

## Organic Food

Organic food is produced using principles and standards related to issues of pesticides, additives, animal welfare and sustainability. It is produced by farmers who emphasise the use of renewable resource and conservation of soil and water to enhance environmental quality. Organic meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products come from animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones. Organic food is produced without using most conventional pesticides, fertilisers made with synthetic ingredients or sewage sludge, bioengineering or ionising radiation.

There are different forms of organic principles, some stricter than others. In the UK the Soil Association is the main accreditation body, whereas, organic standards are decided by USDA in the US. Government approved certifier inspects the farm producing organic food and all the companies handling or processing organic food before it gets to local store or restaurant must be certified. Whereas the USDA does not state whether organic food is safer or more nutritious, Soil Association actively promotes organic food. Last year, UK organic food sales have increased by more than 10%, although sales in supermarkets have fallen marginally. This may be because consumers are buying directly from farmers.

The market is being driven by consumers who want to buy fresh, good-quality food with no pesticides or synthetic agricultural chemicals. Consumers are concerned about pesticides; around 350 pesticides are permitted in conventional farming, and although there are legal standards regarding pesticide residues, these still end up in our food. Organic food movement aims to produce foods as 'naturally' as possible, free from trans-fats, GMOs and most additives, although USDA cautions that 'natural' and organic are interchangeable. So foods claimed to be natural need not be organic; only foods certified as organic are so.

Nutrients of organic foods need to be systematically studied with more research. In one review of 41 studies, organic crops were shown to have higher levels of vitamin C, magnesium and phosphorus. Although organic producers will swear by their produce, carefully produced conventionally grown food may taste as good as organic food and certainly better than mass-produced organic imports. Many organic farmers and food producers command a higher price because of their 'organic' label and not necessarily because their produce is well-made and tasty. Some conventional growers say their hi-tech pest control system and animal medication is better than the low-tech methods used in organic farming, and that in livestock farming this has implications for animal welfare.

Organic production is slower, more labour intensive and generally has lower yields than conventional methods and thus cost of production is significantly higher. USDA allows the organic seal to be put on the labels of foods which are 100% organic or products with at least 95% organic ingredients. Products may still be labeled organic if they contain at least 70% organic ingredients but with less only in the ingredients' list there may be mention of organic ingredients. When products labeled 'organic' do not meet USDA norms then fine is up to \$10,000.

Today, sales of organic foods in UK are more than £ 100 million. As organic food becomes big business, some of its credentials get diluted as standards are not strictly adhered to and sometimes it is difficult to implement when food is imported. UK Government aims to make 70% of organic food sold supermarkets in England home grown from around current figure of just 30%, the rest being imported.

\* \* \*