



Healthy Eating Tip

What is Organic?

When shopping for fruits, vegetables, and other agricultural products, it is noticeable that some foods are advertised as organic while some are not. Deciding to buy organic versus non-organic/conventional foods is a choice that depends on accessibility, availability, and affordability.

By understanding the labels and the growing process, you can become an informed and empowered shopper. This knowledge also increases your ability to notice the similarities and differences in how the farming methods and federal regulations impact the environment, farmers, and food consumers.

Organic

Organic agriculture uses only substances approved by the National Organic Act of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which limits or eliminates the use of synthetic chemicals, fertilizer, genetic engineering, and radiation. In order for farms to sell their products as organic, they must go through a 3-year certification process to ensure their operations are free from any residual, non-approved substances. In general, organic food production promotes crop diversity and environmental sustainability. However, it often comes at a greater cost for the farmer as well as the consumer. Organic crops typically have lower yields due to the resources used to grow them increasing the cost for the consumer.

Non-Organic/Conventional

Non-Organic, or conventional foods, may be produced by using one or more of the following: synthetic chemicals, fertilizers, genetic engineering, or radiation. For protection to the consumer and the environment, all substances and practices used must be generally recognized as safe (GRAS) by the USDA. However, more research is needed to ensure maximum safety for the air/soil/water quality and the employee/animal health over the long term. Nonetheless, conventional foods tend to cost less due to methods producing greater crop yields.



From Corporate Fitness Works Registered Dietitian, Emily Vong

Healthy Eating Continued...

Identifying Organic vs. Conventional

Foods produced from certified-organic operations are able to bear the “USDA Organic” stamp on their package or label. Fruit and vegetable barcodes also reveal information stating how the produce was grown. Organic produce barcodes have five digits and begin with “9” (e.g. 9XXXX). Non-organic/conventional produce barcodes have only four digits and begin with “4” (e.g. 4XXX).



When To Buy Organic

The Environmental Working Group has identified the “Dirty Dozen,” which includes fruits and vegetables with the most synthetic chemical residue left behind when conventionally grown. In contrast, the “Clean Fifteen” typically have minimal traces of chemicals when grown conventionally. If you are concerned about the chemical exposure but do not have the ability to buy all organic foods, prioritizing to buy only the “Dirty Dozen” in organic varieties can help avoid an “all-organic” grocery bill.



Resources

[https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/What is Organic Certification.pdf](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/What%20is%20Organic%20Certification.pdf)

<http://www.myorganicfoodclub.com/about-us/>

<https://www.ewg.org/foodnews/index.php>