

Going Organic



The decision to buy organic foods is a personal one, but these foods tend to cost more. Most people cannot afford to buy only organic foods. As you make your choices, weigh the benefits of organic foods against their effect on your budget.

What Does “Organic” Mean?

The term “organic” applies to foods grown **without** any of the following:

- Conventional pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers
- Hormones and antibiotics

Organic certification is costly and difficult for farms to obtain. Some local farmers follow organic practices but choose to not spend money to become certified organic. On your next trip to the farmer’s market, ask the farmers about their growing practices.

Understanding the Terms

The U.S. government has set guidelines for the use of “organic” on packaging and labels:

- You will find an **Organic** sticker or label on organic foods with only one ingredient, like fruits, vegetables, milk, and meats.
- When a product with two or more ingredients is labeled **Organic**, 95 to 99 percent of the ingredients are organic.
- If the label says **100% Organic**, the product is made with all organic ingredients.
- **Made with Organic Ingredients** means 70 to 94 percent of the ingredients in the product are organic.

Spending Wisely

If you want to add organic foods to your shopping list, which should you pick? While keeping your budget in mind, you may want to think about which organic choices could make a difference to your health.

Here are some foods to consider buying organic:

- **Meat:** Conventional meat often contains added hormones and antibiotics. Organic meat does not.

- **Milk:** Research shows that milk from organic dairy cows contains more healthy nutrients than milk from other cows. Plus, the cows are treated more humanely, and they are not given growth hormones.
- **The “dirty dozen” fruits and vegetables:** The Environmental Working Group (EWG) lists the 12 types of produce with the **highest** amounts of pesticides. (See box below.) You may want to buy organic or locally grown versions of these 12 foods whenever you can.

The “Dirty Dozen” Fruits and Vegetables

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|----------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| • Apples | • Nectarines | • Blueberries |
| • Strawberries | • Imported grapes | • Lettuce |
| • Peaches | • Sweet bell peppers | • Kale and collard greens |
| • Spinach | • Potatoes | |



Organic Foods You Might Skip

Some organic foods may not provide more benefits than conventional choices, particularly when organic types cost more. Here are a couple of examples:

- **Processed foods:** Don’t assume organic is healthier when it comes to processed foods like cookies, chips, and cakes. Organic processed foods still contain calories. Eat them in moderation.
- **The “clean 15” fruits and vegetables:** EWG, the group that listed the “dirty dozen,” found 15 conventionally grown fruits and vegetables with the **least** amount of pesticides. (See box below.) To stay within your budget, you might want to choose conventional types of these foods.

The “Clean 15” Fruits and Vegetables

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|--------------|---------------------------------|------------------|
| • Onions | • Green peas (frozen) | • Cabbage |
| • Corn | • Mango | • Watermelon |
| • Pineapples | • Eggplant | • Sweet potatoes |
| • Avocado | • Cantaloupe (grown in the USA) | • Grapefruit |
| • Asparagus | • Kiwi | • Mushrooms |

