



OPTIONS CENTER NUTRITION TOPIC



Organic Food

Organic food is defined by how it cannot be made rather than how it can be made. It must be produced without the use of sewer-sludge fertilizers, most synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, genetic engineering, growth hormones, irradiation, and antibiotics. A variety of agricultural products can be produced organically, including produce, grains, meat, dairy, eggs, and processed food products.

The truth is organic farming is the oldest form of agriculture. Before the end of World War II, farming without the use of petroleum-based chemicals was the only option for farmers. Technologies developed during the war such as the chemical ammonium nitrate, which was used as munitions, became fertilizer; and organophosphates, used for nerve gas, were later used as insecticide.

These days, farmers are switching to organic agriculture once again. The meat, dairy products, and eggs that organic farmers produce are from animals that are fed organic feed and allowed access to the outdoors.

Why Is Organic Better?

The produce that you buy at the market is picked before it is fully ripe with all the potency of vitamins and minerals. Also, the soil in which the crops are grown is depleted of nutrients due to constant use season after season without rest. Additionally, when the soil is "fertilized" it is done in a non-organic manner. Not only are our foods depleted in nutrients, but what we do get is quickly being used by our bodies to fight environmental and emotional stress. The body depletes its supplies of B vitamins and a host of minerals and amino acids as the stress levels increase. (Side note: "stressed" is not "desserts" spelled backwards. Attacking stress with sugar is not healthy.)

Most importantly, pesticides, herbicides and chemicals from commercial farming are stored in the liver. The liver is one of the most vital organs in the body. It is the main filter of toxins, as well as the storehouse of nutrients (vitamins and minerals), and is responsible for the formation of healthy red blood cells. There are over 300 pesticides and herbicides used in commercial produce. These harmful chemicals can jeopardize the vital functions of our liver. This in turn affects the balance of our hormonal system, immune system and can cause allergies.

How Do I Know If a Food Is Organic?

Look for the word "organic" on produce or on a display sign. The word "organic" may also appear on packages of meat, cartons of milk, eggs, or cheese.

ORGANIC
FOOD

Organic foods are higher in enzyme levels. Enzymes are protein molecules in fresh foods that are responsible for nearly every aspect of life and health. Enzymes catalyze specific biochemical reactions. Each cell has over 100,000 enzyme particles that are necessary for metabolic processes.

Researchers at Rutgers University, intrigued by the claim that “organic is better,” decided to shop around for some answers. The Rutgers team expected the organic produce to be slightly superior in this comparison, but the results were astounding! For example, the commercial spinach had only 3% as much iron as the organic, and the commercial tomatoes only .0005%. Incredibly, many essential elements were completely absent from commercial produce. See their results at www.serrins.com/organic.html.



Direct from the Farm

By Anita Poeppel

Food

What can be more important than the food we feed our bodies? If you're like me, feeding my body the most healthful, nutritious food is a very high priority--next to the quality of water I drink. Choosing good food prevents disease and maintains a strong immune system. It's what gives our bodies the sound base we need to keep healthy. The immediate reward? It just plain tastes better.

What Is High Quality Food?

Organically raised and direct from the farm is ideal. I spend a lot of time seeking out fresh organic homegrown products like eggs, meat, vegetables, and fruit. Through farmer's markets, searching the Internet, and raising our own organic vegetables and chickens, I can obtain almost all of our perishable food direct from the producer. Buying directly from organic farmers assures me my food is absolutely the best I can obtain.

What Makes Organic Food Direct from the Farm So Special?

There are two main reasons why food needs to be organic and direct from the farm.

- Organic food is raised on biologically active, healthy soil.
- Direct from the farm allows food to ripen to a superior level of nutrition and flavor.

We all know that organic food is produced without the use of chemical or synthetic inputs. Fertilizers, herbicides for weed control, and pesticides for pest control are strictly regulated, and those allowed are from natural sources only. However, that's just the beginning for organic farming. Because organic farmers are not allowed to use chemicals to keep weeds and bugs at bay, they must rely on other means to produce a crop. And just like high quality food keeps our bodies strong and resistant to disease, plants produced on healthy, biologically active soil stand a better chance of resisting disease and pests as well.

I grew up on a traditional corn and soybean farm where spraying chemicals was a rite of spring. I've seen what the chemicals and synthetic fertilizers do to the soil. Chemicals kill the good and the bad. Walk out in the middle of a corn field and try to find a bug or an earthworm--any sign of life. There isn't one. Not even an ant hill. And the synthetic fertilizers are so soluble they run off and leach into our water supply.

Now walk out into an organic field or garden and what do you see? Earthworms, sowbugs, spiders, centipedes and millipedes. Bend down and dig your hands into the soil and let it fall through your fingers. You'll notice how the soil is crumbly and full of organic matter in various stages of decay. The soil looks healthy and alive.

These are good signs of a soil that is rich with biological activity. The soil has been treated the right way--with compost, natural source fertilizers that don't run off, and applications of organic matter. Cover crops like oats, clover, and buckwheat have been incorporated into the crop rotation to break pest and disease cycles without the use of chemicals. The cover crop, alive and green, is turned into the soil to improve *tilth*, the condition of the land. This is the way nature does it, and it's what organic farmer's do best. Organic farmers know that if they treat the soil with the respect it deserves, it will reward them.

And the cover crop, alive and green, is then turned into the soil to increase organic matter and improve *tith*. Organic farmers know that if they treat the soil with the respect it deserves, it will reward them.

And reward them it does with a healthy beautiful crop of food waiting to be harvested at the proper time. Once the crops begin to bear, it's important the food remains on the plant until fully ripened. It isn't until the vegetables and fruits have reached their full maturity that they have both superior flavor and nutrition. Food in the grocery store has been harvested immaturely and shipped many miles before it reaches your hands. Buying directly from the farmer gives you a very good chance the food has been allowed to ripen to perfection. And if there's any question, just ask. Most likely the farmer will be happy to answer your questions.



As the growing season approaches, seek out local organic farmers and try their homegrown food. As you slice into a fully ripened, delicious organic tomato, you can feel good that you are providing yourself and your family with the highest quality, best tasting, most nutritious food you can find.

Anita Poeppel and her husband Brian own and operate Broad Branch Farm, Ltd., an organic vegetable farm in Wyoming, IL. For years, the Poeppels have marketed their vegetables at the farmer's market in Naperville, Illinois and offered subscriptions for a weekly box of homegrown organic vegetable deliveries in Peoria. They strongly believe in supporting local organic agriculture.

If interested, contact Broad Branch Farm, Weekly Vegetable Box, 309-231-9290 or visit them on the web at www.broadbranchfarm.com.

Options Center for Health and Education
4316 N. Prospect Road
Peoria Heights, IL 61616
(309) 685-7721
email: options@mtco.com • www.options-center.com