



Organic Produce - better for my health?



Tsang, Gloria, RD. (2006). Organic Produce- better for my health? *Healthcastle*. Retrieved April 18, 2007 from www.Healthcastle.com.

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Published in October 2005; updated in June 2006

A Report suggested always buying organic for certain produce

A report released by the Environmental Working Group EWG sparked the interest in organic produce again. The report named 12 produce being the most contaminated with pesticides and suggested consumers to always buy organic. The "dirty dozen" includes apples, bell peppers, celery, cherries, imported grapes, nectarines, peaches, pears, potatoes, red raspberries, spinach and strawberries.

What does Organic mean?

Organic produce is produced by farmers who emphasize the use of renewable resources and the conservation of soil and water to enhance environmental quality for future generations. According to the USDA, organic produce is produced without using most conventional pesticides, fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients or sewage sludge, bioengineering, or ionizing radiation.



Organic produce has been regulated by the USDA's National Organic Program NOP since October 2002. In order to display the approved USDA organic seal, produce must contain at least 95% organically produced ingredients.

Organic Produce vs Conventional Produce

- **Is organic produce more nutritious?**

It is important to note that it is difficult to compare crops grown in different regions with different weather and soil conditions. Therefore a definite conclusion cannot be drawn; however it is important to note some trends. Early studies in the '90s showed that organic produce was not superior to conventional produce in terms of nutritional value. However, a more recent

review published in April 2001 showed that organic produce contains higher levels of vitamin C, iron, magnesium and phosphorus. In addition, a lower level of nitrates was found in organic crops.

- **Is organic produce free of pesticides and other chemicals?**

Unfortunately the answer is no despite that most consumers perceive it to be pesticide-free. It is, however, true that organic produce has lower concentrations of pesticide residues. A recent study published in February 2006 showed that organic produce lowers exposure to pesticides in children. It is important to note that pesticide usage in farming is subject to strict regulations. Hence, even though the conventional produce contains higher levels of pesticide residues, it does not necessarily mean that they are dangerous to one's health. Unfortunately, since no large-scale studies have investigated longer term effects of pesticides in the food chain, it is difficult to truly know if the safety limit set by the regulatory bodies is indeed sufficient enough to protect us.



Key Message: At this point, we do not know if organic produce is healthier. However we do know that they can help lower our exposure to pesticides. Contrary to most consumers' perception, it is still important to wash organic produce. Since organic crops can be fertilized with natural sources of nutrients such as animal manure, fish emulsion and plant debris, it is important to wash organic products thoroughly especially if they are to be eaten raw. Washing thoroughly can help minimize possible traces of salmonella and E Coli. Regardless of organic or conventional, fruits and vegetables are rich sources of vitamins, antioxidants and fiber. Consider practicing the following:

- Wash thoroughly with slightly warm water
- Remove the outer leaves or skins as they are usually more concentrated with pesticides