

# know more about organic food



# 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 country of origin.

## What are organic standards?

### Organic standards include:

- for planting: avoiding the use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers; but emphasising crop rotation, animal and plant manures, hand weeding and biological pest control;
- for raising animals: avoiding the use of antibiotics, growth hormones and other animal feed additives;
- no application of genetic modification and ionising radiation.



## Who sets the organic standards?

The Codex Alimentarius Commission<sup>1</sup> has established the "Guidelines for the Production, Processing, Labelling and Marketing of Organically Produced Foods". Some other international organisations and countries have also set up similar guidelines that fit their local situations.

## 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 emphasise the use of renewable resources and the need for conservation of energy, soil and water resources.

## How to 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 mainly 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.

## How to compare organic food with conventional food?

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

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### Chemical risk

- avoiding the use of chemical pesticides and veterinary drugs will reduce the presence of chemical residues in organic food products.
- avoiding the use of fungicides in organic farming may lead to the growth of moulds and subsequent production of mycotoxins in crops. However, there are insufficient evidences that the use of fungicides will reduce the production of mycotoxins in crops by moulds.

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### Microbiological risk

- organic produce and nearby water may be contaminated with pathogens if improperly treated manure is used as fertiliser in organic farming. So far, evidences are insufficient to show that the risk of pathogen transfer resulting from organic farming is higher than that from conventional one.

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### Nutritional content

- organic foods have essentially the same nutritional contents in terms of vitamins and minerals as those of the conventional produce. There is no firm scientific evidence that organic produce is more or less healthier than conventional produce.

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Therefore, the major difference between organic food and conventional food is their growing, processing and handling methods.

## Advice to consumers

1. From a nutritional point of view, it is prudent to maintain a balanced and varied diet, which includes fruit, vegetables, cereals, meat and milk that provide all the nutrients required for the maintenance of health, regardless of whether the individual foods are produced by organic or conventional methods.
2. The general rules apply when consumers are purchasing organic products, for example, not to purchase vegetables that look unfresh, mouldy or shriveled; to wash, soak and cook vegetables thoroughly before consumption so as to minimise the potential risks associated with chemical residues and pathogens.

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

**[www.info.gov.hk/fehd/safefood/index.html](http://www.info.gov.hk/fehd/safefood/index.html)**

<sup>1</sup> The Codex Alimentarius Commission was established by the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization in 1963. It was recognised by the World Trade Organization as an international authority for setting food-related standards.