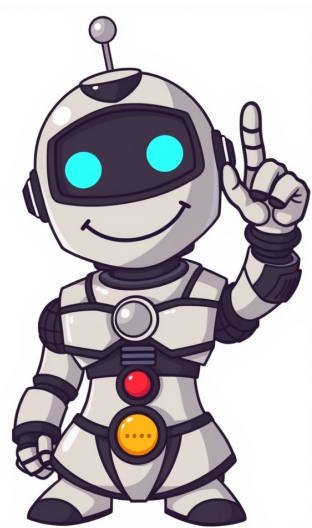


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Fresh summer produce brings back memories of my childhood spent in the Central Valley of California, where I'd accompany my dad through nectarine orchards and watermelon fields. We'd sample fresh fruits like pomegranates and pluots, learning how to assess ripeness for good flavor. My dad taught me to value the final product over production methods, whether organic or conventional. He helped me understand the benefits of both and taught me how to shop for fresh produce. A key lesson my dad shared was to "assess for flavor and quality." I still call him early in the summer to ask about the latest harvests and what's looking good this year. This check-in is all about personal preference, as any produce that makes it to stores is safe to eat. Even with minor imperfections like scars or bruises, a little trimming can make them perfect for eating. Another crucial tip my dad taught me was "buy what you'll eat." He showed me the sustainable practices farmers use to keep soil healthy and air and water clean. This approach helps reduce food waste, which is why I only buy what our family will consume. By being mindful of our consumption, we can support hardworking farmers and make a positive impact on the environment. Lastly, my dad emphasized the importance of "cleaning your produce." Regardless of whether it's organic or conventional, washing produce thoroughly removes dirt, debris, and pesticide residue. This simple step ensures the safety and quality of our food. For me, choosing between organic and conventional produce depends on what fits my budget and meal plans for the week. I'm happy to splurge on organic options when I want a fancier side dish, but I also appreciate the value of conventionally grown carrots or tomatoes that are just as safe and nutritious. Ultimately, my approach to shopping is about finding healthy, well-balanced options within our means. By supporting local farmers who prioritize sustainability and animal welfare, we can make choices that align with our values and trust that they're doing what's best for their business and the market. Organic living emphasizes natural methods like clean housing, rotational grazing, and a healthy diet. Antibiotics and medications help prevent livestock diseases, but they must also have access to the outdoors. However, some farms may not provide this access. The quality of your food impacts your mental health and the environment. Organic produce tends to contain more beneficial nutrients, such as antioxidants, than conventionally grown foods. This is because it often lacks pesticides. Organic farming is environmentally friendly, using fewer resources and chemicals that can pollute nearby birds, animals, and people. However, organic farming requires more land to produce the same amount of food, which increases carbon dioxide levels. Organically raised animals are not given antibiotics or growth hormones and are fed animal byproducts less often. This reduces the risk of mad cow disease and antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Organic meat and milk can be richer in certain nutrients. However, some organic farms do use pesticides, just in a more natural form. Eating organic can lower your exposure to harmful pesticides and reduce health risks such as headaches and cancer. exposure to pesticides at a young age may cause developmental delays and behavioral disorders in children. Pregnant women are also more vulnerable due to the added stress pesticides put on their organs. Moreover, pesticides can be passed from mother to child in the womb and through breast milk. The widespread use of pesticides has led to the emergence of "super weeds" and "super bugs," which can only be killed with extremely toxic poisons like 2,4-Dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (a major ingredient in Agent Orange). While rinsing fresh produce reduces pesticide levels, peeling sometimes helps, but valuable nutrients often go down the drain. To minimize exposure to pesticides, experts recommend eating a varied diet, washing and scrubbing all produce thoroughly, and buying organic when possible. Organic food is not always more expensive than conventional food, and some types of conventionally-grown produce are safer to eat in moderation. The Environmental Working Group has identified the "Dirty Dozen" fruits and vegetables with the highest pesticide levels, which include strawberries, spinach, peaches, and nectarines. In contrast, the "Clean 15" list includes fruits and vegetables like carrots, mangoes, and sweet potatoes that are generally low in pesticides. Industrially-raised animals may be fed antibiotics, growth hormones, and sewage sludge, which can have health consequences for both animals and humans consuming their meat, eggs, or milk. To stay within your food budget, consider shopping at farmers' markets, joining a food co-op, or buying in season. While organic food is more labor-intensive and often more expensive, it is not always healthier than conventional food. Some processed foods marketed as "healthy" may still be high in sugar, salt, and calories. The benefits of eating organic foods are numerous, making it a popular choice among consumers in recent years. As the demand for organic produce continues to grow, farmers like Osceola Organic Family Farm are stepping up to meet the needs of local customers. ##### Fresh Produce from Local Roots If you're looking for fresh, organically grown produce straight from your local environment, look no further than Osceola Organic Family Farm. With a 10-acre farm operating on an honor system during peak season, it's convenient and easy for customers to obtain their favorite organic produce. The farm focuses on sustainability and offers a vibrant array of lettuces, arugula, kale, micro-greens, and sprouts, alongside seasonal favorites like tomatoes, cucumbers, squash, and root