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Wise Organic Food Investments

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Buying organic food can be expensive and confusing, but organics offer many **benefits to both consumers and farmers**. Organic produce reduces your exposure to harmful pesticides, increases your consumption of vital nutrients, and promotes sustainable farming practices that maintain soil integrity and prevent erosion.

So as an ethical consumer on a budget, how do you make the wisest organic investments to generate the biggest benefit for the planet without breaking the bank? At Hearts, our goal is to change the typical distribution channels with intent to positively impact the lives of people and take less from the planet. We want to make sure you target your ethical purchases strategically in order to have the biggest impact on the supply chain. This guide to making wise organic investments is part of that initiative.



Quick Guide: Costs and Benefits of Organic Foods

- **12%+ more nutrients in organic produce:** Organic produce may have higher levels of nutrients than conventional crops. A 2011 study revealed that organic crops contain approximately 12% to 16% more nutrients,^[i] though this issue remains highly controversial today.^[ii]
- **Lower pesticide exposure = Reduced risk of disease:** Organic produce reduces your exposure to pesticide residues, which are linked to respiratory problems, neurological disorders, cancer, and reproductive problems.^[iii]
- **Longer life expectancy with organic produce:** Organic crops contain significantly higher levels of metabolites (alkaloids, carotenoids, salicylates, and polyphenols) which are believed to protect against cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. Eating organic fruits and vegetables may slightly increase life expectancy – by 17 days for women and 25 days for men.^[iv]
- **Organic agriculture creates more American jobs:** Organic agriculture has higher production costs and increased labor involved in organic farming, but keep in mind, that means more American jobs!^[v]
- **Organics reflect true costs of food:** Conventional food prices are artificially lowered through subsidies under the Farm Bill.^[vi] While these subsidies are in place, it will not be possible to properly compare the prices of organic vs. conventional produce and organics will remain more expensive.
- **How much more does organic cost?** The Rodale Institute's **Organic Price Report** indicates organics can sometimes cost twice as much.^[vii]

Take Action! Invest Strategically in Organic Produce

1. **Avoid the Dirty Dozen – Invest wisely for the greatest health benefits:** Try to find organic versions of the fruits and vegetables that typically have the highest pesticide residue levels for maximum health investment. The Environmental Working Group (EWG) has the **Dirty Dozen** list indicating the foods with the highest concentrations of harmful pesticide residues.
 1. **Fruits with the highest pesticide residues:** Apples, peaches, strawberries, imported nectarines, grapes, and domestic blueberries are all on the Dirty Dozen list^[viii], so buy organic of these whenever possible.
 2. **Vegetables with the highest pesticide residues:** Celery, sweet bell peppers, spinach, lettuce, cucumbers, and potatoes. Green beans and kale were also recently added to the Dirty Dozen Plus list because they contain high levels of toxic organophosphate insecticides, even though they do not meet traditional Dirty Dozen criteria.^[ix]
2. **Skip the Clean 15 – Choose non-organic of these produce items:** EWG also publishes a list of the fruits and vegetables with the lowest concentrations of pesticide residues, called the **Clean 15**. You should feel more comfortable buying conventional options of these if your budget is tight or if organic options are not available.
 1. **Vegetables with the least pesticide residues:** Onions, sweet corn, avocado, cabbage, sweet peas, asparagus, eggplant, sweet potatoes, and mushrooms.^[x]
 2. **Fruits with the least pesticide residues:** Pineapples, mangoes, kiwi, domestic cantaloupe, grapefruit, and watermelon.
3. **Save money on organic produce:** The key to finding affordable organic produce is to buy what's in season, which is more readily available and can cost up to 50% less than it would out of season.^[xi] Buying local organics also saves

money because your produce will not have to travel as far.^[xii] Shop your local farmer's market whenever possible to find this season's produce in your own backyard. Check out the [Simply in Season cookbook](#) for more information on finding and cooking with seasonal produce.^[xiii]

4. **Political actions to promote organic practices:** Choosing organic produce happens first at an individual level, but even more impactful is getting political about our food system.
 1. Reach out to your representative in Congress letting them know that organic foods are a priority, and voice your support for the [Organic Standards Protection Act](#), which was introduced in 2012.
 2. Tell your Senator or Representative that you support [revisions to the Farm Bill](#) that will support organic farming and stop subsidies to conventional agribusiness.
 3. Sign the [Food Agenda 2020 petition](#) by the Organic Consumers Association, which calls on US elected officials to build an organic economy.

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Dig Deeper: Organic Foods and Avoiding Pesticide Exposure

- Find out more about avoiding pesticides in your produce with the full [EWG 2012 Shopper's Guide](#).
- Discover how organic agriculture benefits the environment through a Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations report: [What are the environmental benefits of organic agriculture](#).
- Find out what requirements food must meet to be labeled as [certified organic](#) and how [accreditation varies](#) internationally, nationally, and locally.
- Read about the [types of pesticides](#) regulated by the EPA and how [EPA oversees food safety](#).

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