

Go Organic

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NATURAL SELECTION

It's time to get on board with the organic movement.

Many people discount the value of the organic label, chalking its presence up to the latest fad; a way for food manufacturers to make even more money. In some cases, this may be true, but the fact is, this movement is an important one. The fact that the American government now regulates the organic label helps keep false advertising at bay. Any company putting the certified organic label on their product has to follow specific guidelines.

There is concern that larger companies are trying to lower these restrictions, which would discount the value of these products. To date, those efforts have failed. The organic label is important for three major categories of foods: Produce, animal products and packaged foods. Organic produce is grown only by approved, more natural means, without the toxic pesticides and herbicides commonly used on conventional (non-organic) crops. This is important because many of these chemicals are known carcinogens, shown in laboratory-controlled studies to induce tumors.

Now, picture a plant that defends itself in nature from bugs, weeds and the elements. It survives and grows using its inborn defense mechanisms, which are often the source of the vitamins and minerals that make produce so important to our diets. Conversely, imagine a plant covered with pesticides to keep bugs away, herbicides to prevent weeds and fertilizers for growth. What defense mechanisms does this plant produce? None. Organic produce is superior to any conventional product, an advantage found not only in safety, but taste as well.

The Web site, generated by the Environmental Working Group, www.foodnews.org, is a great resource. This site contains a list of the products containing the most pesticides, as well as those with the least. Protect your family by purchasing solely organic versions of those on the "dirty" list. You can be less concerned about conventional versions of "clean" produce.

Dirty Fruits and Vegetables*

Peaches
Apples
Sweet bell peppers
Celery
Nectarines
Strawberries
Cherries
Lettuce
Grapes (imported)

Pears
Spinach
Potatoes

(*List from www.foodnews.org , Environmental Working Group.)

Clean Fruits and Vegetables*

Onion
Avocado
Sweet Corn (frozen)
Pineapple
Mango
Sweet Peas
Asparagus
Kiwi
Banana
Cabbage
Broccoli
Eggplant

(*List from www.foodnews.org , Environmental Working Group.)

In order to mass-produce animal products like meat and dairy, the food industry uses various hormones to increase muscle mass and milk output. The stress put on these animals increases their risk of infection, leading to the use of antibiotics and anti-parasitic medications. There is concern that the hormones and other chemicals found in conventional meat and dairy products have negative effects on people, children especially. Early puberty, antibiotic resistance and digestive problems are just a few links in this detrimental chain. Certified organic animal products, the obvious preference, are those in which the animal was raised without the use of these chemicals.

Some nutritionists say that buying organic breads and snacks isn't worth it. This position is often drawn from the difference in cost and the idea that a [carbohydrate](#) is a carbohydrate. To be blunt, this is both poor advice and an uneducated stance. The value of organic snacks and packaged foods is that they are made with natural products, usually whole grains. Certified organic versions of breads, cereals, crackers and potato chips should always be purchased over conventional. In general, organic means that instead of being made with high fructose corn syrup and partially hydrogenated oil, the two most common pro-inflammatory products in American food, they contain real sugar and organic oil, usually canola. You will notice that, with organic packaged foods, the ingredient list contains items found in a healthy kitchen, and is likely much shorter.

One does have to be careful, though. With the organic label's rise in popularity, the market has been flooded with organic candy bars, cereal bars and other snacks. Organic does not always mean healthy. If organic sugar, or any type of sweetener (cane juice or brown rice

syrup), is one of the first three ingredients, it's best to leave the treat behind, or at least consume it in moderation. A well-balanced nutrition plan should only consist of processed and packaged foods, organic or conventional, in limited amounts.

Can't I just wash my produce to remove the chemicals?

While washing produce prior to consumption is a good idea, it simply isn't enough. Carcinogenic chemicals are often found inside the pulp of the fruit or vegetable, and cannot be removed with washing.

What about local produce from places like farmer's markets?

Most of the produce sold at farmer's markets is true organic food. This produce is usually grown with love, without chemicals and delivered from within a short distance. This last point is important, as very little fuel is used to transport these items.

Most local farmers are not certified organic, which shouldn't automatically be a cause for concern. It's expensive to have a certified organic farm and doesn't make sense financially for the small, local farmer. Simply ask your vendor about their growing methods. Ask what they do to prevent weeds and keep bugs away, as well as if you can visit their farm or garden. Often you will find that these growers are very proud of their methods and eager to explain them to you. They may even give you some advice on growing your own produce. Just some food for thought.

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