

Organic Foods

Introduction

For my factsheet I chose organic foods because it is something that I find interesting. I never really understood the difference between traditionally grown foods and organic ones. A good friend of mine is very pro-organic and when I started talking to her I found it interesting and beneficial for myself to learn more about it and start eating more organic foods myself. I never really knew there were so many different chemicals there are in our fruits and vegetables. There are actually some health problems that can come from eating pesticides that I was really unaware of. By eating organic foods I would be able to avoid these nasty chemicals that I eat on a daily basis and help support local farmers trying to make a living. Organic foods are able to benefit people more than altered foods that we are so used to consuming. I also wanted to know if organic foods were really better for you than traditionally grown. I used to think that organic foods were just more expensive versions of the commercial brands and I wanted to know more about them to be able to make an educated decision about what I should eat.

Background and Problem Statement

(HP2010 did not have any information on my topic)

Web site #1: National Agricultural Library

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/faq/BuyOrganicFoodsIntro.shtml>

Today there is a constant debate about what is better for you, organic food or traditionally grown food? Organic foods have become a constant trend in the diets throughout the country, but we have to stop and think about what organic really means. The term “organic” not only describes the actual food but also the process that it is put through to be able to be labeled organic. The term “certified organic,” guarantees that the produce keeps its natural integrity while being grown on the farm and is being distributed. To be able to guarantee this kind of natural production the U.S. Congress set up the Organic Foods Production Act in 1990. This act established many different

methods and procedures for the handling of products that are organic and also prohibits the use of pesticides and other chemicals.

Web site #2: Organic Food Info

<http://www.organicfoodinfo.net/>

Farmers are forced to use these pesticides and other harsh chemicals because there is such a high demand for these products that these chemicals allow for a more efficient way to mass-produce fruits and vegetables. Even though using these kinds of chemicals on fruits and vegetables is cheaper it takes away more than 50% of the original nutrients. By consuming these pesticides your body is less able to fight off infection because vital nutrients that you would have normally gotten from a piece of fruit or vegetable is taken away and replaced with pesticides and other growth hormones. The pesticides that farmers use on their crops have been also linked to diseases like cancer, Alzheimer's, obesity, and some birth defects.

Web site #3: Beyond Pesticides

<http://www.beyondpesticides.org/organicfood/index.htm>

“Instead of using these harmful pesticides organic agriculture uses more earth friendly methods such as cover cropping, crop rotation, and composting to help make healthy soil.” By using these methods, we aren't exposed to as many harmful chemicals as we would be otherwise. By growing crops organically it can help benefit the farm workers, children and consumers. By not using these harsh chemicals, the workers of the farm do not have to worry about having unnecessary exposure to these harmful substances, which sometimes cause certain cancers. Meanwhile, the consumers and children have reduced exposure to these chemicals and are able to receive a higher level of nutrition from non-altered foods.

Research

Web site #1: Recent Growth Patterns in the U.S. Organic Foods Market

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aib777/aib777c.pdf>

Today, organic foods are available in an array of places from local food stands to club markets. “According to the latest USDA estimates, U.S. certified organic cropland doubled between 1992 and 1997, to 1.3 million acres.” Organic foods are more of a priority to the population than they have been in the past, so to meet the growing demand these products are available in a vast majority of places and are taking over our farmlands. “Organic farming has made deeper inroads in the fruit, vegetable, and other high-value specialty crop industries than in the major grain and oilseed industries.” Organic produce is becoming more and more popular with consumers each day ultimately improving the health benefits for farmers and consumers.

Web site #2: PubMed Central: Benefits of organic food

<http://www.nrdc.org/health/farming/forg101.asp>

Research also shows that areas that grow organic foods have a higher rate of biodiversity among plants, invertebrates, birds and bats. This study was conducted on farms in England where they were growing grains for cereal. Habitat samples were taken from fields and other areas on the organic and non-organic farms to help compare the differences between plants and invertebrates. Research for diversity among birds was done through field research in the wintertime while information collected about bats was done pre-harvest. The results showed that organic farms used a crop rotational cultivation method whereas non-organic farms would continuously cultivate their lands, ultimately disrupting habitats for organisms. A fundamental difference that helps improve the diversity among species in these areas was the lack of pesticides and other toxins in the organic farms. The last difference in the two farms that is that the organic farms tend to have less farmland and therefore leaving more room for animals and other organisms to inhabit. The number of species was typically higher on organic farms than on non-organic ones.

Website #3: PubMed Central: Exposure to non-arsenic pesticides is associated with lymphoma among farmers in Spain

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov:80/pmc/articles/PMC2078050/?tool=pmcentrez>

This article shows a case study on the effects of Spanish farmers who were diagnosed with lymphoma. “Farmers were analyzed according to the type of farming job performed: crop farming, animal farming, and general farming.” Farmers that were exposed to non-arsenic pesticides were at a higher risk for lymphoma, this risk was higher with farmers who were only crop farmers or worked closely with animals and the risk was even higher for subjects who had been exposed to non-arsenic pesticides for over 9 years. Though not all studies have confirmed this, there definitely is a link between farming, pesticides and lymphoma.

Statistics

Web site #1: Organic Consumers Association: Why Americans Are Turning to Organic Foods

<http://www.organicconsumers.org>

A February 1997 poll by the genetic engineering corporation found that 54% of U.S. consumers would prefer to see organic agriculture become the most predominant form of food production instead of traditional farming, which uses intense chemicals and pesticides for their crops. Only a few years later in June 2000 a survey carried out by the National Center for Public Policy, indicated 68-69% of Americans believe that having the word organic on a package means that it is a better choice and is healthier for the environment. This is why almost 10 million consumers of organic products will spend close to 8 billion dollars for organic food this year in the U.S. In Europe it is believed that 30% of all farming will be organic by the year 2010.

