



Key findings from the organic farming, food quality and human health report 2002

What we found

The evidence from properly conducted scientific studies shows that on average organic food is better for you than non-organic food:

It's safer

Unless you eat organic, one item in three in your fridge or kitchen cupboard is likely to contain chemical residues which often occur in potentially dangerous combinations. There are recommended safety levels but the government's own tests have shown that real levels may be being under reported. Chemicals like DDT and lindane have been banned after being declared safe, and little research has been done into the effects of cocktails of pesticides – combinations which can be hundreds of times more toxic. Nine out of ten non-organic oranges tested by the government were found to have residues of more than one pesticide and as many as seven different pesticides were found on a single lettuce. Health problems as diverse as heart disease, osteoporosis, migraines and hyperactivity have been linked to food additives whose use is banned in organic food production. These include phosphoric acid (eg fizzy drinks: osteoporosis), hydrogenated fat (eg margarine and biscuits: heart disease), aspartame sweetener (eg diet food, fizzy drinks, sweets: headaches, mood swings, nausea), tartrazine colouring (eg squash: hyperactivity), monosodium glutamate (eg ready meals: headaches, asthma).

It's more nutritious

On average our research found higher vitamin C, higher mineral levels and higher phytonutrients – plant compounds which can be effective against cancer. There's also less water in organic vegetables so pound for pound you get more carrot for your carrot. Tests with people and animals eating organic show it makes a real difference to health. Alternative cancer therapies have achieved good results relying on the exclusive consumption of organic food. Animal feeding trials have shown better reproductive health, better growth, better recovery from illness.

Why our findings are important

Because health is in decline and we need to do something about it. Diet is a significant factor for both the major killer diseases, cancer and heart disease. Rates of cancer have increased from one in 80 a hundred years ago to one in three now. We are exposed to between 300 and 500 toxins in our food and our environment – more than ever before. Nutrient deficiencies are very common: so many of us are overfed and undernourished. Official data show that over the past half century there's been an alarming decline in mineral levels in fruit and vegetables. Nutrient levels are 85 per cent higher in organic soils.

Because our research shows that those who said there was no evidence of health differences between organic and non-organic food got it wrong

What we want

More research is needed to confirm the indications in our report, and is well justified by the existing evidence. The government should recognise the potential of our agriculture to be the primary health service, potentially saving billions on NHS costs, and give much more help to farmers going organic.

Organic Farming, Food Quality and Human Health is published by the Soil Association. The report can be downloaded from the Soil Association website:

<http://www.soilassociation.org/web/sa/saweb.nsf/Resources/research.html>

How can I support the work of the Soil Association?

The Soil Association is a membership charity, we urgently need your support to continue our work. As public support for the Soil Association continues to grow, our ability to influence the thinking and policies of government and big business grows with it. In this way we help to develop a truly healthy and sustainable future. Join us today and help us to continue campaigning for sustainable agriculture and organic food. You can join the Soil Association on our website, over the phone or by writing to us.

Further Reading

Please see the Soil Association website library, <http://www.soilassociation.org/library>, for more information

Soil Association Campaigning for organic food and farming and sustainable forestry
Bristol House, 40-56 Victoria Street, Bristol BS1 6BY
T: 0117 314 5000 F: 0117 314 5001 E: info@soilassociation.org
www.soilassociation.org

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