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Choosing Organic for Health

By Marjorie Geiser, RD

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We come from a society where growing organic and just growing produce and livestock for food was once one and the same. Small, family farms still grow their own food using traditional methods passed down through the generations. As commercial farming became big-business, however, growers and farmers started to investigate methods of increasing crops and building bigger livestock in order to increase their profits. This led to increased use of pesticides and drugs to enhance yield.

In this article, we will look at what is required in order to call a product organic, how choosing organic eating and farming impact the environment and our health, discuss the benefits of eating organic foods, and what research says about the nutritional benefits of organically-grown produce.

Calling it "Organic"

In 1995, the US National Organic Standards Board passed the definition of 'organic', which is a labeling term denoting products produced under the authority of the Organic Foods Production Act. It states, "Organic agriculture is an ecological production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity. It is based on minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain, and enhance ecological harmony."

The primary goal of organic agriculture is to optimize the health and productivity of interdependent communities of soil life, plants, animals, and people.

The philosophy of organic production of livestock is to provide conditions that meet the health needs and natural behavior of the animal. Organic livestock must be given access to the outdoors, fresh air, water, sunshine, grass and pasture, and are fed 100% organic feed. They must not be given or fed hormones, antibiotics or other animal drugs in their feed. If an animal gets sick and needs antibiotics, they cannot be considered organic. Feeding of animal parts of any kind to ruminants that, by nature,

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eat a vegetarian diet, is also prohibited. Thus, no animal byproducts of any sort are incorporated in organic feed at any time.

Because farmers must keep extensive records as part of their farming and handling plans in order to be certified organic, one is always able to trace the animal from birth to market of the meat. When meat is labeled as organic, this means that 100% of that product is organic.

Although organic crops must be produced without the use of pesticides, it is estimated that between 10–25% of organic fruits and vegetables contain some residues of synthetic pesticides. This is because of the influence of rain, air and polluted water sources. In order to qualify as 'organic', crops must be grown on soil free of prohibited substances for three years before harvest. Until then, they cannot be called organic.

When pests get out of balance and traditional organic methods don't work for pest control, farmers can

request permission to use other products that are considered low risk by the National Organic Standards Board.

The Environment

According to the 15–year study, "Farming Systems Trial", organic soils have higher microbial content, making for healthier soils and plants. This study concluded that organically grown foods are raised in soils that have better physical structure, provide better drainage, may support higher microbial activity, and in years of drought, organic systems may possibly outperform conventional systems. So, organic growing may help feed more people in our future!

What is the cost of conventional farming, today? The above–mentioned 15 –year study showed that conventional farming uses 50% more energy than organic farming. In one report, it was estimated that only 0.1% of applied pesticides actually reach the targets, leaving most of the pesticide, 99.9%, to impact the environment. Multiple investigations have shown that our water supplies, both in rivers and area tap waters, are showing high levels of pesticides and antibiotics used in farming practices. Water samples taken from the Ohio River as well as area tap water contained trace amounts of penicillin, tetracycline and vancomycin.

Toxic chemicals are contaminating groundwater on every inhabited continent, endangering the world's most valuable supplies of freshwater, according to a Worldwatch paper, *Deep Trouble: The Hidden Threat of Groundwater Pollution*. Calling for a systemic overhaul of manufacturing and industrial agriculture, the paper notes that several water utilities in Germany now pay farmers to switch to organic operations because this costs less than removing farm chemicals from water supplies.

What About our Health?

Eating organic food is not a fad. As people become more informed and aware, they are taking steps to ensure their health. US sales of organic food totaled 5.4 billion dollars in 1998, but was up to 7.8 billion dollars in the year 2000. The 2004 Whole Foods Market Organic Foods Trend Tracker survey found

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that 27% of Americans are eating more organic foods than they did a year ago.

A study conducted by the California Department of Pesticide Regulation reports that the number of people poisoned by drifting pesticides increased by 20% during 2000.

A rise in interest and concern for the use of pesticides in food resulted in the passage of the 1996 Food Quality Protection Act, directing the US EPA to reassess the usage and impact of pesticides for food use.

Particular attention was paid to the impact on children and infants, whose lower body weights and higher consumption of food per body weight present higher exposure to any risks associated with pesticide residues.

Publishing an update to its 1999 report on food safety, the Consumers Union in May 2000 reiterated that pesticide residues in foods children eat every day often exceed safe levels. The update found high levels of pesticide residues on winter squash, peaches, apples, grapes, pears, green beans, spinach, strawberries, and cantaloupe. The Consumers Union urged consumers to consider buying organically grown varieties, particularly of these fruits and vegetables.

