

Know more about organic food

Since organic food is getting popular in the local market, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) has prepared some information that briefly introduces organic food to the general public from the angle on food safety.

What are the differences between organic food and conventional food?

We may compare the differences between organic food and conventional food in terms of the following three aspects –

Microbiological risk

The use of organic wastes has been considered to be a potential risk to food safety. If the manure is improperly treated and used as fertilizer in organic farming, organic produce and nearby water may be contaminated with pathogens. However, if the manure is properly treated and stored, the level of pathogens are likely to be reduced. So far, evidences are insufficient to show that the risk of pathogen transfer resulted from organic farming is higher than that from conventional one and organic produce is more or less microbiologically safe.

Chemical risk

As a usual practice, the certification bodies for organic products would establish their own lists of chemicals which are “permitted” to be applied in organic farming. This would result in considerably lower level of residues of chemical pesticides and veterinary drugs in organic produce than that in conventional ones. However, it does not mean that organic produce is free of any chemicals.

Nutritional content

Organic foods have essentially the same nutritional content in terms of vitamin and mineral contents as the conventional produce. There is no firm scientific evidence that organic produce is more or less healthier than conventional produce.

In conclusion, the best available evidence shows that there is no significant difference between organic food and conventional food in terms of food safety and nutritional quality. In fact, under the food surveillance programme of the CFS, a wide variety of food samples, including conventional and organic food products, have been taken regularly at every stage of the supply chain for chemical and microbiological testing so as to ensure the safety of food supply in Hong Kong.

What is "organic food"?

"Organic food" usually refers to food that is produced according to organic standards throughout production, handling, processing and marketing stages, and certified by a certification body or authority of the countries of origin.



chemical
pesticides
and
fertilizers

Mushroom

What are the organic standards?



antibiotics,
growth hor-
mones and
other animal
feed additives

Organic standards include:

- for planting, avoid the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, but emphasize crop rotation, animal and plant manures, some hand weeding and biological pest control;
- for raising animals, avoid the use of antibiotics, growth hormones and other animal feed additives;
- no application of genetic modification and ionizing radiation.

Who set the organic standards?

In view of the growing production and international trade in organically produced food, the Codex Alimentarius Commission¹ has established guidelines for the production, processing, labelling and marketing of organically produced foods. Some other international organizations and countries have also set up similar guidelines that fit their local situations, e.g. the list of permitted substances for the production of organic food may vary slightly.

¹ The Codex Alimentarius Commission is recognized by the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Trade Organization as the international authority for setting food related standards.

What are the benefits of organic farming?



Organic farming promotes and enhances the health of the ecosystem, the biological activity and fertility of soil. People who advocate organic agriculture emphasize the use of renewable resources and the need for conservation of energy, soil and water resources.

How can I know if the food is "organic"?

The label of organic food usually indicates that the products have been certified as "organic" by certification bodies or authorities. In Hong Kong, the production of organic food is limited to vegetables. However, some processed organic food products such as dried beans, soya milk, breakfast cereals, cookies etc. and organic animal products including eggs are imported from overseas and available for sale in the local market.



Advice to consumers

From a nutritional point of view, it is prudent to maintain a balanced and varied diet which includes fruit, vegetables, cereals, meat, milk etc. that provide all the nutrients required for the maintenance of health, regardless of whether the individual foods are produced by organic or conventional methods.

The general rules apply when consumers are purchasing organic products e.g. not to purchase vegetables that look unfresh, mouldy or shriveled; to wash and cook the vegetables thoroughly before consumption so as to minimize the potential risks associated with chemical residues and pathogens.

For further information on other food safety issues, please visit:

<http://www.cfs.gov.hk/>

有機食品知多一點點

有鑒於有機食品日漸普及，食物安全中心(中心)因此編製作了一些資料，從食物安全的角度向市民簡介有機食品。

有機食品和一般食品有什麼分別？

我們可從下列三方面去比較有機食品和一般食品：

微生物性風險

使用有機廢物已被確認對食物安全帶來潛在的風險。有機耕作中所使用的肥料若處理不當，可能會帶來致病菌，污染食品和附近水源；不過，若肥料經妥善處理及貯存，可減低致病菌的數量。現時的證據不足以證明由有機耕作而導致致病菌傳播的風險高於一般耕作。

化學性風險

一般有機食品的認證機構會設有准許用於有機食耕作的物料清單，這清單會令有機農產品的殘留化學農藥和獸藥較一般作物為低，不過，有機作物並不因此而完全不含化學物。

營養成分

有機耕作食品的營養成分，包括維他命或礦物質的含量，跟一般食品基本上相同；目前並沒有確實的科學證據，指出有機食品比一般食品含有更豐富的維他命或礦物質。

總括而言，現有的證據顯示有機食品與一般食品在食物安全和營養質素方面並沒有顯著的分別。中心亦透過食物監測計劃，在食物供應的不同層面定期抽取各類食物樣本，包括一般食品和有機食品，作化學及微生物測試，以確保本港食物可供安全食用。

甚麼是「有機食品」？

「有機食品」通常指從生產、處理、加工到銷售階段，按照有機標準生產，並經來源地認證機構或管理當局認證的食品。



甚麼是有機食品標準？

有機標準包括：

- 在種植方面，避免使用化學性除害劑及肥料，而多採用輪作、動植物堆肥、人工除草和生物方法防治蟲害；
- 在飼養動物方面，避免使用抗生素、生長激素和其他動物飼料添加劑；
- 不使用基因改造技術和電離輻射技術。



誰來制訂有機標準？

鑒於有機食品生產及國際貿易不斷增長，食品法典委員會¹為有機食品的生產、加工、標籤及銷售制定指引。此外，部分國際組織和國家因應本身的情況已制定類似的指引，其准許用於有機食品生產的物料的清單可能有點差異。

¹食品法典委員會獲世界衛生組織、糧食及農業組織和世界貿易組織承認的國際組織，負責訂定與食品有關的國際標準。

有機耕作有什麼好處呢？



有機耕作促進及加強生態系統的健康、土壤的生物活性和肥沃。提倡有機農業的人，主張使用可循環再用的資源，並提倡存護能源、土壤及水源。

我如何可識別「有機食品」呢？

有機食品的標籤上通常會說明該食品已被認證機構或管理當局證明為「有機食品」。本港所出產的有機食品以蔬菜為主，但一些經加工的有機食品，如乾豆、豆漿、穀類早餐、餅乾等，以及有機動物產品，例如雞蛋，可經由海外進口並在本地市場出售。



給消費者的提示：

從營養角度來看，不論該食品是否經有機方法抑或普通方法生產並沒有太顯著的差異。然而最重要的是要維持均衡膳食，進食各種不同種類的食品，包括水果和蔬菜、穀類、肉類和牛奶等，以吸取維持健康所需的營養。

跟選購一般食品一樣，消費者在購買有機食品時，不宜購買外觀看來不大新鮮、發霉或有枯萎跡象的產品；在進食前應把蔬菜徹底洗淨及煮熟，以減少蔬菜中的化學殘餘物和致病菌所帶來的風險。

如欲獲取更多關於其他食物安全問題的資料，可瀏覽以下網頁：

<http://www.cfs.gov.hk/>