



Is Organic Food Better Than Conventionally Farmed Food?

*"A major EU-funded study has found that **nutrient levels were higher** in organic foods. It found that levels of nutritionally desirable compounds, such as antioxidants and vitamins, were higher in organic crops, while levels of nutritionally undesirable compounds such as toxic chemicals, mycotoxins and metals such as cadmium and nickel, were lower in organic crops."*

(May 2009)

*"According to a new, independent study funded by the Government's Food Standards Agency (FSA) there is **little, if any, nutritional difference** between organic and conventionally produced food and there is no evidence of additional health benefits from eating organic food."*

(July 2009)

Over the last 50 years, farmers in the UK and many other developed countries have been able to grow **ever more increasing amounts of food**. In order to do this, certain changes have had to be made.

On modern **conventional farms**:

- The farms are now bigger
- Hedges and trees have been removed
- Farmers use more machines and less workers
- Farmers use better quality seeds and breed from better quality animals

Plus farmers now use more:

- **Pesticides** – to kill insects
- **Herbicides** – to kill weeds
- **Fungicides** – to prevent plant disease
- **Fertiliser** – to make crops grow bigger and stronger
- **Drugs** – to prevent animal diseases and to make animals grow faster

This last change is all about **chemicals**! What happens to those chemicals that keep being sprayed on to our food and injected into our animals? Some people believe that the chemicals may remain in the food that we eat and so they have started to grow food and rear animals without all the chemicals – this is called **organic farming**. In 2008 there were about **5,000** organic farms in the UK (about 4% of all farms). Customers spent about **£2 billion** on organic food.



Is organic food better than food grown on a conventional farm? The two research reports quoted above looked at **nutrients** but they didn't look at any other **benefits** or **disadvantages** of the two systems of producing food – taste, pollution, animal welfare, etc.

Deciding between the two systems is not easy and some people hold very strong opinions. You will need to make up your own mind based on the evidence. In the end, it is good that people have a **choice** of what sort of food they eat – a few years ago, this was not really possible unless you grew your own food.