

The Lunchbox Nutritionist ***Kathleen Searles MS, RD, LDN***



August is a great month for nutrition! Fresh local produce is abundant and eating healthy seems to come naturally. (I'm snacking on some cherry tomatoes as I write this!) I hope that you enjoy this month's newsletter about organic foods. For help locating local and organic food sources visit www.localharvest.com.

- Kathleen Searles

What Does Organic Mean?

The USDA National Organic Program (NOP) defines organic as follows:

Organic food is produced by farmers who emphasize the use of renewable resources and the conservation of soil and water to enhance environmental quality for future generations. 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. Before a product can be labeled "organic," a Government-approved certifier inspects the farm where the food is grown to make sure the farmer is following all the rules necessary to meet USDA organic standards. Companies that handle or process organic food before it gets to your local supermarket or restaurant must be certified, too.



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There are four categories of labels relating to the product being "organic":



"100% Organic" means the product contains all organic ingredients, with the exception of salt and water as these are not certifiable. These products cannot be affected by the "big three": irradiated, contains genetically engineered organisms (GEO's), or grown with sewage sludge fertilizer. If the label only says, "Organic," 95% of the ingredients in the product are organically grown.

A label that says, "Made with Organic....," means that 70% of the ingredients within the product are organic. The "big three" rules apply here, for the 70% organic ingredients as well as the 30% non-organic. The supplier may list up to 3 ingredients that are organic on the front of the label.

Labels that list organic ingredients on the side panel of the package contain less than 70% organic ingredients. There can be no organic claims on the front of the label. The "big three" are allowed to be in the non-organic ingredients.

Organic vs Non Organic - Myths and Facts

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Myth 1: Organic means healthier

Fact: There is no evidence that organic implies that the product has more nutrients than non-organic products.

Myth 2: Organic is the same as local

Fact: The organic label describes how the product is raised or grown. Local indicates the product you are consuming was grown nearby. There is no defined distance that makes a product locally grown. Sometimes local products are grown organically, but organic does not imply local organic.

Myth 3: Organic is the same as natural

Fact: Natural is a term used only for the processing of meat and egg products. Natural implies that the product has been "minimally processed" and contains no artificial ingredients. Organic can apply to produce, grains, meat, poultry, eggs and dairy. Don't assume that food labeled "natural," "sustainable," "hormone-free," or "free-range" is organic. The U.S. does not regulate the use of those labels, so anyone can use them.

Recipe of the Month: Slow and Easy Ratatouille

News and Events:

The "back to school" season is right around the corner! I would love to help you find personalized ideas to keep your family healthy with high quality lunches. Give me a call today (978-697-2834) or send an e-mail (ksearles@lunchbox-nutritionist.com) for more information!

Benefits of Buying Organic

With all the hype surrounding food production and the risks to consumers, many people are opting for all organic diets. Here are 4 benefits of buying organic foods. But remember, the decision is ultimately up to you.

1. Pesticide residue on foods may cause cancer. However, keep in mind that organic foods show a lower frequency of pesticide residue, but are not guaranteed to be chemical-free.
2. Organic meat is free of antibiotics and added hormones. Animals that are raised organically are not allowed to be fed antibiotics, the recombinant bovine growth hormones rbGHo or rBST.
3. Most synthetic additives are forbidden in organic convenience foods. However, natural additives are still approved to be in these products. The best way to ensure additive free food is to cook from scratch using organic ingredients.
4. Organic foods do not come from genetically engineered crops or animals. Genetically engineered basically means taking the gene from one species and placing it in another to increase food production or reduce susceptibility to crop pests. There is a problem organic farmers are having called "genetic drift." This is when pollen from nearby GEO crops contaminate organic crops. There are discussions



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Prep time: 15 minutes

Cook time: 3 to 6 hours

Ingredients:

- 2 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 large onion, coarsely chopped
- 3 cloves minced garlic
- 2 medium zucchini, halved and sliced
- 1 eggplant (about 1 1/4 lbs.), peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks
- 1 medium fennel bulb, quartered and thinly sliced (white base only)
- 1 small red pepper, seeded and diced
- 1 small yellow pepper, seeded and diced
- 1 (29-oz.) can crushed tomatoes
- 1 (6-oz.) can tomato paste
- 1 tsp each: dried basil, rosemary and thyme
- 1 tsp sea salt or to taste

Ground or smoked pepper to taste
 Snipped fresh basil and grated Parmesan cheese (optional)

Directions:

Heat oil in a large skillet. Add onion; cook and stir over medium high heat for 5 minutes. Add zucchini, eggplant and garlic; cook for 5 more minutes. Transfer to a slow cooker with all remaining ingredients except fresh basil and Parmesan. Cover and cook on HIGH for 3 hours or on LOW for 6 hours. Serve hot or at room temperature topped with fresh basil and Parmesan. Makes 8 servings.

Quick Stovetop Variation: Prepare as directed above, cooking in a large pot instead of a slow cooker. Bring to a boil; reduce heat and simmer, covered, for 30 to 45 minutes or until vegetables are cooked to your liking.

on ways to deal with this situation, but none have been enacted as of yet.

What to Buy?



The Environmental Working Group (EWG), a nonprofit group that analyzes the results of government pesticide testing, has compiled a list of the 14 foods they recommend buying Organic - they call this list the "Dirty Dozen Plus™" as well as a list of 15 foods that have the least amount of pesticide residue, called "The Clean 15™"

The Dirty Dozen Plus™

Apple
 Celery
 Sweet bell peppers
 Peaches
 Strawberries
 Nectarines – imported
 Grapes
 Spinach
 Lettuce
 Cucumber
 Blueberries – domestic
 Potatoes
 Plus
 + Green beans
 + Kale/Greens
 for these may contain pesticide residues of special concern

The Clean 15™

Onions
 Sweet Corn
 Pineapples
 Avocado
 Cabbage

Nutritional analysis per serving: Calories: 130, Fat: 4g, Saturated Fat: 0.5g, Trans Fat: 0g, Cholesterol: 0mg, Sodium: 610mg, Potassium: 926mg, Carbohydrates: 22g, Fiber: 7g, Sugar: 7g, Protein: 5g, Vitamin A: 30%, Vitamin C: 120%

Quote of the Month:

"Every second we choose to nourish ourselves in a way that supports or depletes our lives, and to think and speak about other people in a way that is honoring or dishonoring. What choice are you going to make today?"

- Gregg Braden

Peas
Asparagus
Mangoes
Eggplant
Kiwi
Cantaloupe - domestic
Sweet potatoes
Grapefruit
Watermelon
Mushrooms

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About Kathleen Searles, MS, RD, LDN

I am a Registered Dietitian and am licensed to practice in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine. The exciting field of nutrition has been my passion ever since I took a foods class with my friends in high school. Through my work in different states and different settings I have developed my philosophy of helping people improve their diets by finding foods that fit into their particular routines, budgets, and preferences. I look forward to helping you solve your nutrition challenges with tasty and satisfying foods.