

## Making the Switch to Organic Foods

*Buying organic is a delicious way to bring healthy eating and support for the environment into your kitchen. The key principle behind organic food is healthy soil. By acting as responsible stewards of their land, organic farmers create a cycle of healthy soil, growing healthy food for healthier people. (We think it tastes better, too.)*

**Conventional farming practices** extract a higher cost from our environment through contamination caused by pesticides polluting our air, soil and water. Fertilizers can weaken the soil with synthetic nutrients. Herbicides and pesticides harm more than the targeted pests, as these harsh chemicals run off into the soil and water supply. Farmers and farm workers who apply these chemical adjuncts could also risk their own long-term health. Efforts to clean up these areas often come at a hidden cost to taxpayers. The loss of natural habitats for beneficial insects and wildlife is inestimable.

Many pesticides can penetrate the peel, and others are absorbed in the plant's roots. Washing and peeling may only remove up to 25 percent of pesticide residues.

### Resources

#### **Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy**

2105 1st Ave. S.  
Minneapolis, MN 55404  
612-870-3424  
[www.iatp.org](http://www.iatp.org)

#### **Environmental Working Group**

1436 U Street NW, Suite 100  
Washington, DC 20009  
Email: [info@ewg.org](mailto:info@ewg.org)  
[www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org)

#### **Midwest Food Alliance**

Blair Arcade West, Suite T  
400 Selby Ave.  
St. Paul, MN 55102  
651-265-3682  
[www.thefoodalliance.org](http://www.thefoodalliance.org)

#### **Midwest Organic Services Association**

PO Box 344  
Viroqua, WI 54665  
608-734-3349  
email: [mosa@mosaorganic.org](mailto:mosa@mosaorganic.org)  
[www.mosaorganic.org](http://www.mosaorganic.org)

#### **Organic Trade Association**

PO Box 547  
Greenfield, MA 01301  
413-774-7511  
email: [info@ota.com](mailto:info@ota.com)  
[www.ota.com](http://www.ota.com)

#### **United States Department of Agriculture**

Washington, DC 20250  
[www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)



## ALL ABOUT Organic Foods



We are over 100 consumer-owned grocery co-ops working together, across the country, to bring our passion for good food, our partnerships with local farmers and suppliers, our care for the community and the planet to you.

For a complete store listing, visit [www.ncga.coop/member-stores](http://www.ncga.coop/member-stores)

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## Go Organic!

If you're making the switch to organic foods, first explore the foods you eat most often while considering your budget and lifestyle.

Do you eat fresh fruit in the morning?

Try in-season, fresh bananas or oranges for breakfast. Do you drink coffee? Try organic varieties. Eat a lot of salads for lunch? Give the organic lettuces and greens a go. We think that you'll taste the difference and realize how easy it is to make the switch.

While prices of organic foods might seem a little higher to some shoppers, we support paying a premium price in the interest of giving organic farmers a fair return on their investment. Organic certification is an expense to farmers that benefits consumers' right to know how their food was grown. We encourage shoppers to "go organic" in support of such ecologically minded farmers (and so that you can continue to enjoy the great flavor of organic foods).

### Organic Certification of Retailers

Any retailer selling organic food must be prepared to conform to the USDA Organic Food and Production Act, although becoming a certified organic retailer is optional. Although certification is not required, we support the organic certification of our retail stores because it maintains a chain of integrity from certified farms to certified warehouses to certified grocers.



Co-ops are working together to help systematically certify our stores as efficiently as possible. Ask your local co-op's representative for information about their certified departments.

Organic retailer certification is based on site inspections by the organic certifying agency. These inspections include a review of our organic producers, processors, handlers, manufacturers and retailers. A certified organic retailer must conform to the following:

- Adhere to a comprehensive plan to protect organic products from contamination and commingling with non-organic product and non-organic cleaning supplies.
- Keep documentation that tracks connections between the retailer and organic suppliers for five years.
- Display organic product with proper and accurate signage.
- Keep organic certificates on file for farms from whom the store buys directly.
- Submit to an annual review of organic certification.

Organically grown food is produced without the use of synthetic pesticides, chemicals and fertilizers. Organic agricultural practices promote sustainable growing methods that nurture the soil, crops and animals, creating a beneficial habitat for all living things. In addition, consumers who purchase organically grown foods may benefit from the invigorating flavors of foods grown and harvested with care.

### National Organic Standards for Certified Organic Products

All foods labeled and sold as "organic" must be certified by the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) accredited independent certifying agencies.

Organic farming and certified products are defined by the USDA Organic Foods Production Act as follows:

- Three years with no application of prohibited materials (no synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, or GMOs) prior to certification.
- No use of prohibited substances while certified; no sewage sludge; no irradiation.
- Proactive soil building, conservation, manure management, and crop rotation systems.

### The Dirty Dozen Produce Items: Most Contaminated with Pesticides

1. Strawberries \*
2. Bell peppers \*
3. Red Raspberries \*
4. Peaches \*
5. Nectarines \*
6. Celery \*
7. Apples \*
8. Spinach \*
9. Cherries
10. Grapes (imported)
11. Pears
12. Potatoes

*\* Tests showed these had the highest likelihood of multiple pesticides.*

*From the Environmental Working Group*

- Mandatory outdoor access for livestock, access to pasture for ruminants.
- No antibiotics or hormones used.
- 100 percent organic feed.
- Organic management from birth or hatching.
- No commingling or contamination of organic products during processing, and mandatory recordkeeping for all operations.

### LABELING OF PRODUCTS

The USDA label requirements on all organic products follows four basic labeling categories.

Product Label Claim	"100% Organic"	"Organic"	"Made with Organic (specified ingredients or food groups)" on label	None
Label Parameters	100% Organic Ingredients	At least 95% Organic Ingredients	At least 70–95% Organic Ingredients	Less than 70% Organic Ingredients