



## GrayIsGreen

### Who are we?

**Gray Is Green** is an online gathering of older adult Americans aspiring to create a green legacy for the future. As environmentally conscious elders, we respond to a generational call: to co-create a future of economic justice, ecological sustainability and social justice.

We hold next generations of humans in mind and consider the future of ecosystems and other species. We are alert to the historic challenges facing our planet. And we are aware of the question arising from descendants generations hence:

*What did you do, when you knew?*

### What do we do?

We aspire to embrace our eldership, living beyond consumerism and ageism. **Our Curriculum for Gray-Green Living** offers a variety of ways to join—and re-engage with—this elder movement.

We offer a periodic newsletter, a speaker's bureau, online resources, a [Facebook page](#) for relevant updates. In partnership with congenial organizations, we serve as a central clearinghouse of ideas and communications for older adults interested in greening their lives, learning about sustainability, advocating for sound public policy, being creative stewards or grandparents, emerging as elders, and mentoring young people.

*We invite **you** to get involved!*

[www.grayisgreen.org](http://www.grayisgreen.org)

## Community Resilience

### What is Organic Food?

Similar to the indistinct label of local food,<sup>1</sup> food labeled as organic could mean any number of things. We see food labeled as organic in our grocery stores and at the restaurants we go to and we see, hear, and read about the benefits of organic food on TV and on the Internet. Almost any kind of foodstuff, from meat to greens to ice cream, has an organic alternative.

### What Does the Label Organic Food Actually Mean?

Organic produce<sup>2</sup> is grown without the use of pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, or genetically modified organisms. Animals that produce meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products do not take antibiotics or growth hormones. Essentially, organic food is grown the way humans have cultivated and gathered food for thousands of years, before the rise of the contemporary industrial food system from which so much of our food comes today.

People who prefer to purchase and consume organic food include those who want to avoid eating food which may be contaminated by processes of industrialized food production and distribution, such as pesticides. Our friends at the Pesticide Action Network (PAN), who are working to advance alternatives to pesticides, share with us that non-organic foods which are treated with pesticides<sup>3</sup> can have uncertain effects on our health. PAN tells us that the EPA sets limits on the maximum amount of each pesticide that can be on each food item, but does not limit the number of different pesticides that can be on your food, or the total amount of contamination. With regulations being so vague, our food and thus our bodies are vulnerable

to the complex mixture of chemicals that may be used to grow it.

### What Does Certified Organic Mean?

Farmers and growers can be certified organic<sup>4</sup> through the National Organic Program of the United States Department of Agriculture. This nationwide program for producers and distributors of foodstuffs provides an official and widely accepted standard for what is considered a properly grown organic foodstuff. All certified organic foodstuffs and products you will see in your local stores and farmer's markets will have the green and white USDA organic seal. If you see the USDA organic seal, the product is certified organic and has 95 percent or more organic content.

The official USDA label is a very important standard, especially since the organic label has become something which some less scrupulous food vendors, producers, and distributors use to promote their products, even though what they grow and sell is not actually organic. The official USDA label insures that you know what you are getting is truly grown organically.

### What is the Difference Between Local and Organic Foods?

It is important to remember that just because something is labeled organic does not mean it is a local food.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, just because something is grown locally does not always mean that it is organically grown. Most farmers and vendors at your local farmer's market and CSA (community-supported agriculture) will have grown their produce and other foodstuffs

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in an organic fashion. However, they may have not have been able to undertake becoming officially certified organic growers due to time and cost restraints. Farmers and other growers who grow organically generally follow good-for-the-earth practices without the certification. You can always ask farmers and vendors you have gotten to know and trust at your local farmer's market or CSA if they grow organically, even if they do not display any official certification from the USDA.

### What About the Cost of Organic Foods?

The organic food movement has gained a lot of steam in reclaiming the way we grow, share, and eat food away from the unsustainable and unhealthy practices of the industrial food system. Our friends and colleagues at Rodale Institute tell us that the organic industry is growing fast<sup>6</sup> and creates jobs at 4 times the national average. While organic foods, as you may experience, are still on average slightly more expensive than non-organic foods, the increasing supply and demand for organic foods means that they are becoming cheaper and more accessible to people of all budgetary concerns.

Many people see the value of the extra safety of organic foods, but still struggle to justify paying the price for organic food. A study by the Environmental Working Group of 43 fruits and vegetables shows that you can reduce your pesticide exposure<sup>7</sup> from produce by up to 90 percent by avoiding the twelve most contaminated fruits and vegetables and eating the least contaminated instead. If you have young children, a high priority might be organic milk because it does not contain antibiotics or growth hormones.

The reason organic food is now the fastest-growing sector of the food industry is that consumers have shown they want it by buying it. There is, in fact, no other way to promote organic food<sup>8</sup> than by buying it and encouraging others to do the same.

### What are the Health Benefits of Organic Foods?

Because organic foods are grown with natural techniques that have been passed down through generations, our bodies are able to maintain optimal health by eating organic foods. The pesticides on our produce remains in our bodies long after we digest our food, and can lead to unforeseen health

issues. PAN tell us that many diseases are linked to chemical exposure, including diabetes.

Because we carry so many chemicals in our bodies, it is difficult to conduct studies that tie individual toxins with specific diseases. Even so, evidence is mounting<sup>9</sup> that elevated levels of chemicals in our bodies are linked to higher risk of adult diseases such as reduced fertility (particularly in men), immune suppression, and bladder, breast and other cancers.

Eating organically not only prevents health problems from unnecessary chemical elements in our foods, but is also more nutritious overall. The Organic Consumers Association tell us that on average, organic food is 25% more nutritious<sup>10</sup> in terms of vitamins and minerals than products derived from industrial agriculture. Since organic food's shelf price is only 20% higher than non-organic food, this actually makes it cheaper gram for gram. This figure even conservatively leaves out the astronomical hidden costs of industrial food production like damage to health, climate, environment, and government subsidies.

1 see local food subtopic

2 <http://www.organic.org/home/faq>

3 <http://www.panna.org/issues/food-agriculture/pesticides-on-food>

4 <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateC&navID=NationalOrganicProgram&leftNav=NationalOrganicProgram&page=NOPConsumers&description=Consumers&acct=nopgeninfo>

5 <http://www.nrdc.org/thisgreenlife/0704.asp>

6 <http://rodaleinstitute.org/our-work/organic-certification/>

7 <http://foodnews.org/walletguide.php>

8 insert link to local food sub-topic

9 <http://www.panna.org/issues/persistent-poisons/pesticides-in-our-bodies>

10 <http://www.organicconsumers.org/organlink.cfm>



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