

NUTRITION NUGGET # 11

Question: Which is healthier, organic or conventional produce?



Answer: It is NOT clear whether organic produce has more nutritional benefits than conventional produce and a “certified organic label” does NOT guarantee that a product is more “environmentally friendly” than a non-organic one, according to the USDA.

Facts:

- At this point, there is not enough strong evidence to say that organically grown foods are more nutritious than conventionally grown foods.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulates and certifies how organic food is produced and handled, not food quality.
- Food products with less than 70% of organic ingredients can say “made with organic ingredients on the label, but cannot use the USDA organic seal nor the word “organic” for their product labels. Only foods with 95% of organic ingredients can carry the USDA organic seal or product be labeled 100% organic if completely organic.
- Some research studies have shown that, on average, organic produces contain higher levels of minerals, vitamin C and antioxidant phytonutrients than conventional produces; however, these studies often only focus on one specific crop. Further well-designed research studies with human subjects are needed to investigate the long-term effects of organic vs. conventional foods toward human health and chronic diseases.
- Some studies claim that organic farming methods are more “environmentally friendly” than the conventional farming methods because they help to reduce pollution and conserve water, etc. Other studies say that some organic farming methods may offer poorer environmental outcomes than conventional ones. Therefore, the effects on the environment can be varied and depend on individual farming decisions.



Apply: Would you recommend participants to buy organic fruits and vegetables? What factors should you consider?

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References: United States Department of Agriculture, Part B. Does organically-grown food contain more or better nutrients - vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients - than conventionally grown food? <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/faq/BuyOrganicFoodsB.shtml> . Accessed October 13,2011. Mayo Clinic, Organic foods: Are they safer? More nutritious? <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/organic-food/NU00255> . Accessed October 13,2011. United States Department of Agriculture, Part D. Are organic foods more environmentally friendly than non-organic foods? Do organic farming practices have fewer negative impacts on soil resources, water quality, energy consumption and climate change than conventional practices? Are organic farms more ecologically sustainable?<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/faq/BuyOrganicFoodsD.shtml>. Organic fruits and vegetables image: <http://www.freecookingvideos.com/userfiles/image/OrganicFruitSmall.jpg>; USDA organic seal image: <http://ecologiquedesign.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/organic-food-usda-9451.jpg?w=256&h=256> Accessed October 13,2011.