Web site #2: Organic Statistics- the shape of organic food and farming

<http://www.organic.aber.ac.uk/statistics/index.shtml>

This Web site focuses on organic statistics overseas in the U.K. There are 2,404 registered organic processing farms in the UK, 5.2% based in Wales, which is an increase from 112 to 125. Direct sales of organic food through box advertising, farmers' markets and farm stands grew by 54% to £146 million during 2006. Sales of organic products sold through supermarkets increased by 21%. Imports of organic produce sold by some supermarkets increased by 1% from 46% in 2003 to 47% in 2005 and reduced to 34% in 2006.

Web site #3: Dramatic Increase in Dangerous Pesticide Use in California

http://www.pmac.net/use_increasing.html

These statistics are relevant to the use of pesticides in California. According to the Department of Pesticide Regulation data, use of pesticides that have been shown to cause certain types of cancer have had a steady increase to about four million pounds a year-- from over 31 million pounds in 1991 to over 56 million pounds in 1997, a total increase of 81%. Metam sodium use increased from 4.8 million pounds in 1991 to nearly 15 million pounds in 1997. Use of 1,3-dichloropropene was severely restricted in the early 1990s, with only 14,000 pounds used in 1991 and 2,200 pounds in 1993. After the restrictions were removed, however, use dramatically increased to 2.4 million pounds in 1997, an amount 17 times greater than the data from 1991. Along with these carcinogenic pesticides, the increased use of reproductive toxicants, organophosphate and carbamate pesticides have also skyrocketed, chemicals that are known to cause serious health problems for humans and animals.

Consumer Information

Web site#1: Pesticides Linked to Parkinson's

http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_89395.html

This article talks about how people who are exposed on a regular basis to dangerous pesticides may be at a greater risk for Parkinson's disease. Researchers asked 519

Parkinson's patients and 511 people who did not suffer from the disease about their previous work history and exposure to toxins, including pesticides and solvents. The study found that 44, which is about 8.5% of Parkinson's patients, reported pesticide exposure, compared with 27, about 5.3% of those without the disease. These findings suggest that exposure to pesticides and Parkinson's are related. There were 3 compounds, an herbicide, an organic and an insecticide that were shown to increase the risk of Parkinson's disease.

Web site #2: Organic and Other Environmentally Friendly Foods

http://kidshealth.org/teen/food_fitness/nutrition/organics.html

This article helps people determine what products really are organic. Organic animal products, meat, poultry, eggs, and other dairy come from animals that are fed 100% organic feed products, receive no antibiotics or growth hormones, and are free range. If a product is labeled "organic," it means that a government-approved certifier has inspected the farm where they were produced to guarantee that the farmer followed the USDA's organic standards. Foods can be labeled in two ways "100% organic," which says that they are all organic or made from all organic substances or "organic," which means that they are at least 95% organic.

Web site #3: Is organic baby food better than regular baby food?

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/organic-baby-food/AN01424>

Organic baby food can limit your baby's exposure to pesticides and other potential contaminants in foods. However, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) says organic baby foods are no safer or more nutritious than are traditionally processed foods. Also, organic baby foods can cost a lot more than traditionally prepared foods. Organic foods are produced without conventional pesticides, antibiotics or growth hormones. The U.S. Department of Agriculture provides organic seals for products that are entirely organic or contain a range of organic components. But the USDA makes no claims or guarantees that organic foods are safer or more nutritious than nonorganic foods. With this evidence, it is up to the consumer on what they would rather spend their money on.

Solutions to the Problem

Web site #1: Michigan Food and Farm Alliance

<http://www.moffa.org/home.html>

The Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance (MOFFA) was organized in 1992 as a non-profit organization. They work to promote public awareness about the nature of traditionally grown food supply that uses substances that may be hazardous to the environment and may have social hazards as well. They teach organic consumers to value and to choose organically grown food produced locally. MOFFA is a force for raising public awareness about the need for more decentralized food source that allows consumers to have more of a choice of the selection about what they are eating. Also, on their Web site, MOFFA posts recent news that has to do with organic foods and other things going on within the range of organic.

Web site #2: Green Decade

<http://www.greendecade.org/greencap.html>

GreenCAP was organized by a group of Green Decade members in 1994. Since then GreenCAP members have learned that pesticide use is so common that almost any place we go, indoors and outdoors, may be a potential source of pesticide exposure. They have developed a variety of outreach and education projects to promote the use of safe ecological ways of dealing with pest problems that would have earlier used hazardous substances. Their motto is “Say No to Pesticides. Give every child a healthy start, a healthy school and a healthy tomorrow.”

Web site #3: Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms

<http://www.woofusa.org/>

Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms also known as WWOOF, is making a world-wide effort to help promote volunteers among organic farmers, education and building a

global community that is fully aware of environmental farming. This organization publishes a list of over 1000 farms that host volunteers. This allows people to learn more about organic farming through hands-on experience.

In doing this factsheet I really learned many different things about organic farming and problems that are tied in with it. It is important for people to be aware of pesticide issues and what can happen if they are exposed to them. There are many different organizations that are helping people through education to make them aware of the problems that the organic market is facing. Not only is organic farming a good way to avoid commonly used pesticides but it is also a good way to help support your local farmers who are trying to make a living.

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