



Is Organic Right for You?

Organic food has expanded from health food stores to claim a larger share of supermarket shelves. The answers to a few common questions may help you decide if going organic is right for you.

Whether you buy organic or not, you should include a variety of fresh produce, low-fat dairy, whole grains, and lean meat, poultry and fish in your diet.

What is different about organic food?

Farmers grow and process organic food in specific ways. If they raise produce and livestock organically, for instance, they don't use chemicals for feeding, fertilizing, weed control or disease prevention.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has strict standards for foods that are labeled "organic." For example, the standards bar organic farmers from using sewage sludge, ionizing radiation and genetic engineering. Animals can't have antibiotics or growth hormones if they're sources of organic poultry, eggs, dairy products or meat.

There are 3 USDA-approved organic labels:

- 100 Percent Organic: every ingredient in the food is certified organic
- Organic: at least 95 percent of the ingredients are certified organic
- Made With Organic Ingredients: at least 70 percent of the ingredients are certified organic

The terms "natural" or "all natural" on food labels aren't the same as "organic" and have no legal meaning.

Can organic food benefit the environment?

The answer is complicated. For example, organic farmers do still use pesticides, just not synthetic ones. One study found that certain organic pesticides can have a greater environmental impact than conventional ones. Other studies have shown that organic farms use less energy, produce less waste and maintain higher quality soil.

How to Lower Your Produce Bill

Fruits and vegetables are always a healthy choice, no matter how they're grown. In addition to comparing prices at different stores, you may be able to limit your costs by:

- ✓ Buying produce in season
- ✓ Shopping at a farmers market or food co-op
- ✓ Joining a local community supported agriculture farm, where you purchase "shares" of produce