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# Why Eat Organic Food?

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What is organic food?

Organic food is produced according to a set of principles and standards concerning such issues as pesticides, additives, animal welfare and sustainability. There are different forms of organic, some stricter than others. The main accreditation body to look for in the UK is the Soil Association.

Over the last year, sales of organic food in the UK have increased by over 10 percent, according to the 2004 Soil Association's Organic Food and Farming Report. Despite this rise, the amount of organic produce sold through the supermarkets is said to have fallen by 1 percent for the second year running, with more consumers turning directly to the farmers. Sales through box schemes, farmers' markets and farm shops have risen by 16 percent over the last year and are now worth £108m a year. Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury's and Waitrose were praised by the Soil Association for stocking more organic food from UK farmers and reducing the amount they import. Is organic food 'better'?

Many people turn to organic food because of concerns about pesticides. Around 350 pesticides are permitted in conventional farming and the Soil Association says an estimated 4.5 billion litres of them are used annually. While there are Government rules for pesticide residues, they still end up in our food and nobody knows the long-term implications of their combined effect.

The organic movement aims for food that is produced as 'naturally' as possible, free from trans-fats, GMOs (genetically modified organisms) and most additives. The Soil Association encourages high standards of animal welfare and campaigns against the misuse of antibiotics for growth promotion, for example. Soil Association accreditation guarantees that animals have more living space. As for nutritional superiority, more research needs to be done in this area but in a 2001 review of 41 studies, organic crops were all shown to have higher levels of Vitamin C, magnesium and phosphorus. Does organic food taste better?

The best organic producers are committed to quality and their food is outstanding, but carefully produced conventionally grown food may well taste better than mass-produced organic imports.

As a broad response to such questions, organic systems offer a guarantee of standards. It is then up to the consumer to decide what is 'good' and what is 'less good'. From a farmer's perspective, to go organic is not an easy option. It is likely that most organic producers are part of the movement in the true spirit of sustainability and good food. If you shop directly from producers it helps you work out who you trust.

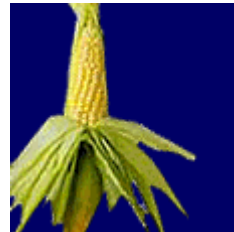
Why does organic food cost more?

Organic production is slower, more labour intensive and generally has lower yields than conventional methods. A Morgan Stanley study this year showed organic food could be up to 63 percent more expensive, but the premium is usually lower, especially if you are buying local, seasonal food directly from the producer. Furthermore, Government subsidies have focused on mainstream farming, artificially lowering the price of conventional foods. We still pay for pollution, through our taxes and higher water bills rather than at the checkout.

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Body text  
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