



**Buying organic food online may be easier than you think**



# YOU'VE GOT **produce**

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The benefits of eating organic food are widely known, and even though enthusiasts do what they can to get their hands on organic products, finding those eatables can be time consuming and costly. Although it may not seem like an obvious choice, the Internet is growing as a place to find quality products.

#### **WHY BUY ORGANIC FOOD ONLINE?**

With the explosion of Web commerce, many people have become accustomed to buying goods online since books, music and even groceries are just a click away. And while few have reservations about buying nonperishable items, purchasing produce — especially organic — can seem risky. On the other hand, having this food delivered to your door — whether you're someone whose work schedule does not allow the luxury of perusing farmers' markets every week or if you are a person who just doesn't enjoy shopping — is a convenience that may make sense.

In addition to convenience, ordering organic products online can give you access to products that may not be readily available in your area, and sometimes buying online can save you money.

“Luckily there are a lot of great resources out there to find what you’re looking for,” said Ryan Zinn, national campaign manager for the Organic Consumers Association, an organization that works to educate the public about organic food and farming. “You can sometimes purchase at wholesale prices, depending on who you go through and how much you buy, and can actually end up saving a lot of money.”

But what if you would like to reap all of these benefits and still feel reluctant about buying organic products on the net?

### GETTING TO KNOW THE SELLERS

Laura Klein, publisher and editor of Organic Authority ([www.organicauthority.com](http://www.organicauthority.com)), an education portal that gives practical tips on how to simply live an organic lifestyle, said it’s important to get to know who is selling organic food on the Web. “Whether it’s the farmer, the grocery store produce manager, the butcher or the fishmonger, it’s just asking them a few simple questions,” she said.

**Klein suggested that if you’re unsure about a company that sells organic food online, just pick up the phone and ask them a few questions:**

- ✓ Do you use fertilizers or pesticides on your farm?
- ✓ How are your cows raised? Are they grass fed? Do you rotate your cattle?
- ✓ Do you offer a guarantee on your products?
- ✓ If I’m dissatisfied with my order, can I get a refund or replacement?

“These people really appreciate when you take the time to actually get to know them and they’ll open up to you,” Klein said. “They are so receptive because they take pride in what they do and they want to share that with you. And the fact that someone actually cares about this kind of stuff makes their day.”

Similarly, if you call a purveyor that acts defensive and doesn’t want to answer questions, it’s best to take your business elsewhere.

### TAKING BABY STEPS

So now you’ve done your research, you’ve talked to purveyors and gotten your questions answered. What if you’re still feeling a little unsure about buying organic food online? Ryan Zinn suggested that you start with a small order of items that are nonperishable such as organic coffee or chocolate and continue to buy the rest from your local health food store. Once you are confident that you have found the right seller, experiment with other products. Eventually you’ll find that the online world and the organic lifestyle can indeed go hand in hand.

To find a list of organic Web sites, visit [www.organicconsumers.org](http://www.organicconsumers.org).



# What is Organic?

**THE TERM “ORGANIC”** brewed up so much controversy in the ’70s and ’80s that Congress forced the USDA to create guidelines in 1990 under the U.S. Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA). The first draft of this bill, which included moderate use of pesticides and antibiotics, genetic engineering, irradiation, and 20 percent nonorganic feed for animals, enraged many purists — some went so far as to state they would buy their organic food from another country if the rules took effect.

After 12 years, the USDA revised the definition to mean: “Organic food is produced by farmers who emphasize the use of renewable resources and the

**ORGANIC FARMERS CAN BE SUBJECT TO UP TO A \$10,000 FINE PER VIOLATION.**

conservation of soil and water to enhance environmental quality for future generations. Organic meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products come from animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones. Organic food is produced without using most conventional pesticides; petroleum-based fertilizers or sewage sludge-based fertilizers; bio-engineering; or ionizing radiation.” Before a product can be labeled “organic,” a government-approved certifier inspects the farm where the food is grown to make sure the farmer is following all the rules necessary to meet USDA organic standards. Companies that handle or process organic food before it gets to your local supermarket or restaurant must be certified, too.