

The Green Notebook

Organic Foods Part II: The local scoop

The topic of organic food could take up entire pages of this newspaper, as there is a lot to cover. But let's keep it simple. Considering that we are so removed from the growing of and preparation of our food like no other generation before us, that our choices have expanded beyond what we really need and that we are faced with the ever-increasing use of preservatives and other additives in our food supply, it makes one wonder what to do? Hence, the practice of organic farming has gained momentum.

But, before you break the bank on buying all organic foods, a little homework needs to be done. To meet the growing demand for organic food, modern organic production methods have undergone its own industrialization which brings about the question "Are all organic foods created equal?" Knowing more about what is behind a label will help and there are helpful resources out there (the library and online). However, in an effort to keep it simple, a good rule of thumb is to buy locally-produced food (organic or not) first with large corporate-produced organic products last.

To help in this hazy maze of what to buy, The Environmental Working Group tested conventional and organic produce for the highest number of pesticide residues and came up with a list called "The Dirty Dozen." These fruits and veggies should be purchased organically, if available. Those not on the list, you don't have to worry. The Dirty Dozen are: apples, cherries, grapes, nectarines, peaches, pears, raspberries, strawberries, bell peppers, celery, potatoes, and spinach.

So where can you find organic products locally? Here are some places to start:

- **Farmer's markets**—these lead the list: when the markets open this season, you will find a wide array of locally-grown products, some organic, some not, but most use way less chemicals in their production than what you'll find at the grocery store. Delaware sponsors two markets: one at the fairgrounds on Tuesdays from 4 to 6 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 to noon (starting June 2) and one downtown on Wednesdays from 3 to 6 p.m. and Saturdays 9 to Noon (beginning in May). We are lucky to have Banks Farm Market, on London Rd., and Miller's Country Gardens, west of town on Rt. 37, too—both excellent resources for produce and more. Good, healthy food and supporting the local community, all in one trip.
- **Stratford Ecological Center**—Delaware is fortunate to have this resource right here in town. You can pick your own produce, purchase organic lamb, beef, chicken, pork, maple syrup (when in season), honey and eggs in addition to flowers and organic garden transplants. Call 363-2548 for more information. Stratford also offers community garden plots, so you can even grow your own organic veggies.
- **Pure-n-Simple Natural Foods**—right here in Delaware is a good resource for some organic items—located at 23 W. Winter St.
- **Food cooperatives**—member-owned natural foods grocery stores are another terrific way to support your organic habit, however the options are not close—the Clintonville Community Market (614-261-3663) and Bexley Natural Food Co-op (614-252-3951). If you are in the area, check them out—it is a real eye opener. Memberships are available and provide a discount.
- **Community Supported Agriculture groups (CSAs)**—members join these groups by paying the grower up front for food produced that season and then share the harvest. Delaware has a local CSA called Jumping Spider in Ashley. For more info, call 740-747-0389.
- **Natural grocery stores**—Columbus has a good selection of grocery stores with natural and organic food selections including Whole Foods (my friend calls it "Whole Paycheck"—it's cool, but pricey!) and Trader Joe's, both in Dublin, Raisin

Rack Natural Food Market in Westerville and Wild Oats Natural Marketplace in Upper Arlington.

- **Traditional grocery stores**—Kroger, Buehler, Giant Eagle and Meijer, even Wal-Mart, have all jumped on the organic band wagon. The selection varies from week to week and you can sometimes hit a good sale.
- **Internet shopping**—a plethora of sites online offer organic products. I would recommend local shopping first, but you can see what is available online.

Another point to remember is organic produce goes “bad” quicker than their conventional counterparts. So, don’t wait too long to consume what you buy.

To learn more about organics explore The Organic Center at www.organic-center.org and The Organic Trade Association at www.ota.com or go to the library and check out an excellent resource called “A Field Guide to Buying Organic” by Luddene Perry and Dan Schultz (or other books on the subject).

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