

Buying organic? New labeling standards should make it easier

Many people in America have started buying organic foods. Organic food sales have shot up from \$180 million in 1980 to over \$6.5 billion last year, not only in health food stores but in grocery stores as well. Actually, grocery stores sales made up fifty-six percent of organic food sales in the past year. Although organic food sales only make up two percent of national food sales, the organic market has definitely begun soaring, especially on Wall Street. Experts expect the figure to more than double by the year 2010. The USDA has finally released an official definition of what qualifies as "organic" food in response to the great increase in sales. It is also developing labeling standards which should be in effect by this summer. Up until the past couple of months, a definition of what actually qualifies as organic foods did not even exist. Throughout the past decade farmers and conventional farming organizations have been debating the need for federal organic labeling. Fear that the organic labels would create an unfair bias against conventional products kept conventional farmers from encouraging labeling. In December, the Grocery Manufacturers of America actually complained about the new organic standards, claiming that the new labels will mislead consumers into believing that organic products are safer and more nutritious. The agricultural secretary denies the accusation of bias stating that although the organic seal will give more validity to organic products, the seal will not imply that organic foods are safer or more nutritious. Of course, users of organic foods often believe that organic foods are safer, since they contain fewer pesticides, more nutritious because they contain more trace minerals and nutrients, and also better for the environment because organic growing practices are kinder to the soil, sky, and water.

The new USDA standards mean you will get better organic food for your buck due to an official and national standard for what foods can be called organic. You will now know with certainty that the organic foods you purchase contain no synthetic pesticides and no added chemicals. Organic farmers will also use no genetic engineering, no irradiation and no sewage fertilization. Additionally, live-stock raised under these standards will be given 100 percent organic feed and will not be treated with antibiotics. Before the standardization, consumers often had to trust misleading labeling claims on organic products. Even with the new standards, the question is whether it is worth it to purchase organic. Americans who consume organic foods often have substantially higher monthly grocery costs. Actually, in 1998 average costs of organic foods were fifty-seven percent higher than conventional foods. Additionally, a recent report on 20/20 stated that organic foods contain dangerous bacteria such as E. coli and salmonella. However, more and more doctors believe that organic foods are safe and are well worth the additional cost. Those doctors who support organic eating often believe that the cumulative effects of toxins in our food, water, and air can be extremely harmful to our health. They also believe that anything we can do to reduce the toxins is well worth it.

If you only have a small budget but would like to go organic, there are still some things you can do. Some foods are more known for pesticide residue than others. Start with buying these if you can only buy limited amounts of organic foods. Citrus foods are usually not a high risk because of their thick skins, as well as asparagus, bananas, broccoli cauliflower, cherries, corn, onions, pineapple, sweet peas, and watermelon. These are considered by the FDA and EPA to be the ten cleanest foods. Additionally, make sure to wash all the produce you buy, whether or not it is organic. You can regularly take an antioxidant supplement which will help the body to remove any toxins that are on the produce. Most importantly, be sure to keep eating fruits and vegetables, as they are essential to good health.

About the Author

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