

Fact Sheet

Organic Food and Cancer

You're at the grocery store and see two of all types of produce. There's either 'conventional' or 'organic'. You've seen claims that you should only eat organic food. Others say it doesn't matter. How do you decide if it's worth it to spend the extra money on organic?

Are Organic Foods Better for Your Health?

Conventional refers to produce that may be grown with the application of pesticides as part of the farming process. When it comes to health benefits, there have not been any direct studies on humans to show that organic foods can prevent cancer or other diseases, any more effectively than conventionally grown foods. So far, there is also no consistent evidence that organic food is any more nutritious (higher in vitamins, minerals and other nutrients) than conventionally grown foods.

Given this information, why would someone choose organic? We know that organic foods have:

- Lower pesticide residues
- Lower amounts of synthetic (man made) food additives
- Better stewardship of natural resources like land and water
- Better stewardship of human resources means being socially considerate of the working and living condition of laborers, needs of rural communities and health of consumers.

Organic Food Facts



Here is a good comparison of conventional vs. organic foods:

Conventional	Organic
Apply chemical fertilizers to promote plant growth.	Apply natural fertilizers, such as manure or compost, to feed soil and plants.
Spray insecticides to reduce pests and disease.	Use beneficial insects and birds, mating disruption or traps to reduce pests and disease.
Use herbicides to manage weeds.	Rotate crops, till, hand weed or mulch to manage weeds.
May give animals antibiotics, growth hormones and medications to prevent disease and spur growth.	Give animals organic feed and outdoor access. Use preventive measures - rotational grazing, a balanced diet and clean housing - to help minimize disease.

What do the Labels Mean?

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| • "100% Organic" | Just that, all organic! |
| • "Organic" | At least 95% of the ingredients are certified organic |
| • "Made with organic" | At least 70% of the ingredients are certified organic |
| • "Organic ingredients" | Less than 70% of the ingredients are certified organic |

The Most Contaminated Foods

The Environmental Working Group has put together a very practical approach to buying organic. If you are trying to avoid pesticides in your food, purchasing the produce listed under the “Dirty Dozen” in organic form will help you get the most bang for your food buying buck. The “Clean 15” are the lowest in pesticide residues, so the difference between organic and conventional products isn’t as great. You may be more comfortable buying the “Clean 15” as conventional.

EWG’s 2017 Shopper’s Guide to Pesticides in Produce	
Dirty Dozen (Buy Organic)	Clean 15 (Lowest in Pesticides)
Strawberries	Sweet Corn
Spinach	Avocados
Nectarines	Pineapples
Apples	Cabbage
Peaches	Onions
Pears	Sweet Peas
Cherries	Papayas
Grapes	Asparagus
Celery	Mangoes
Tomatoes	Eggplant
Sweet bell peppers	Honeydew
Potatoes	Kiwi
	Cantaloupe
	Cauliflower
	Grapefruit

Who's your farmer?

Local Food

The US government monitors the organic label. It can be an expensive process for the farmers to be able to make the organic claim. Therefore, many smaller farms may not be able to afford the official organic claim. If you shop at farmers markets or co-ops where you can talk to the farmer, ask if they use organic farm practices.

Buying local can be just as important for environmental and health choices as organic foods. Local foods tend to be higher in nutrients because they are usually picked fresh and sold to you soon after picking. Produce at the grocery store may be picked before it's ripe so that it can make the long trip to the distribution center and then on to your grocery store. Find a location for your local foods at www.localharvest.org.

Just remember, the most important thing is to eat a colorful variety of produce, wherever it comes from!

References:

www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/organic-food/art-20043880?pg=2
www.foodnews.org (the Environmental Working Group)

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