

The ABCs of Organic Food

Ever wonder what makes a food product organic? If you are not sure what you are really getting when you buy organic food products, some new guidelines may help.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), along with the National Organic Standards Board, recently set a national standard for how organically produced food must be labeled.

An organic label refers to the methods used to grow, handle and process food. The new USDA

Organic seal, used with the term "organic," assures consumers that a food is at least 95 percent organic.

These new government guidelines may help you further understand organic products:

- ✦ 100 percent organic means that 100 percent of the ingredients in that product are organic.
- ✦ Organic certifies that the product contains at least 95 percent organic ingredients.
- ✦ If the label says, "Made with organic ingredients," it means the product must contain at least 70 percent organic ingredients.
- ✦ Only 100 percent Organic and Organic-Certified foods will carry the new USDA seal.

Consumers should be aware, however, that the label organic may not necessarily mean the food is better for you. "The truth is there is no scientific evidence to prove that organic foods are safer or more nutritious than conventionally grown foods," said Terrie A. Holewinski, R.D., of the University of Michigan Health System. "They both must meet the same safety and quality standards based on government guidelines and standards."

So why are some consumers so passionate about buying organic? "People who choose organic foods tend to want a more holistic eating pattern—one in which their family's foods aren't exposed to antibiotics, growth hormones and pesticides," said Holewinski.

Freshness and taste also can be factors in deciding to buy organic. Fruits and vegetables produced without pesticides and fertilizers tend to ripen faster than conventionally grown produce, which means they are handled more carefully and delivered to the market quicker.

Holewinski pointed out that organic foods should not be confused with those labeled "natural." While no standardized definition exists for the term natural, food producers use the term for products that are processed minimally or made with few preservatives.

Source: University of Michigan Health System, www.med.umich.edu

As you go through the drive-thru or shop at your local grocery store, you may find a bigger serving can mean more value for your money, but keep in mind that it also means many more calories.

Source: American Dietetic Association, www.eatright.org

Growing Portion Sizes Mean Expanding Waistlines

A value size meal at lunchtime may mean less money out of your wallet, but it also can mean more inches added to your waistline. According to a study published in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, portion sizes of many popular restaurant and packaged foods have increased significantly over the past 20 years, and the result can be seen in many Americans' larger waists.

Researchers from New York University compared

portion sizes to federal standards and found most commercial portions exceeded standard sizes by as much as eight times the recommended amount. Also, researchers found portion sizes of many foods and beverages are two to five times larger than when the

items first hit the market.

"This trend toward larger marketplace portions parallels the rising rates of obesity in our country," said Keith Ayoob, registered dietitian and American Dietetic Association (ADA) spokesperson. "Because marketplace portions are consistently so much larger than Department of Agriculture standard servings, consumers need to be aware that one bagel can easily comprise six grain servings."

Researchers also found the portions of some foods even exceeded the serving sizes recommended on the package's food labels. These labels list the number of calories per serving, but individually packaged items sometimes contain 2.5 or more standard label servings.

