

## **Farmer D on Organics (link to this article as a PDF)**

Why Organic?

By: Daron 'Farmer D' Joffe

Organic food is quickly becoming more and more popular to the extent that even the major brands like Jiffy peanut butter and Smucker's Jellies have gone organic. Shoppers looking for affordable and quality organic products no longer have to seek out the local farmers market, food coop or Whole Foods now that the big groceries like Kroger and Publix have a wide variety of organic products, including their own private label organic product lines. Why are all of these companies going organic?

- A. Because it is healthier for the planet and the consumers
- B. Because it tastes better
- C. Because it is the right thing to do
- D. Because it makes economic sense
- E. All of the above

The answer is E, all of the above.

What do organic farmers do differently from conventional farmers?

- Organic farmers do not use toxic pesticides or synthetic fertilizers protecting ground and surface waters from contaminants.
- Organic farmers feed the soil using cover crops and green manures, compost and animal manure to stabilize nutrients and make them available to the plants
- Organic farmers do not use any genetically modified/engineered crops.
- Organic farmers enhance biodiversity, providing habitat and food sources for pollinators.

### **What does Organic really mean and how do you know that what you are buying is truly organic?**

As of October 2002, the USDA finalized the National Organic Program (NOP), which was the result of a 10-year National Standards Organic Standards Board study. The USDA label is granted to products that go through the rigorous organic certification program and provides consumers with a valid third party certificate of quality. The certification is based on growers and processors following the NOP guidelines for organic production and the NOP's definition of organic as, "A production system that is managed to respond to site-specific conditions by integrating cultural, biological, and mechanical practices, that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance and conserve biodiversity."

### **Does organic food really taste better?**

A ten-year comparison of the influence of organic and conventional management practices on the content of flavonoids in Tomatoes – UC Davis

A ten-year UC Davis study concluded that mean levels of quercetin and kaempferol (flavonoids) in organic tomatoes were 79% and 97% higher than those in conventional tomatoes.

### **Is organic food really better for you?**

Numerous studies have shown that organic foods have lower level of pesticide residues than conventional. Conventional crops were six times as likely to contain multiple pesticide residues.

University of Washington found that "consuming food grown using organic production methods can virtually eliminate exposures to a dangerous class of insecticides known to disrupt neurological effects in infants and children." See the Pesticide Action Network website for more information at <http://www.panna.org>.

There are substantial health benefits from eating organic foods as well as reducing the risk of harmful pesticides.

USDA scientists found that organic brands of catsup contained 57% higher levels of the health-promoting antioxidant lycopene, than the major conventional brands of catsup.

A study done by Newcastle University found that organic fruits and veggies have up to 40% more antioxidants and milk 80% higher antioxidants than their conventional counterparts.

A study of wines found that among 15 varieties of red wine, organic wines had the greatest concentration of antioxidants and the highest level of total health polyphenols, while containing far less mycotoxins than conventional wines.

### **Are animals on organic farms treated more humanely?**

Animals raised on organic farms must have access to the outdoors, be fed organic feed and cannot be treated with hormones or antibiotics. Cloned and transgenic animals, and their products, are also not allowed in organic farming. Animals in conventional operations, known to many as “factory farms” often never see the outdoors and are manipulated physically and genetically to yield higher profits at the expense of health and morals.

### **Are organically raised animals healthier for the consumer?**

On conventional farms with caged hens, 23.4% of the farms tested positive for Salmonella, compared to just 4.8% in free-range organic flocks and 6.4% in conventional free-range birds.

Recent research coming out of the UK shows that Mothers consuming mostly organic milk and meat products were found to have about 50% higher levels of ruminic acid in their breast milk. This Conjugated Linoleic Acid (CLA) is responsible for most of the health benefits of CLA's in milk and meat. Authors report that the greater reliance of organic beef and dairy farmers on pasture and forage grasses increases the level of CLA's in milk and meat. This is a great reason to buy grass-fed organic beef over meat raised in confined feedlot operations, which is where the vast majority of beef is produced.

### **Is organic farming really better for the environment?**

Evidence says absolutely yes and in a dramatic way.

The U.S. geological Survey has shown that rainwater in 8 Midwestern states consistently contains over 100% of the EPA Safe Drinking Limit for Atrazine and Alachlor, both toxic chemicals used to grow conventional corn, soybeans and other crops.

Chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides cause major environmental problems including creating “Dead zones” at the mouths of major rivers killing off vital ecosystems.

Organic farms cannot use Genetically Engineered crops. Researchers at Indiana University have found that Genetically Engineered Bt corn also harms aquatic insects and disrupts stream ecosystems.

On the contrary, the organic farming system works by making healthy soil, healthy plants, healthy animals, healthy people and thus a healthy planet. Organic farming increases biodiversity at every level of the food chain – all the way from bacteria to mammals. This is the conclusion of the largest review ever done of studies from around the world looking at this area.

### **Can organic farming feed the world?**

Organic methods could produce enough food on a global per capita basis to sustain the current human population, and potentially even larger population, without increasing the agricultural land base. This conclusion is based on a global dataset of 293 yield ratios for plant and animal production.

Not all organic farms are created equal.

It is very important to point out that there are many variations of quality within the USDA Organic seal. Some organic farms produce massive volumes of one crop, known as monoculture, without the use of synthetic chemical fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides. While this is a great improvement over conventionally grown food, it is better but not best practice. Also, many organic crops are grown in Mexico, South America and China where organic standards may not be as strict. There is also a large environmental impact and loss in quality when food is shipped such great distances. Where this helps put organic alternatives on the shelves for the mainstream, more conscious consumers are seeking organically produced products that are grown locally or regionally on small, diversified family farms.

In summary, the benefits of organic food to the environment, economy, and peoples health farm outweigh the increased costs over the long-term. If more people buy organic and local now, it will help bring the prices down so that organic farmers can be more competitive in the marketplace. The best way for a consumer to get the best quality organic food for the most reasonable cost is through farmers markets and Community Supported Agriculture farms.

How can you get involved in this movement? Join Georgia Organics to become part of the solution here in Georgia and seek out local organic farms in your community.

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