

GRAND TOUR

Food

WHY BUY ORGANIC?

By Gena Bell

ORGANIC IS THE BIG BUZZWORD THESE DAYS, especially around the grocery aisles and local farmers markets. Many of us may not understand what all the hype is about. Organic farming is the agricultural production system used to produce a variety of products, including produce, grains, meat, dairy and eggs. Organic farming focuses on replenishing natural resources, thereby preserving the soil, the water system and environmental quality for future generations. Organic farmers, as opposed to conventional farmers, are not allowed to use synthetic pesticides or fertilizers in the growing process, and animals raised on an organic operation must be fed organic feed and given outdoor access.

In 1990, Congress passed the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) requiring the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to develop standards for organically grown products. Labels that claim "Certified Organic" guarantee the agricultural production processes have been followed according to uniform standards and verified by independent state or private organizations accredited by the USDA.

So what does all this mean for you and me? For me, organic means flavor. Fruits, vegetables and meats are not pumped up with "quick growing" chemicals and forced to skip some of their growing lifecycle. Potatoes, brussel sprouts and tomatoes actually taste like potatoes, brussel sprouts and tomatoes. Have you ever chosen a beautiful plump, red tomato and bitten into it to find that it tastes like cardboard? Probably not organic. Another reason why organic produce often tastes better is because organic farmers tend to use older generation seeds, which create better tasting varieties.

Organic food is a growing industry. Currently 2% of U.S. food is grown using organic methods and in 2001 retail sales of organic foods were projected at \$9.3 billion (Organic Consumer Trade 2001). Several retailers are hot on organics. Whole Foods Market, for example, focuses on fresh organic products that have been grown regionally as well as a variety of products for special diets. Safeway/Vons is even getting into the organic business with produce and dairy offerings for an organic lifestyle. Trader Joe's is another retail chain that offers organic packaged goods, dairy and produce at reasonable prices. With all this selection, why not?

Organic foods can be more expensive, due to the lack of organic farmers and the true cost of growing organic food. Organic farming has a longer growing process and doesn't always yield large crops due to bug and insect damage. In some states eating organic 365 days a year may be difficult. Living in

California however, does allow us the privilege of being exposed to fresh organic products all year long.

If you haven't tried organic foods, you might want to pick up a fresh organically grown squash, or an apple for that matter, and see for yourself. I have just recently joined a CSA, which stands for -- Consumer Supported Agriculture. A CSA, or an organic farm, grows fresh organic produce and charges individuals a flat weekly rate for a box of fruits and veggies. The quality and flavor of my produce is always outstanding and what I love most is that you only receive freshly picked items that are ripe ready. Also, what makes belonging to a CSA extra special is that you never know what you're going to get until you pick up your box—I like to think of it as a weekly produce Christmas present! To find a local CSA near you go to www.sare.org/csa and click on "Find a CSA Farm Near You."

BRUSSEL SPROUTS WITH ORANGE BROWN BUTTER SAUCE

1 1/2 pounds fresh organic brussel sprouts, trimmed and halved
4 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 tablespoon fresh orange zest
salt
pepper

To Prepare:

1. Fill a large pot with water and bring to a boil over medium-high heat.
2. When boiling, drop brussel sprouts into boiling water and cook for 8 minutes or until fork tender. Drain sprouts in a colander.
3. Place pot back on the stove over medium-high heat. Add butter immediately and let cook until lightly brown and foamy. Add zest and stir for one minute. Add brussel sprouts to the pot and toss lightly together.
4. Salt and pepper brussel sprouts to taste. Place in a serving dish. Enjoy! @T

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