The most common class of pesticide in the US is organophosphates (OP's). These are known as neurotoxins.

An article published in 2002 examined the urine concentration of OP residues in 2–5 year olds. Researchers found, on average, that children eating conventionally grown food showed an 8.5 times higher amount of OP residue in their urine than those eating organic food. Studies have also shown harmful effects on fetal growth, as well.

Pesticides are not the only threat, however. 70% of all antibiotics in the US are used to fatten up livestock, today. Farm animals receive 24.6 million pounds of antibiotics per year!

Public health authorities now link low-level antibiotic use in livestock to greater numbers of people contracting infections that resist treatment with the same drugs. The American Medical Association adopted a resolution in June of 2001, opposing the use of sub-therapeutic levels of antibiotics in agriculture and the World Health Organization, in its 2001 report, urged farmers to stop using antibiotics for growth promotion. Studies are finding the same antibiotic resistant bacteria in the intestines of consumers that develop in commercial meats and poultry.

Is it More Nutritious?

Until recently, there had been little evidence that organically grown produce was higher in nutrients. It's long been held that healthier soils would produce a product higher in nutritional quality, but there was never the science to support this belief. Everyone agrees that organic foods taste better.

In 2001, nutrition specialist Virginia Worthington published her review of 41 published studies comparing the nutritional values of organic and conventionally grown fruits, vegetables and grains.

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What she found was that organically grown crops provided 17% more vitamin C, 21% more iron, 29% more magnesium, and 13.6% more phosphorus than conventionally grown products. She noted that five servings of organic vegetables provided the recommended daily intake of vitamin C for men and women, while their conventional counterparts did not. Today there are more studies that show the same results that Ms. Worthington concluded.

Considering the health benefits of eating organic foods, along with the knowledge of how conventionally grown and raised food is impacting the planet should be enough to consider paying greater attention to eating organic, today. Since most people buy their food in local supermarkets, it's good news that more and more markets are providing natural and organic foods in their stores. Findings from a survey by Supermarket News showed that 61% of consumers now buy their organic foods in supermarkets. More communities and health agencies also are working to set up more farmer's markets for their communities, also, which brings more organic, locally grown foods to the consumer. The next time you go shopping, consider investigating organic choices to see if it's indeed worth the change!

Marjorie Geiser has been teaching health, fitness and nutrition since 1982. She is a nutritionist, registered dietitian, certified personal trainer and life coach. As the owner of MEG Fitness, Marjorie's goal for her clients is to help them incorporate healthy eating and fitness into their busy lives.

In Margie's major health and nutritional support tool, the 30-Day Fitness Focus Program you will get a jumpstart on learning what you are really eating, what regular exercise you do, and exactly how you tend to sabotage yourself from achieving your goals.

To learn more about the services Margie offers, go to her website at

or email her at

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The Benefits Of Organic Flaxseed Oil

By Greg Haehl

Organic Flax Seed Oil Provides the Right Kind of Fatty Acid

For countless years the argument the fat in your diet was bad for your health. The problem with most people's diets however is that they are getting too much of the wrong types of fat in their diets and not enough of the fats that are good for them. Organic Flax Seed Oil contains linoleic and alpha-linoleic acid, two fats that are extremely good for the body. Organic Flax Seed Oil is beneficial in many ways.

Organic Flax Seed Oil is Good for the Kidneys

Many studies being performed by health care professionals are showing that the linoleic and

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alpha–linoleic acids in Organic Flax Seed Oil are proving to be quite beneficial in the treatment of autoimmune diseases. Systemic lupus an autoimmune disease likely to strike younger women is often found to have inflammation of the kidneys as one of its symptoms. A study performed on both animals and humans with this condition showed that renal function began to improve when taking between 15 to 40 grams of Organic Flax Seed Oil a day for at least a four week time span.

Organic Flax Seed Oil supplements are also being shown to ease the symptoms of arthritis. Completed studies by medical professionals are showing patients who added Organic Flax Seed Oil to their diets showed a lessening in arthritic symptoms after just a few short weeks.

Organic Flax Seed Oil doesn't appear to have any bad side effects if taken as directed. It works well as a substitute for several different oils used in cooking and baking. You can also add organic flax seed oil to a nutritional shake or drink it on its own.

Organic Flax Seed Oil Just Makes Your Body Work Better

These are just two of the diseases that Organic Flax Seed Oil is being shown to be useful in aiding with treatment. Organic Flax Seed Oil is also very beneficial to pregnant and nursing women and organic flax seed oil is also being used to lower cholesterol. As always you should check with your health care provider before starting any kind of alternative treatment program and contact the hospital right away should you be suffering any side effects you believe are from taking Organic Flax Seed Oil.

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