



Organic 101: A Basic Reference Guide

What does organic mean?

The term “Organic” refers to a method of growing and producing food.¹

Does “natural” mean the same as organic?

No. In the United States the FDA does not have rules or regulations for products labeled “natural.” Unlike “natural” and other marketing claims that manufacturers make, only organic offers third-party certified, government-backed assurance that products are grown and processed without the use of toxic chemicals, antibiotics and synthetic growth hormones.²

Can I trust the word organic on food labels?

Yes. This is because the USDA strictly regulates the use of the word “organic” on products; they have a rigorous third party certification system in place to ensure a specific set of practices are being followed before earning the right to use the word “organic” to describe ingredients.³

What does the USDA organic seal signify?

The USDA created the organic seal to assure consumers those specific standards of organic production and integrity are being met. Organic meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products come from animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones. Organic food is produced without using most conventional pesticides; fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients or sewage sludge; bioengineering; or ionizing radiation, or genetically modified organisms (GMO).³ In addition, USDA certified organic operations must have an organic systems plan as well as tracking records, and are subject to random checks to ensure standards are being met.⁴

Are all organic labels equal?

The USDA has identified 3 categories of organic labeling:

- **“100% Organic”**: Made with 100% organic ingredients. These products are allowed to display the USDA organic seal.
- **“Organic”**: Made with at least 95% organic Ingredients. These products are allowed to display the USDA organic seal.
- **“Made with Organic Ingredients”**: Made with a minimum of 70% organic ingredients, with strict guidelines on the quality of the remaining 30% ingredients (for example, no GMOs). These products cannot display the USDA organic seal.

Products containing less than 70% organic ingredients may list organically produced ingredients on the side panel of the package, but may not make any organic claims on the front of the package and cannot display the USDA organic seal.⁵





What are the benefits of eating organic?

This is one of the most common questions when it comes to buying organic products, and can be divided into benefits for YOU (human health) and benefits for our ENVIRONMENT (planet health).

BENEFITS FOR YOU

Agricultural Chemicals & Overall Health

- Agricultural chemicals have statistically and significantly been implicated in causing all sorts of cancers, behavioral problems, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, autism, Parkinson's disease, reduced intelligence, infertility, miscarriage, diabetes, infant deformities, and low birth weight.⁶
- Organic agriculture offers numerous opportunities to reduce exposure to agricultural pesticides through the food and water supply, which may be detrimental to human health particularly for high-risk groups such as pregnant women, infants, and young children.⁷

Reduced Pesticide Exposure for Children and Pregnant Women

- Among the most important consumers for organic are women of child-bearing age, newborns, and children.⁸
- Children are far more susceptible to the health risks of pesticide exposure as their internal organs are not fully developed. For example, their immune systems may not be able to protect them against pesticides and their excretory systems may not be able to excrete these chemicals. Pesticide exposure may also permanently affect development negatively by blocking the absorption of nutrients necessary for development.⁸
- Exposure to organophosphates has been associated with adverse effects on neurodevelopment, such as behavioral problems and lower cognitive function. Research suggests that organophosphate exposure, at levels common among US children, may contribute to ADHD prevalence.⁹
- Research suggests an organic diet can significantly lower children's dietary exposure to organophosphorus pesticides (OP). OP are common agricultural pesticides known to cause neurologic effects in animals and humans.¹⁰

Nutritional Quality

- While to date there isn't a large body of evidence for significant nutrient advantages to organic as a category, when compared to conventional milk organic milk has been shown to have higher amounts of specific health-promoting nutrients such as vitamin E, beta-carotene, omega-3 fatty acids, and antioxidants. Also, organic milk may contain significantly higher levels of the beneficial fat, conjugated linoleic acid.¹¹





BENEFITS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

A Better Farming System for a Changing Earth

- While soil, climate, and post-harvest handling all influence nutrient content, organic farming practices have a whole host of benefits beyond the innate nutritional quality of the food.⁶
- Rodale Institute's Farming Systems Trial (FST) is America's longest running, side-by-side comparison of conventional and organic agriculture. The project shows the feasibility of making a transition to organic production and the multiple economic, environmental and energy conservation impacts. FST has shown the potential of organic agriculture to improve our soil and water, while at the same time to produce crop yields and net returns that are comparable to (or better than) conventional systems.¹²

Documented environmental benefits of organic production systems and some key findings from the FST include:

- reduced nutrient pollution
- improved soil organic matter
- lower energy use
- reduced pesticide residues in food and water
- enhanced biodiversity

Why do organic foods cost more?

There are several reasons to explain the higher cost of organic foods.

Conventional agriculture carries many hidden costs to us all, such as the external environmental and social costs that such production systems create. Prices of organic foods include not only the cost of the food production itself, but also a range of other factors that are not captured in the price of conventional food¹³, such as:

- Environmental enhancement and protection (and avoidance of future expenses to mitigate pollution)
- Higher standards for animal welfare
- Assuring a fair and sufficient income to farmers and growers

Conventional farmers receive a substantially higher proportion of the government's agricultural subsidies as compared to organic farmers, thereby making the cost of conventionally grown foods artificially low.^{13, 14}

For more information, please email nutrition@stonyfield.com





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