

Organic Food

What's it all about?



photo: WDA

**Questions and answers about
organic food and farming in Wales**



Canolfan Organig Cymru
Organic Centre Wales



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

What is organic food?

- The use of the term organic, when applied to food, has a legal meaning. It means the food has been grown and processed according to certain rules
- These rules of organic farming and processing are known as Standards, and are legally enforceable in the UK and across Europe
- These Standards cover every stage of organic food production, from farm to shop

So how do I know if it's organic?

- Make sure that the word 'organic' is on the label
- Check out the logo – these logos listed below appear on products licensed by some of the organisations in the UK



What do the organic Standards mean?

What about animal welfare?

- **Animals must have enough room to express their natural behaviour**
- **All stock must have access to pasture when conditions allow**
- **Intensive feeding of beef and dairy cattle and the use of battery hen cages is not allowed**
- **No routine dosing with antibiotics**

What about growing crops?

- **Growing different crops in the same area means that pests and diseases don't have a chance to build up from season to season**
- **Very few artificial fertilisers are allowed**
- **Farmers build up their soil fertility by the use of clover and animal manures**
- **Organic farmers are only permitted to use a small number of pesticides and even then only under certain conditions**
- **No herbicides are allowed on organic farms**



photo: Craig Farm

The word organic can also apply to toiletries and fabrics. These are increasingly available, although the word organic does not have the same legal meaning. However, some products are licensed by the certifying organisations



photo: John Harvey

Organic food comes from farms that aim to produce high quality food in an environmentally friendly way to promote the health and well-being of soil, plants, animals, people and the countryside



photo: John Harvey

There are over 600 organic farms in Wales all working to deliver high quality products into the marketplace and create jobs in the countryside



photo: WDA



photo: WDA

How long does it take a farmer to produce organic animals and crops?

- **It takes at least two years for a farm to convert to organic production**
- **Farmers have to follow organic Standards and to make sure they do, they are inspected every year and their products are licensed**

What about GMs?

- **The use of all Genetically Modified materials such as seeds and feeds is prohibited**

What about the price of organic food?

- Methods used by organic farmers mean that labour costs can be higher
- Generally, the farmers obtain lower yields than non-organic farmers so to remain in business they need to receive a higher price for their produce
- Organically grown feed for animals can be expensive to produce
- Processed organic foods can be more expensive than conventional equivalents because ingredient costs are higher and other organic restrictions can lead to higher costs
- Smaller quantities and longer distances which can be involved in fresh and processed foods, sometimes raise the costs of production and marketing
- As with any product, when demand is high and supply is low, the price goes up and the farmer has very little control over this!



photo: WDA

How can I find organic food at a reasonable price?

- You can often buy direct from the producer. This might be by box schemes, from farmers' markets, online sales, mail order or farm shops
- Produce can be cheaper when it's in season
- Most supermarkets and wholefood shops stock organic produce: if you can't find it, **ask for it!**
- By preparing your own food and avoiding highly processed foods, you may find that you are not paying any more overall than you would for non-organic food

What about the quality of organic food?

- Organic food contains fewer residues of the pesticides used in conventional agriculture. Buying organic produce is one way to reduce the chances that your food contains these pesticide residues
- The routine dosing of farm animals with antibiotics is not allowed
- There has never been a case of BSE among animals born and raised on an organic farm
- Only about 30 additives, such as salt and baking powder, are permitted in organic processed food, compared with more than 500 additives permitted for use in non-organic processed foods
- Hydrogenated fats, linked with heart disease, are not allowed in processed organic foods
- It has been found that animals fed on higher proportions of grass and clover have a high content of essential fatty acids



Announcing new farmer support on 1st March 2004 Carwyn Jones, Minister of Environment said: "Organic produce is a vital part of the future of food production in Wales"



A healthy diet should be well balanced and should contain plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. A diet dominated by highly processed foods may contain unhealthy levels of sugars, saturated fats or salt, whether or not it is organic



Organic products have been very successful in the WDA's True Taste Awards

Is organic farming good for the environment?

- Studies have shown that, on average, established organic farms support higher numbers and a richer variety of birds, wild plants, insects and other wildlife, than non-organic farms
- Organic farmers are encouraged by the Standards to maintain hedges, trees and field margins to protect wildlife
- Energy use, particularly associated with the manufacture of fertiliser and pesticides, tends to be significantly lower on organic farms



What is the future of organic farming in Wales?

- The Welsh Assembly Government developed an organic action plan in 1999, ahead of England and Scotland, and continues to support organic farmers
- The Welsh Assembly Government is encouraging greater provision of Welsh-produced food, including organic food, in schools, hospital and other public authorities
- Bigger food companies are increasingly investing in new organic products, often supported by the Welsh Development Agency and Farming Connect



How can I find out more about organic food and farming and be part of this organic future?

- Find out more about organic food and farming from one of the many organisations which support it. Some are listed below
- Ask for organic food if you can't find it in a shop or restaurant
- Consult The Organic Directory by Clive Litchfield, published by Green Books 01803 863 260 available from the Soil Association and also on their website (see below)
- Visit farmers' markets and buy direct from the organic producers
- Grow your own organic food and start a compost heap. It's the best way to ensure that your produce is free from pesticides
- Find out if there is an organic farm near you which welcomes visits from the general public
- Ring the Organic Centre Wales Helpline for more information: 01970 622 100

Visit the websites below and follow the links

- www.organic.aber.ac.uk Organic Centre Wales the focal point for information on organic food and farming in Wales
- www.defra.gov.uk/farm/organic/consumers The UK Government view on organic farming
- www.soilassociation.org The Soil Association, which campaigns for organic food and farming in the UK
- www.hdra.org.uk information on organic gardening from the HDRA near Coventry
- www.food.gov.uk/wales The Food Standards Agency Wales
- www.foodcomm.org.uk The Food Commission, an independent watchdog
- www.cat.org.uk The Centre for Alternative Technology, near Machynlleth
- www.foe.co.uk/cymru Friends of the Earth Wales
- www.farmersmarketsinwales.co.uk Farmers Markets in Wales

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