



MOSES ORGANIC FACT SHEET

Local and Organic:

The Benefits of Both and the Differences Between Them

Americans care about their food—how it is farmed and how far it travels from the farm to their plates. This has spurred the growth of organic and local sales in the marketplace. As the consumer, you hold all the power. Put your values into the market by speaking up with your pocketbook and soon healthy food choices will become more prevalent in your community.

Your Decisions Have Benefits

Increased Health Benefits

Numerous studies show that organically produced foods have higher nutritional content than foods produced conventionally (visit www.organiccenter.org for more info). Organic farmers continually improve the health and vitality of their soils and animals, which ultimately yield nutrient dense foods. Since organic farmers avoid the use of problematic synthetic pesticides, fungicides, and hormones, the likelihood of synthetic residues either in or on organic foods is less. Synthetic preservatives, colors, and flavors are specifically prohibited in organic foods, such as nitrates in meat or synthetic waxes on fruit. Milk from cows grazed on pasture is higher in conjugated linoleic acids (CLA) which have been linked to cancer prevention. By buying locally, your food's nutritional content is maintained through shorter storage and transport times.

Protecting Farmers

When you buy organic foods, you're ensuring farm workers are not exposed to harmful chemicals. Chemical pesticides which are used on commercial farms end up in the atmosphere and in the bodies of conventional farm workers. Such exposure causes short-term illnesses - abdominal pains, dizziness, headaches, skin problems, etc, as well as long-term diseases, including cancer and respiratory conditions. According to the National Cancer Institute, farm workers exposed to herbicides are six times more likely to get cancer than non-farmers. Unlike workers on conventional farms, workers on organic farms are not exposed to high levels of potentially harmful chemicals.

Preserving the Environment & Fostering Biodiversity

Locally grown food travels short distances to market, thereby reducing carbon dioxide emissions and harmful packing materials. Conventional farms pollute our groundwater with repeated applications of toxic fertilizers. Organic and local farms provide safe habitats for a wide variety of birds, insects and other animals, and use soil conservation techniques to protect farmland from runoff and erosion. With three billion tons of top-soil lost every year in the U.S., good soil stewardship is no longer "optional"—it's a matter of life or death for our planet.

Decentralized, local farming maintains more crop varieties since local farmers grow what's best for their specific environment and micro-climate and are not limited to varieties that ship well and stay fresh for extended periods of storage. Genetically-modified organisms, prohibited in organic production, are killing pollinator species and threatening the genetic integrity of many life forms by cross-pollinating into the wild and into cultivated varieties. It is critical to maintain wild and heirloom varieties, as they are our planet's living library of genetic material.

Organic Certification is a Guarantee

There is more to organic than just the avoidance of synthetic chemicals. It is a system that mimics nature and seeks to boost the health of plants and animals through natural fertilizers and healthy living conditions. The National Organic Program regulates all organic crops, livestock and agricultural products certified to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) organic standards. Organic certification agencies inspect and verify that organic farmers, ranchers, distributors, processors, and traders are complying with the USDA organic regulations. (Visit www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/nop for more information.)

Enjoy Exceptional Flavors

Taste the difference of fresh, local food and judge yourself. A vine-ripened tomato from your local farmers market tastes far better than one shipped from dis-

tant states and countries. Local farmers offer products grown for flavor and freshness rather than for shipping endurance and shelf life. Fruits and vegetables shipped long distances can spend as many as fourteen days in transit before they arrive in the supermarket.

Local or Organic? Is There a Difference?

With increased national awareness and popularity comes attention from national and local press, consumer groups, government and nonprofit agencies. There are voices of skepticism as well as applause for this consumer concern, and many ask the question: Which one is better—local or organic?

Unfortunately, the answer is not straightforward. Ideally, buying local, organic food would be a strong first choice. This encourages environmentally beneficial farming practices in your own backyard while supporting your local farming community. But if that's not an option, how do you choose? The answer does not have to be an either/or choice; it will depend on the values and priorities used by you, the consumer, when buying your food.

Know Your Farmer

Local qualifies a general location, but there are no associated quality or production assurances. Does the farmer understand chemical application and disposal rules? There is no oversight of their production, or guidance and review of their production practices. Often the only way you can know a local farmer's production practices is to ask him/her yourself. Knowing a farmer personally increases the benefits of buying local by several degrees. If you are able to personally discuss his/her growing methods, you can decide whether a local farmer's foods meet your values and concerns. Local can mean a direct connection and consumer empowerment with a wealth of information.

The popular phrase "buy local" brings to mind increased diversity and the strengthening of small businesses and local economies. Supporting local farmers, rather than distant organic farms, may appear to be the better choice toward strengthening community and sustainability. However, if you don't know your farmer and their growing methods personally, a certified organic label is the next best thing. It is your guarantee that sustainable and environmentally responsible methods were used to grow that food, providing for healthy and vibrant lands, foods and ecosystem, both now and into the future.

The Energy Issue: Local vs. Organic

Why buy an organic tomato grown cross-country, if you can get a conventional one grown locally? Does the petroleum needed to ship the fruit to the consumer outweigh the benefit of the environmental stewardship of the distant organic grower? It is true that trucking food cross-country is not sustainable (most of the food we eat travels on average 1,500 miles to reach our plate) but an organic tomato hauled hundreds of miles may still

trump a locally grown conventional tomato in overall energy impact. The majority of energy needed for food production isn't consumed by transportation needs, but by the production of chemicals, synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. Although much local produce is sold very close to home, some products carrying a local label have actually put on a lot of miles. Distances can add up as a farmer drives from store to store, farm to warehouse or to regional drop off centers. Together, the production and use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides consumes 40% of the total energy used in farming, making conventional farming a high cost and less environmentally friendly choice. (Read more at www.sustainabletable.org.) Overall, organic farms use approximately 30% less energy than conventional farms to grow the same amount of food.

Resources & Links

www.mosesorganic.org

The MOSES website is your source for farmer-oriented information. Free resources include the Organic Resource Directory, Certification Guidebook, Fact Sheets, event listings, plus the Organic Broadcaster.

www.organic.org

Learn about the benefits of organic agriculture, food and products.

www.localharvest.org

Find farmers markets, family farms, and other sources of sustainably grown food in your area.

www.landstewardshipproject.org

Food and Farm Connection section includes a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Directory, and recipes using local foods.

www.rodaleinstitute.org

The Rodale Institute supports farmers and consumers with research and resources, including a resource directory and Farm Locator™.

www.organic-center.org

Get news and research on why organic is better.



The Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) provides education and resources to farmers to encourage organic and sustainable farming practices. To learn more, please see:

www.mosesorganic.org