

Making the switch to organic foods

Buying organic is a delicious way to bring healthy eating and support for the environment into your kitchen. The key principle behind organic food is healthy soil. By acting as responsible stewards of their land, organic farmers create a cycle of healthy soil, growing healthy food for healthier people. (We think it tastes better, too.)

Conventional farming practices extract a higher cost from our environment through contamination caused by pesticides polluting our air, soil and water. Fertilizers can weaken the soil with synthetic nutrients. Herbicides and pesticides harm more than the targeted pests, as these harsh chemicals run off into the soil and water supply. Farmers and farm workers who apply these chemical adjuncts could also risk their own long-term health. Efforts to clean up these areas often come at a hidden cost to taxpayers. The loss of natural habitats for beneficial insects and wildlife is inestimable.

Many pesticides can penetrate the peel, and others are absorbed in the plant's roots. Washing and peeling may only remove up to 25 percent of pesticide residues.

Resources

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

2105 1st Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55404
612-870-3424 | www.iatp.org

Environmental Working Group

1436 U St. NW, Suite 100,
Washington, DC 20009
info@ewg.org | www.ewg.org

Food Alliance Midwest

400 Selby Ave., Suite Y
St. Paul, MN 55102
651-265-3682 | www.cdfus.coop

Midwest Organic

Services Association
P.O. Box 821, Viroqua, WI 54665
608-635-2526 | mosa@mosaorganic.org
www.mosaorganic.org

Organic Trade Association

P.O. Box 547, Greenfield, MA 01301
413-774-7511 | info@ota.com | www.ota.com

United States Department of Agriculture

Washington, DC 20250
www.usda.gov



StrongerTogether.coop is a consumer website developed by National Cooperative Grocers Association (NCGA) for our “virtual chain” of over 120 retail food co-ops, operating more than 160 store fronts, nationwide.

StrongerTogether.coop is a place for people to gather on their food journeys. It's a place to find out more about what's in your food, where it comes from, where to find great food, how to prepare it, and a whole lot more. It's also a place to talk with others about food topics you're exploring, are passionate about, and even want to get involved in.

Learn more about co-ops, and find food co-ops all across the U.S. at www.strongertogether.coop. Follow [@strongrtogethr](https://twitter.com/strongrtogethr) on Twitter and like us on Facebook; we're at www.facebook.com/coop.strongertogether.

ALL ABOUT

Organic Foods



www.strongertogether.coop

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Go organic!

If you're making the switch to organic foods, first explore the foods you eat most often while considering your budget and lifestyle. Do you eat fresh fruit in the morning? Try in-season organic fruit for breakfast. Do you drink coffee? Try organic varieties. Eat a lot of salads for lunch? Give the organic lettuces and greens a go. We think that you'll taste the difference and realize how easy it is to make the switch.

While prices of organic foods might seem a little higher to some shoppers, we support paying a premium price in the interest of giving organic farmers a fair return on their investment. Organic certification is an expense to farmers that benefits consumers' right to know how their food was grown. We encourage shoppers to "go organic" in support of such ecologically minded farmers (and so that you can continue to enjoy the great flavor of organic foods).

Organic certification of retailers

Any retailer selling organic food must be prepared to conform to the USDA Organic Food and Production Act, although becoming a certified organic retailer is optional. Although certification is not required, we support the organic certification of our retail stores because it maintains a chain of integrity from certified farms to certified warehouses to certified grocers.

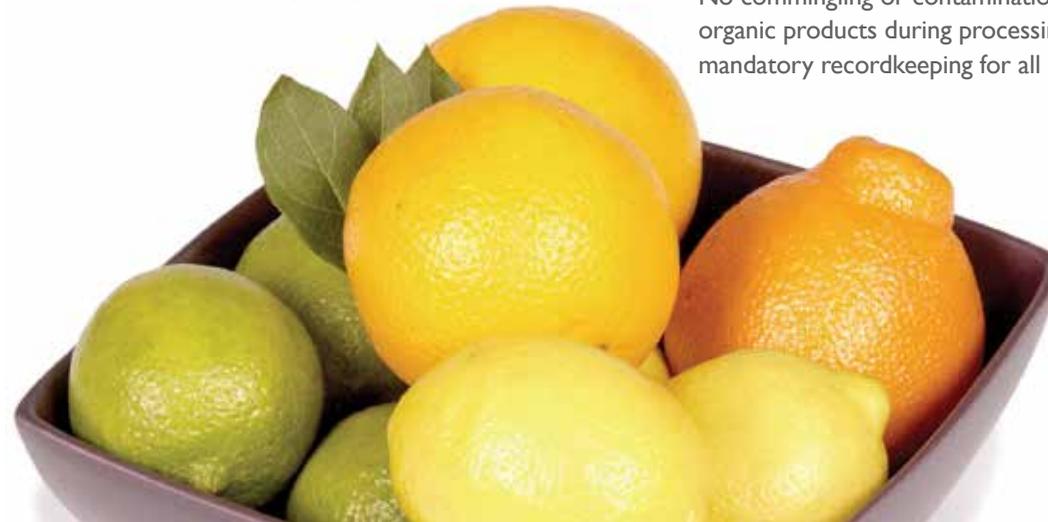
Co-ops are working together to help systematically certify our stores as efficiently as possible. Ask your local co-op's representative for information about their certified departments.



Organic retailer certification is based on site inspections by the organic certifying agency. These inspections include a review of our organic producers, processors, handlers, manufacturers and retailers. A certified organic retailer must conform to the following:

- Adhere to a comprehensive plan to protect organic products from contamination and commingling with non-organic product and non-organic cleaning supplies.
- Keep documentation that tracks connections between the retailer and organic suppliers for five years.
- Display organic product with proper and accurate signage.
- Keep organic certificates on file for farms from whom the store buys directly.
- Submit to an annual review of organic certification.

Organically grown food is produced without the use of synthetic pesticides, chemicals and fertilizers. Organic agricultural practices promote sustainable growing methods that nurture the soil, crops and animals, creating a beneficial habitat for all living things.



National organic standards for certified organic products

All foods labeled and sold as "organic" must be certified by the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) accredited independent certifying agencies.

Organic farming and certified products are defined by the USDA Organic Foods Production Act as follows:

- Three years with no application of prohibited materials (no synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, or GMOs) prior to certification.
- No use of prohibited substances while certified; no sewage sludge; no irradiation.
- Proactive soil building, conservation, manure management, and crop rotation systems.
- Egg-laying chickens must have access to the outdoors, no cages, and a vegetarian diet.
- Cattle must derive 30 percent of their feed from pasture.
- No antibiotics or hormones used.
- 100 percent organic feed.
- Organic management from birth or hatching.
- No commingling or contamination of organic products during processing, and mandatory recordkeeping for all operations.

THE DIRTY DOZEN

The dozen produce items most contaminated with pesticides:

1. Apples
2. Celery
3. Sweet bell peppers
4. Peaches
5. Strawberries
6. Nectarines (imported)
7. Grapes
8. Spinach
9. Lettuce
10. Cucumbers
11. Blueberries (domestic)
12. Potatoes

2012 list from the Environmental Working Group (www.ewg.org)

LABELING OF PRODUCTS

USDA label requirements on all organic products follows four basic labeling categories.

LABEL CLAIM	LABEL PARAMETERS
"100% Organic"	100% organic ingredients.
"Organic"	At least 95% organic ingredients.
"Made with Organic (specified ingredients or food groups)" on label	At least 70–95% organic ingredients.
None	Less than 70% organic ingredients.