

Organic 101

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What is organic food?

Organic food is food that is grown without the use of synthetic fertilizers, chemical pesticides and insecticides, growth hormones or antibiotics. Organic food cannot be irradiated, contain genetically engineered organisms (GEOs) or genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and cannot be grown using sewage sludge fertilizer.

Is organic food more nutritious than conventionally grown food?

Yes. Organic farmers practice crop rotation. This means that they will grow different crops each year to preserve and nourish the soil, and to promote biodiversity. Traditional farmers may grow the same crops on the same soil year after year and use toxic chemicals, both of which result in nutrient depletion.

The nutritional value of food is strongly correlated to the nutritional value of the soil. It is all about the soil.

Here are a few studies that talk about the nutritional advantages of organic food.

- A 2010 [report](#) by Washington State University said that organic strawberries have higher levels of antioxidants, last longer and taste better than conventionally-grown strawberries.
- A 2009 [report](#) by the French Agency for Food Safety (AFSSA) says that organic food has greater levels of polyphenols in fruits and vegetables (protect against cancer), polyunsaturated fatty acids in meats and milk, and more nutrients in wholegrain cereals than traditional food.

- In 2007, the Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry Research published findings from a ten-year study at the University of California-Davis which showed flavonoid levels increase over time in organically-grown crops. More specifically, the researchers found that organic tomatoes contain on average 79 and 97% more quercetin and kaempferol aglycones (beneficial flavonoids) than conventionally-grown tomatoes. Flavonoids are antioxidants found in plants, which can be very beneficial to the human body.
- As reported in the 2006 Journal of Dairy Science, a three-year study conducted by the Universities of Liverpool and Glasgow found organic milk contained 68% more omega-3 fatty acids, on average, than conventional milk.
- A 2003 study in the Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry reported that organically-grown marionberries had 50% more antioxidants than conventionally-grown berries and organically-grown strawberries had 19% more antioxidants than conventionally-grown strawberries. The study also said that organic produce had higher levels of ascorbic acid, which the body converts to Vitamin C.

Why does organic food cost more than conventionally-grown food?

This is due to a variety of reasons including: major agribusinesses receive large subsidies from the government, particularly for corn-based products; most organic farmers do not have the economies scale to compete with large corporate conglomerates, and; organic food producers must go through a rigorous and time-consuming process to receive organic certification.

Even though conventional food may cost less, it does not deliver the same amount of mineral nutrition. The cost may be lower but so is the nutritional value.

Why does organic food not last as long as conventionally-grown food?

This is because organic food does not contain artificial preservatives to extend its shelf life. Having these preservatives results in an inferior taste.

If I am new to organic, do I have to eat absolutely everything that is organic?

Switching to a 100% organic diet Day 1 is simply not realistic for most people. If you are new to organic, below are a few different suggestions on how to get started.

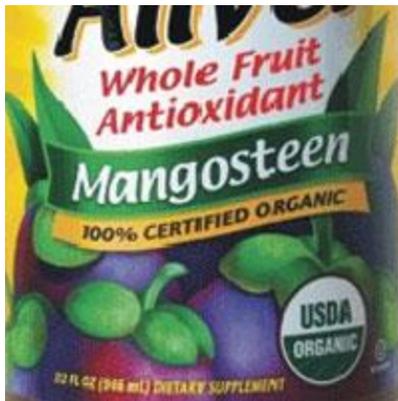
- Go into the market and look for products with the USDA Organic Seal — see below.
- Look for fruits and vegetables that start with the number “9”
- If you have kids, buy organic milk and organic cereal.
- Substitute your regular soda with organic soda or organic juices.
- If you are not a vegetarian, buy organic chicken instead of regular chicken.

Start off slowly, don't buy too much at first and see what products work well for you. Also, you will need to understand the short shelf-life of organic fruits and vegetables so you don't waste any food or money.

Here is a [video](#) that I put together that explains how we know if something is organic or not.

What are the different categories of organic?

There are three different types of organic labeling.



100% CERTIFIED ORGANIC

This means that 100% of all ingredients in a product (except salt) and water, are organic. 100% certified organic products may use the USDA Organic Seal.



ORGANIC

This means that 95% of all ingredients in a product, except salt and water, are organic. Certified organic products may use the USDA Organic Seal.



MADE WITH ORGANIC INGREDIENTS

This means that 70% of all ingredients in a product, except salt and water, are organic. These products may not use the USDA Organic Seal.

What is the history of organic food regulation in the U.S.?



It largely began with the passage of the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 (OFPA). This bill mandated for the creation of an advisory board, the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), to write recommendations for the standards of organic food. It took 12 years for the government to approve the exact wording of these standards and establish criteria for which foods could call themselves “USDA Certified Organic”.

How do I know the food I am eating is organic?

Organic food is certified by an independent, third-party certification agency. The USDA’s National Organic Program (NOP) approves organizations, both for-profit and not-for-profit, that wish to be official certification agencies.

Certifiers work with farmers to make sure that:

- The soil used has been chemical-free for at least 3 years
- The farmer is practicing and adhering to organic standards
- All operations of the farm are in compliance with organic standards
- An extensive log is in place and is being used to record all activity

Food processors and manufacturers are held to the same standards as farmers. Inspections take place at least once per year.

There are many small farmers who practice organic farming but do not participate in the certification process because the cost and time expenses are too onerous. Therefore, they are not legally allowed to call their food organic.

An organic food product lists the certification agency on its label. The largest agency is Quality Assurance International.

What is the difference between organic and natural?

Natural products are supposed to contain no artificial ingredients or added colors and be minimally processed. Natural products do not have near the regulation, standards or enforcement as do organic products.

Overall, there is a lot of widespread abuse of the word “natural”, and there is tremendous confusion about what the word means and the value it provides.