

Organic Milk FAQ

What's the difference between organic and regular milk?

The dairy case has something for everyone – whether you're looking for low-fat, lactose-free, a favorite flavor or foods that are certified "organic" – so it's easy to meet the federal government's dietary recommendations for three servings of milk and milk products each day.

As with all organic foods, it's the process that makes milk organic, not the final product. In other words, foods that are certified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as "organic" are really "organically grown" or "organically produced," meaning they are grown according to a philosophy that emphasizes a productive and balanced ecological environment for soil, plants and animals.

While proper animal care and environmental stewardship are priorities for all dairy farmers, marketers using the term "organic" must ensure that **all** of the USDA on-farm criteria are met, and they must follow the FDA's labeling guidelines.

Is organic milk more nutritious than regular milk?

No, both types of milk are equally nutritious. Carton to carton, bottle to bottle, organic and regular milk contain the same unique package of nutrients that makes dairy products an important part of a healthy diet. Just check the nutrition facts label and you'll see that each 8-ounce serving of milk offers the same amount of nine essential nutrients, including calcium, vitamin D and potassium.

Is organic milk safer than regular milk?

No. All milk must comply with very stringent safety standards. In fact, milk and dairy products are among the most highly regulated and safest foods on the shelf. According to the USDA, and to the American Dietetic Association (ADA), organically produced food isn't safer or more nutritious than conventionally produced food:

www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/SID-5303FFEA-B7A2C3E1/ada/hs.xsl/home_4535_ENU_HTML.htm

What about hormones, antibiotics and pesticides? The label on my organic milk carton says it is "hormone, antibiotics and pesticide-free."

The term "organic" refers to farm practices, not to the milk itself. Milk and dairy foods are among the most tested and regulated foods in this country. While organic dairy farmers use only organic fertilizers and organic pesticides and their cows aren't treated with synthetic hormones, the milk itself is the same as the milk produced conventionally.

Hormones

Hormones are present naturally in all milk. While some dairy farmers use a supplemental hormone for their cows, the safety of this use has been affirmed and reaffirmed by leading national and international health and agricultural organizations over the past 15 years. Carton to carton, bottle to bottle, there is no significant difference in the level of hormones in any milk.

Antibiotics

It's important to note that dairy cows are not routinely treated with antibiotics.

While organic farmers choose never to use antibiotics in their herds, conventional dairy farmers sometimes use antibiotics to treat clinically diagnosed illnesses, just as humans sometimes need

medication when they are sick. The cow is taken from the milking herd, treated, and is not put back into the herd until her milk tests free of antibiotics.

Every tanker load of milk is tested for antibiotics. In the rare instance that antibiotics are found, that milk is discarded and never reaches the market. Because of this major financial loss to the farmer, you can be certain that dairy farmers take all necessary precautions to keep milk free of any contaminant.

Pesticides

Milk has consistently been found to contain no pesticide residue or to have residue levels that rank among the lowest of all agricultural products.

The bottom line is that stringent government standards ensure that both organic milk and regular milk are pure, safe and nutritious. For more information on food safety, visit:

www.nationaldairycouncil.org/NationalDairyCouncil/Nutrition/Safety/foodSafetyfactsheet.htm

Does buying organic do more to help support small family farms?

There are large and small farms in both the conventional and organic food categories. Organic farming has more to do with farming practices than the size of the farm itself. Of the 70,000 dairy farms in America today, most are smaller farms with less than 200 cows. It's important to keep in mind that the vast majority of U.S. farms -- big and small -- are family owned and operated.

Is organic milk fresher than regular milk?

Most milk, including organic milk, is delivered to stores within a few of days of milking. With modern distribution systems, both types of milk may travel hundreds of miles from farm to retail outlet.

Does organic milk taste different?

The taste of milk, regardless of whether it is organically or conventionally produced, can differ slightly from bottle to bottle and season to season. Factors that may impact taste include location of the farm, breed of the cow, variations in the cows' feed from farm to farm, and even the time of year. Milk that is ultra-high temperature (UHT) pasteurized for longer freshness may also have a slightly different taste. People should do their own "taste test" to see which kinds of milk they prefer.

Why does organic milk cost more?

It is costly for dairy farmers to follow the government standards that are required to receive the "certified-organic" label.

References / Additional Sources of Information:

USDA Organic Standards: www.ams.usda.gov/nop/Consumers/Consumerhome.html

USDA General Milk Safety Standards: www.ams.usda.gov/dairy/stand.htm

American Dietetic Association on Organic Foods:

www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/SID-5303FFEA-B7A2C3E1/ada/hs.xsl/home_4535_ENU_HTML.htm

Contact the National Milk Producers Federation at 703-243-6111 or www.nmpf.org for more information

