Organic Foods – What’s the Hype?
Learning objectives

Organic Foods – What’s the Hype?

• Understand the term "organic" foods
• Learn labeling requirements for organic foods
• Discuss common questions
• Discover tips to lower pesticide intake
• Learn how to become a savvy shopper
What is **organic**?

- **Organic is a labeling term** that indicates that food or other agricultural products has been produced through approved methods.

- Food that is labeled organic has been grown or raised without chemical fertilizers, pest killers (pesticides), weed killers (herbicides), hormones or drugs.
Characteristics of organic foods

**Organic Farmers**

- Use only natural pest killers
- Use only natural fertilizers
- Feed their animals only organic food
- Don’t give animals antibiotics or growth hormones
- Don’t use genetically modified organisms (GMOs)
- Don’t use irradiation
USDA organic seal

- Strict standards for organic labeling
- One way to search for organic foods
  - Voluntary, fees apply
  - Some organic foods may not be labeled
Organic seal on foods

- **100% Organic**
  Use of the USDA Organic Seal is optional.
  - ![Organic Seal](image)

- **Organic**
  (95% or more Organic Ingredients)
  Use of the USDA Organic Seal is optional.
  - ![Organic Seal](image)

- **Made with Organic Ingredients**
  (At least 70% Organic Ingredients)
  - ![Organic Seal](image)

- **Less than 70% Organic Ingredients**
  (Organic Ingredients denoted in ingredient list only)
  - ![Organic Seal](image)
Voluntary labels for livestock products

- **No added hormones or steroids**

- **Grass-fed** - grass makes up the majority of animal’s diet

- **Pasture-raised and/or humane** - not regulated

- **Free-range** - flock provided shelter with access to outdoors

- **Cage-free** - flock able to freely roam enclosed area

- **Natural** - minimally processed with no artificial ingredients
ANSWER:

• Foods with the organic label have less pesticide residue compared with most nonorganic foods
• Foods grown with pesticides (natural or artificial) can have small amounts of pesticide left on the food when it gets to the store
• Overall, organic foods are not considered more safe than conventionally produced foods
Common questions: What are your thoughts?

Are organic foods more nutritious?

ANSWER:

• There is not enough evidence to say that organic food is more nutritious than nonorganic food, although eating an organic diet may reduce exposures to pesticides and antibiotic-resistant bacteria.
**Common questions: What are your thoughts?**

**ANSWER:**

- Children may be more sensitive than adults to pesticides and other chemicals because they are still growing.
Common questions: What are your thoughts?

ANSWER:

- There is no evidence that organic food tastes better just because it’s organic.
- Organic food is usually fresher because it does not contain preservatives and it needs to be eaten sooner.
Common questions: What are your thoughts?

ANSWER:

- In general, yes. Many organic farmers and ranchers work to conserve water and soil.
Foods that are likely to have the highest levels of pesticides

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fruits</th>
<th>Vegetables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peaches</td>
<td>Celery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apples</td>
<td>Snap peas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nectarines</td>
<td>Sweet bell peppers and hot peppers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strawberries</td>
<td>Cucumbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherry tomatoes</td>
<td>Potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grapes</td>
<td>Leafy greens such as collard greens, spinach, and kale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foods that are likely to have the lowest levels of pesticides

**Fruits**
- Avocados
- Pineapples
- Mango
- Kiwi fruit
- Eggplant
- Cantaloupe
- Papaya
- Grapefruit

**Vegetables**
- Onions
- Sweet corn
- Sweet peas
- Asparagus
- Cabbage
- Sweet potatoes
- Cauliflower
Tips to Lower the Amount of Pesticides

Wash raw fruits and vegetables under running water

Peel apples, nectarines, peaches, cucumbers and potatoes

Throw away the outer leaves of head lettuce and cabbage

Buy from local farms and ranches (certified organic or not)

Remember that eating nonorganic fruits and vegetables, even those with higher pesticide levels, is better than not eating fruits and vegetables at all.
Genetically modified organisms (GMOs)

• A plant or animal whose DNA has been changed in a lab

• Common GMOs:
  – Soy, canola, corn, sugar beets, tomatoes, squash, potatoes, soybeans

While organic farming regulations prohibit the use of GMOs, it is possible for organic crop to be exposed to GMOs
Function and safety of GMO’s

• Potential benefits include:
  – More nutritious and tastier foods
  – Decreased use of pesticides
  – Faster growing plants and animals

• Safety
  – GMO’s are generally regarded as safe, but there has not been adequate testing to ensure complete safety
  – If concerned, look for labels indicating the food does not contain GMOs

Labeled as:
“no GMO”
“non-GMO”
“GMO-free”
Organic shopping

- **Read packaging and look for:**
  - The organic seal
  - “No GMOs” (most processed foods contain GMOs)
  - Don’t fall for the “natural” label

- **If there are no organic products, look for:**
  - Meat and poultry labeled “No antibiotics administered/USDA process certified”
  - Milk labeled “rBGH-free” or “rBST-free” – does not contain artificial hormones
Why does organic food cost more?

• **Extra labor**
  - Growing plants and raising animals without the help of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and drugs can take more work

• **Feed**
  - May cost organic cattle ranchers twice as much to feed their animals because they must use organic feed

• **Small operation farmers**
  - Conventional farmers and ranchers often get money from the government so that they can sell their food for lower prices

Shop around. Sometimes the price of organic products is close to the price of conventional ones, especially when they are in-season or on sale.
Cost-savings tips for organic foods

- Go organic for produce with higher pesticide levels
- Consider buying organic foods in-season
- Visit farmer’s markets and talk to the growers
- Look for community-supported agriculture (CSAs) programs
- Buy cheaper cuts of organic meat
- Browse the bulk aisle for flour, pasta, and cereals
Summary

• Look for the organic seal
• Don’t be fooled by the labels ‘natural’, ‘pasture-raised’, or ‘humane’

• Organic foods may have less pesticide residue than non-organic foods
• You can lower the amounts of pesticides by washing or peeling foods

• Foods labeled ‘organic’ should not contain GMOs
• GMOs are generally regarded as safe, but further testing is needed

• Overall, organic food is neither safer nor more nutritious than conventionally produced foods
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Thank you