.

Organic farming-



Demand for organic food is exceeding supply and not enough US farms are growing or converting to organic. For many small and medium-sized farming operations, the annual cost of organic certification can be quite burdensome.

- Basic research funds: Organic farming relies intensively on information and management for its success but currently organic farming research only gets about \$3 million in dedicated funds out of the USDA research budget of about \$2 billion.
- Certification cost share: Farmers can get up to \$500 annually to offset up to 75 percent of the costs of organic certification, but much of that money has run out. This \$500-per-farm subsidy is the only one specifically for organic farmers and is aimed at smaller operations.
- Transition support: During the three-year conversion to organic production, farmers have to incur up front costs but do not receive the higher price premium of the organic crop. The high costs coupled with lack of technical expertise makes organic conversion prohibitive for many farmers, despite the market incentives.
- Organic farmers applying for crop insurance are charged a 5% surcharge on crop insurance premiums because they are organic.

Cost difference between organic and non-organic-

People are often unwilling to spend more than a small portion of their grocery budget on organic foods due to expense. This is one reason why organic food accounts for just 2 percent of food sales. Locally grown foods also total 1 to 2 percent. Consumer demand for it is growing at nearly 20% however. One of the motivations of "buying organic" is protecting the land, water, and air. But the increasing demand for organic food hasn't translated to a proportionate increase in organic land under cultivation in the US due to the production issues discussed above. It has produced a rise in industrial-organic practices and overseas production that feed into the conglomerate food manufacturer's capitalization on the market.

Consumers can leverage their rising willingness to buy organic to significantly decrease the amount of poisons used in growing food and support that organic farming also saves energy since the production of fertilizer and pesticides consumes one-third of the energy used in farming overall.

One way is to buy whole food from nearby farmers whose practices are known and trusted. And buying local, organic, and conventional foods because each meets a need is how many are responding. Both locally produced and organic are good choices because they move the food market in a small way. By choosing them a consumer can insert their values into an equation that has long been determined only by volume, convenience, and price. The pursuit of these results in damage -- damage ultimately paid for in water pollution, toxic pesticide exposure, unhealthy livestock, the quality of food, and the loss of small farms. The full cost may not show up at the checkout, but it's one paid nonetheless.

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