vegetables. ##### Sustainable Farming Practices The farm's commitment to nurturing the land naturally ensures that customers can trust their crops are free from harmful pesticides and herbicides. The soil is a carefully nurtured environment teeming with life - our super soil - which not only supports thriving crops but also has a surprising connection to your own gut health. ##### Super Soil: A Living Ecosystem Our super soil is a living community, packed with beneficial microbes like bacteria, fungi, and other tiny organisms that work together in harmony. These microbial friends break down organic matter into plant-available nutrients, just like the good bacteria in your gut help you digest food. The richer and more diverse this microbial life, the healthier and more nutritious our plants become. ##### Connecting Soil to Gut Health Research suggests a link between the diversity of microbes in our gut and overall health. A thriving soil microbiome, like our super soil, is essential for digestion, nutrient absorption, and even immune function. By cultivating a super soil teeming with life, we're not just growing delicious produce but contributing to a healthier you, from the ground up! ##### Nutrient Powerhouse Our healthy soil fosters plants rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants - the building blocks of a healthy gut. Diverse microbes may also harbor beneficial microbes that can contribute to your gut microbiome diversity, potentially promoting better digestion and overall well-being. Organic compounds, namely antioxidants, may be present in higher levels within these plants. The presence of nitrate in organically grown crops is notably lower by 30%, as observed in studies (7, 8). High nitrate levels are correlated with an increased risk of specific types of cancer and a condition called methemoglobinemia in infants, affecting the body's ability to carry oxygen (9, 10). Organic milk and dairy products contain higher amounts of omega-3 fatty acids and slightly more iron, vitamin E, and certain carotenoids (13, 14, 15). However, organic milk may have lower levels of selenium and iodine compared to non-organic milk. These minerals are crucial for health and play a vital role in maintaining overall well-being. Several studies indicate that organic meat has higher levels of omega-3 fatty acids and slightly reduced saturated fats (16). A diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids can contribute to numerous health benefits, including a lower risk of heart disease. Nevertheless, other research has produced conflicting results, suggesting no significant differences between organic and conventional foods. Observational studies have yielded mixed results regarding the nutrient content of organic versus conventional vegetables (18), while reviews have found some positive outcomes associated with organic food but struggled to draw definitive conclusions (19). A more recent review revealed a lack of strong evidence supporting the notion that organic foods are significantly more nutritious than regular options (20). The varying nutrient levels in different products can be attributed to factors such as soil quality, weather conditions, and farming methods. These natural fluctuations make it challenging to compare results from studies conducted on different farms or with varying animal breeds. Despite the mixed evidence, consuming organic food may help reduce exposure to pesticide residues and antibiotic-resistant bacteria (20). One study reported a significant reduction in cadmium levels within organic produce, while another found that pesticide residues were more commonly present in non-organic crops (7). However, it is essential to note that even within organically grown produce, the presence of toxins can still pose health risks. Washing and cooking food can mitigate these effects, but complete removal may not always be possible. Recent studies have highlighted potential health benefits associated with organic diets, including enhanced antioxidant content and improved immune function (26). Research on animals has demonstrated positive outcomes regarding growth, reproduction, and immune system performance in those fed an organic diet (26). Older observational studies have suggested that organic foods may lower the risk of allergies and eczema in children and infants. A 2014 observational study found no significant difference in cancer risk between individuals who never consumed organic food and those who ate it regularly (30). Unfortunately, more robust human studies are needed to establish conclusive evidence supporting the health benefits of organic diets. Organic foods must contain at least 70% organic ingredients to qualify for the USDA seal or be labeled as organic. The US Department of Agriculture sets strict rules for what can be used in organic farming, including synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. Organic farmers use natural products like compost and manure to promote soil health instead of chemical fertilizers. To ensure compliance with regulations, organic farmers must follow specific guidelines, such as regularly checking for pests and using certified organic ingredients. Meat and poultry producers also have strict standards to meet, including providing access to the outdoors and avoiding antibiotics and hormones. When shopping for organic products, consumers can look for various labels, including "100 Percent Organic," which means all ingredients are organic, or "Made With Organic Ingredients," which indicates at least 70% certification. However, some foods may not specify a percentage of organic ingredients, making it difficult to determine their authenticity. To become certified, producers and handlers must submit detailed applications and undergo inspections by USDA-certified agents. Annual records are also required to ensure compliance with regulations.

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