



A CAFÉ SAM REPORT: ORGANIC FOOD 101
(9/01/09)

Today, the method of producing and processing food such as fruits, vegetables, and meat determines whether or not it can be called “organic.” Farmers who grow organic produce and raise livestock don't use conventional methods. For example, organic produce farmers use compost and manure (natural fertilizers), and complex systems for rotating crops and fields to promote plant growth. They use natural insecticides such as beneficial insects, birds and traps to stave off pests, and manage weeds by hand, mulching, and tilling soil. Organic animal farmers give cattle organic feed, and allow access to the outdoors. They also use preventive measures such as rotational grazing, a balanced diet, and clean housing to help minimize disease.

Conventional produce farmers, on the other hand, utilize chemical fertilizers to increase their production yields, in addition to chemical pesticides and herbicides to protect plants from insects, disease, and weeds. Conventional animal farmers give livestock antibiotics, medications, and growth hormones to prevent disease and spur growth.

The nice thing about organic farming is that it's natural and doesn't use synthetic chemicals for production or processing. Therefore, organic farming supports better biodiversity in the environment and soil, since the man made chemicals are not present. Better biodiversity in the environment means healthier numbers of plant and animal species. Better biodiversity in the soil means reduced susceptibility to drought and less need to draw from water sources (among other things).

Overall, organic farming is more friendly to the ecosystem than conventional farming.

A small debate. Some people buy organic food because they say it tastes better than conventionally grown food – but others argue this is a subjective consideration. You'll have to decide that one for yourself!

A big surprise. On the health front, to date there is no empirical evidence to show organic foods are better for you than conventionally grown foods. A recent study commissioned by Great Britain's Food Standard Agency (the U.S. equivalent of the USDA) concluded that organic foods do not have greater nutritional value than their conventionally grown counterparts. And although many people buy organic fruits and vegetables to avoid pesticides, we do not know whether the small amounts of pesticide in conventionally grown produce are hazardous to our health.

The concept of organic farming was originally built on the practice of growing (and buying) locally so food would get to the consumer faster and fresher, and eliminating environmental hazards and economic costs of transportation. Today organic farming is a booming business. Is the current increase in appeal for organic foods vs. conventional foods just a craze (like bottled water vs. tap water was five to ten years ago), or is it here to stay? We'll leave off where you were just before clicking onto this page. Café Sam buys local organic produce from Naturally Grown Farms during the summer because of its beautiful product and environmentally friendly ways, and we have no plan to make any changes. We'll keep watching for their pickup truck twice a week for many summers to come. It's a no brainer (here to stay), as far as we're concerned!