

# Important Reasons to Choose Organic

by Andrew Weil, MD. Printed with permission.

I have been a longtime proponent of organic agriculture and have an organic garden at my home in southern Arizona. My reasons for going organic are twofold: I am concerned about the effects of agricultural chemicals on my own health, and I am concerned about the effects of conventional agricultural practices on the environment.

As a class of chemicals, the pesticides in use on conventional crops are suspect. The bottom line is simple: they can't be good for us. The only question is, "How bad are they?" I'm afraid the answer might be "pretty bad." The pesticides we use against insects, worms, and microorganisms are poisons, and most of them are poisons for us as well as the pests.

Government standards on "acceptable" levels of pesticides in food do not reassure me. These standards set levels for acute toxicity of single compounds—that is, how much of one chemical might cause immediate harm. My concern is about chronic, low-level exposure to multiple compounds—the compounding of all the various poisons in use in conventional agriculture, as well as everything else we have to deal with in the water we drink and the air we breathe and the manufactured materials we handle. This toxic load, over time, might easily be more than our body defenses can handle, increasing lifetime risks of cancer and other very serious diseases. I would bet, for example, that a number of degenerative neurological conditions whose causes are not known will turn out to be the result of toxic injury to sensitive parts of the brain. I include Parkinson's disease and ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) in this category.

Environmental damage from conventional growing methods is of two sorts. The first has to do with trying to deal with pests by using chemical weapons against them; it creates the same problem as indiscriminate use of antibiotics against germs. The germs get tougher and nastier over time, because antibiotics influence their evolution, killing susceptible organisms and selecting resistant ones. It is the same with pests and pesticides. In areas of the United States where pesticides have been used longest and heaviest, patterns of insect predation on food crops are now worse than they were before farmers started using insecticides on crops. And many of the chemicals persist in the environment—in groundwater, for example—with disastrous effects on frogs, birds, and other species.

The second kind of environmental damage has to do with the sustainability of our soils and agriculture. Our society is dependent on synthetic fertilizers, monocultured crops, genetic engineering, and all the other methods conventional agribusiness has invented to boost yields. All of these methods are mortgaging our future in order to realize immediate, yet temporary, gains.

As I say, my own enthusiasm for organic agriculture is motivated by these two broad concerns: the dangers posed by chemical pesticides to individual health and the effects of conventional growing methods on planetary health. But, of course, organic food production offers other advantages as well. Organic fruits and vegetables often taste better, which may have as much to do with better varieties as with better composition. Whether organically grown fruits and vegetables have better nutritional profiles apart from varietal difference or stages of ripeness from conventional counterparts is an open question. Some preliminary research suggests this is the case and I believe it is a possibility.

The adoption of the [US] National Organic Standards in October 2002 and the use of the new USDA organic seal will increase consumer confidence in the integrity of organics, and prices should come down as organic continues to go mainstream.

The organic movement is here to stay. Its foundation is solid, and the more we support it, the more we will be able to enjoy its products.

Note: Dr. Andrew Weil is a Clinical Professor of Medicine at the University of Arizona Health Sciences Center.

[note: in June 2004 Dr. Weil gave IMPACS, on behalf of the COABC, permission to use this on their site]

**Source:**

**[http://www.ebfarm.com/why\\_organic/doctor\\_weil.html](http://www.ebfarm.com/why_organic/doctor_weil.html)**