

More and more people of all income groups have access to organic food. At the same time, it's true that there is a premium price on organic products at the grocery store. Unfortunately, the price of chemically grown food does not include the externalities, such as pollution cleanup costs and treatment for the poisoning of farmers and farmworkers. However, buying organic does not mean you have to burn a hole in your wallet each time you set out to buy groceries. It may take some extra planning and commitment, but considering all the benefits of organic food, it is well worth the extra effort. Consider the options that follow and insist on organic.



Eat Seasonally and Locally

Though it is a widely held notion that fruits and vegetables from the farmers market are more expensive than their big-box grocery store counterparts, there has been little research to back up this claim. In fact, a report by the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) of Vermont finds that just the opposite is true: organic produce from farmers markets consistently costs less than organic produce from grocery stores. This corroborates findings in Washington, Iowa and other parts of the country.

In addition to economic benefits, local, organic produce has generally been harvested recently and is grown for its taste and nutritional qualities, not its durability. Taste alone is a compelling enough reason, but the benefits go beyond the palette. Local, organic farms do not contribute to pesticide contamination in communities.

Tip: Stock up on organic produce when it's at its cheapest. Can or freeze what you won't eat in the short term so you can enjoy summer's bounty all year long.

Simple Recipes: Less Is More

Frozen dinners, restaurant meals, packaged foods, and other convenient options quickly add up. Limit spending on value-added products and stick with simple recipes that are quick and easy to prepare. If you purchase high quality, in-season, organic ingredients, you usually need nothing more than a little heat and touch of olive oil along with some salt and pepper to make something delicious.

Tip: Ask your farmers if they have any suggestions for preparing their produce. If anyone knows how to eat well, it's likely to be the person who grew your food.

Community Supported Agriculture

Commonly referred to as CSA's, this is an arrangement where members pay a farmer at the beginning of the season or in installments throughout the year and receive a weekly share of whatever produce is available at the time. Membership can seem like a large sum of money up front, however, when you divide it by the amount of weeks you receive your share, the savings are well worth it. This benefits farmers because the guaranteed payment helps with cash flow and cuts marketing costs. Aside from saving money, it's a great way to add diversity to your diet!

Tip: Ask at your local farmers market or visit www.localharvest.org for more information on CSAs, as well as a list of resources in your area.

Food Co-ops or Buying Clubs

A food cooperative is a member-owned and controlled organization which generally provides high quality goods at low prices. There are a number of different styles of food co-ops, however all share a core set of principles, including democratic decision making, mutual financial benefit, open membership, and are not for profit. While "prepared" goods may be offered, the real saving occurs in purchasing bulk goods.

Buying clubs have similar principles as food co-ops, but are usually smaller and less formal, comprised of a couple of households or a small neighborhood group. Members place an order for bulk grains, flour, beans, oils, and even canned goods, which can then be divided and distributed among club members. This often reduces packaging significantly as well.

The Real Cost of "Conventional" Food

It is said that organically produced food has higher prices at the store because it takes more time and energy to produce than its chemical-intensive counterpart. Compared to chemical-intensive farming, organic farmers pay closer attention to the health of their agricultural ecosystems and the potential impacts of their farming practices, and this more intensive management does come with a pricetag. However, this is only part of the story, as it overlooks the glaring fact that conventional farm operations do not incur the total cost of their production.

Chemical-intensive agriculture has countless negative effects on our health and natural resources, which are not accounted for in most traditional farm business models, but are passed on to society nevertheless. Some researchers calculate the adverse impacts to health and the environment to be as much as \$16.9 billion a year. We still pay these costs, just not at the grocery checkout counter. Instead, we see these costs in the form of higher taxes and medical bills, and decreased quality of life due to environmental pollution.

Growing Your Own Organic Food

Not only is gardening a rewarding experience, but you can save money by growing some of your own vegetables. Herbs are extremely easy to grow and are almost always more expensive to buy fresh from the market. Whether you live in the city and only have room for a few window pots of herbs, or you live in the country where you can set up a backyard garden to provide nearly all your produce needs, growing your own food organically is worth a try.

If you have limited space, consider a plot at a community garden. Stipulations vary by garden, but in many cases you can grow whatever you want provided that you maintain it. Community gardens are becoming increasingly popular options, and you'd be surprised to find that there may be one in close proximity to where you live. You can also ask your city's community center or department of recreation, go to your local nursery, gardening supply store or public garden and ask them for information, or search the web. Don't be discouraged if you can't find a local community garden or if what you do find is already full: you can easily start one yourself!

Tip: For a how-to guide on getting started, read our factsheet, "Grow Your Own Organic Food" printed in the Spring 2010 issue of Pesticides and You, www.beyondpesticides.org/infoservices/pesticidesandyou.

Rethink Your Food Budget

How much do you spend on food for yourself or your family? Perhaps you can give up one restaurant meal a month, or replace a couple of the products you eat the most with organic versions. A small change in your budget to allow for more organically grown food can have significant benefits for the health of your family, farmworkers, and the environment.



Feeding Your Family Organic... Affordably



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