

PLANET ORGANIC

Organic – what's the story?

Pesticides and other chemicals

After the Second World War when people had been living on rations there was a huge drive to feed the masses. The start of factory or intensive farming meant that large amounts of food had to be produced as cheaply as possible.

This was when chemicals were introduced into farming to increase yields and to kill pests, insects and weeds. These include pesticides, herbicides and fungicides and many people (not surprisingly) feel that if these substances are strong enough to kill plants and insects they may not be good for our health. Some people living next to fields that have been sprayed have reported damaging effects to their health.

Now the Soil Association claims that more than 31,000 tonnes of pesticides are used in the UK's conventional farming every year.

At Planet Organic we believe that the more aware people become about how their food is meddled with before it gets to their plate, the more they want choice. Eating food that is grown naturally without added chemicals should be the norm, not the option.

If you knew that the apple you were about to eat had been sprayed up to 18 times, wouldn't it put you off?

Over 400 chemicals are in use in farming and some of these have been linked to health problems – organophosphates have been associated with chronic fatigue, Parkinson's disease and infertility problems.

Pesticides that can kill pests also harm wild animals and get into the environment through water, costing fortunes to ensure it doesn't come out of our taps.

Natural Farming

What better way to control pests, weeds and disease than by natural farming methods which were used for thousands of years before the chemicals were developed? Wildlife flourishes on organic farms encouraging biodiversity and natural predators which keep away pests instead of chemicals.

By rotating crops, using resistant plant varieties and natural predators organic farms hardly have any need for pesticides except in unusual circumstances – like freak weather conditions which have encouraged more pests, when a limited number of pesticides can be used under strict guidelines.

Genetic Modification

British consumers have been very quick to convey that they don't want to eat foods that have been genetically modified. Consequently many major retailers have claimed that they do not sell GM foods at all. Food can only be certified as organic by the Soil Association and other organic bodies if it does not contain any genetically modified ingredients.

This response is instinctive and few people know why they don't want GM, except that they don't want their food interfered with artificially. No-one really knows what effects GM food will have on human health yet.

But it is known that where GM crops are grown nearby organic produce can be damaged because of airborne pollen or from bees carrying pollen from the GM site to the organic one. This is disastrous for organic farmers and for us who want our food to be uncontaminated.

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Eating organic meat

Some people realise that organic crops are not sprayed but don't understand how meat can be organic. With all the recent scares about meat in the last few years, many consumers feel safer eating organic.

Animals who are reared on organic farms are treated in the way most of us would want them to be. They are not restricted but free to roam outdoors in a natural environment. They are also fed proper food – cows eat grass rather than feed that has been made from other animals and was the original cause of BSE.

Because animals on organic farms are moved around from field to field and not packed into overcrowded sheds they are less likely to succumb to illness than their unfortunate counterparts on 'factory' farms. These animals are routinely given antibiotics to prevent them from becoming ill and traces of these can remain when the meat is cooked.

Some experts believe that the overuse of antibiotics on farms has led to the many antibiotic-resistant diseases now prevalent in humans, such as MRSA and infections caused by the E-coli bug.

So cheap meat comes at a price, whereas organic meat tastes just how meat used to taste and comes with the assurance that the animals are well fed and cared for.

Nutritious food comes from mineral rich soil

There have been many unwelcome outcomes from factory or intensive farming. Soil that has been overused is depleted of the nine vital minerals that we need to eat: copper, boron, magnesium, manganese, selenium, chromium, iron, potassium, and zinc.

Therefore crops grown in depleted soil cannot provide as much goodness as their organic counterparts grown in rich fertile soil. This is because farmers rotate crops and sometimes have sheep grazing the land to encourage biodiversity which allows the soil to revitalise and become rich in minerals again.

Organic food grown in soil rich in nutrients is healthy food.

Back to nature

One of the other problems with using pesticides is that wildlife has been killed off and the natural habitat, such as hedgerows, has been obliterated. The good news is that on organic farms there is an abundance of butterflies and birds, beetles and bats and plenty of wild flowers. Natural predators have come back and keep away the unwelcome pests.

Our founder Renée Elliott has been on the Council of the Soil Association since 1999.

If you want to know more about organic food, issues and campaigns go to the Soil Association's website: www.soilassociation.org