Unit 6 The Organic Food Movement
Lesson 3: Organic Foods: Buy or Buy-pass?

What we call progress is the exchange of one nuisance for another nuisance.
Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) British psychologist.¹

Organic food: Buy or bypass?
The United States has, judging by the steadily increasing rate of obesity, the largest food supply of any nation with a plethora of food types and sources available to many consumers. Choosing food products for one or one’s family involves many social, behavioral and cultural factors. Choosing to buy organic, according to the Mayo Clinic,

Many factors may influence your decision to buy — or not buy — organic food. Consider these factors:

- **Nutrition.** No conclusive evidence shows that organic food is more nutritious than is conventionally grown food. And the USDA — even though it certifies organic food — doesn't claim that these products are safer or more nutritious.

- **Quality and appearance.** Organic foods meet the same quality and safety standards as conventional foods. The difference lies in how the food is produced, processed and handled. You may find that organic fruits and vegetables spoil faster because they aren’t treated with waxes or preservatives. Also, expect less-than-perfect appearances in some organic produce — odd shapes, varying colors and perhaps smaller sizes. In most cases, however, organic foods look identical to their conventional counterparts.

- **Pesticides.** Conventional growers use pesticides to protect their crops from molds, insects and diseases. When farmers spray pesticides, this can leave residue on produce. Some people buy organic food to limit their exposure to these residues. Most experts agree, however, that the amount of pesticides found on fruits and vegetables poses a very small health risk.

- **Environment.** Some people buy organic food for environmental reasons. Organic farming practices are designed to benefit the environment by reducing pollution and conserving water and soil.

- **Cost.** Most organic food costs more than conventional food products. Higher prices are due to more expensive farming practices, tighter government regulations and lower crop yields. Because organic farmers don't use herbicides or pesticides, many management tools that control weeds and pests are labor intensive. For example, organic growers may hand weed vegetables to control weeds, and you may end up paying more for these vegetables.

**Taste.** Some people say they can taste the difference between organic and nonorganic food. Others say they find no difference. Taste is a subjective and personal

consideration, so decide for yourself. But whether you buy organic or not, finding the freshest foods available may have the biggest impact on taste. (Mayo Clinic, Date)²

**Buying tips**

The following buying tips for purchasing organic foods are from the Mayo Clinic

Whether you're already a fan of organic foods or you just want to shop wisely and handle your food safely, consider these tips:

- **Buy fruits and vegetables in season to ensure the highest quality.** Also, try to buy your produce the day it's delivered to market to ensure that you're buying the freshest food possible. Ask your grocer what day new produce arrives.

- **Read food labels carefully.** Just because a product says it's organic or contains organic ingredients doesn't necessarily mean it's a healthier alternative. Some organic products may still be high in sugar, salt, fat or calories.

- **Don't confuse natural foods with organic foods.** Only those products with the "USDA Organic" label have met USDA standards.

- **Wash all fresh fruits and vegetables thoroughly with running water to reduce the amount of dirt and bacteria.** If appropriate, use a small scrub brush — for example, before eating apples, potatoes, cucumbers or other produce in which you eat the outer skin.

  If you're concerned about pesticides, peel your fruits and vegetables and trim outer leaves of leafy vegetables in addition to washing them thoroughly. Keep in mind that peeling your fruits and vegetables may also reduce the amount of nutrients and fiber. Some pesticide residue also collects in fat, so remove fat from meat and the skin from poultry and fish.

(Mayo Clinic, Date)³

**The Price of Buying Organic Food**


Just how much more expensive is it to go organic? You can expect to pay 50%-100% more for organic foods. That's because, in general, it is more labor-intensive, and without the help of pesticides, the yield is not always as favorable.

To maximize your organic food dollar, the Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C., recommends going organic on the "dirty dozen" -- types of produce that are most susceptible to pesticide residue:

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And which organic produce is probably not worth the added expense? The group lists these 12 items as having the least pesticide residues:

- Papayas
- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Bananas
- Kiwifruit
- Sweet peas (frozen)
- Asparagus
- Mangoes
- Pineapple
- Sweet corn (frozen)
- Avocados
- Onions

You can help keep costs down by shopping for sale items, comparing prices, buying locally grown products either at farmers' markets or via a co-op. The sale of organic foods in large grocery store chains is also likely to help keep prices down in the long run.

Organic versus Convention Food Cost Comparison

Because the cost differential between buying organic and conventional foods may differ the Unit 6 asks students, as future nutrition educators, to conduct a cost comparison project. Evaluating the actual cost of organic versus conventionally grown foods can provide students with not only a valuable learning experience but obtain factual information about 'buying organic.'

5(MedicineNet, 2008) 6