

Major Confusion Between Organic and Healthy

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Despite higher prices, more and more Americans are choosing to buy organic foods.

Organic food sales in the United States have increased 20 percent for five years, with sales reaching \$11 billion in 2002, and analysts predict that the number will reach \$13 billion in 2003.

Sales of organic dairy, the fastest growing segment in the 1990s, rose 500 percent between 1994 and 1999, however, even with the increase only two out of every 100 gallons of milk sold in the United States are organic. Yet sales of organic milk and cream in traditional grocery stores still reached \$104 million, and sales in natural food stores reached \$55 million, during 2000.

Organic milk makes up 1.86 percent of all the food milk sold in the United States , but with the rising trends farmers predict that it could make up as much as five percent to 10 percent.

Food industry planners have also taken note that consumption of organic products is rising at premium prices. Analysts say this may be because consumers see organic as not only healthy but also as part of a socially conscious movement to reconnect with the food chain and help the environment.

Consumers may also like the idea of supporting the family farmer in a time when the U.S. food industry is driven by huge factory farms striving to produce cheap food. Organic farmers earn about \$18 to \$23 per hundred pounds for their milk, compared with traditional farmers who earn \$10 to \$12, according to industry analysts.

To earn the "organic" label or use the word organic, milk and other foods must meet USDA's national standards. According to the standards, organic milk must come from government-certified farms where dairy cows are not fed antibiotics and growth hormones, not fed genetically altered corn or soybean meal, and graze on land certified free of herbicides or other chemicals.

Recently, a provision overturned those standards that no longer requires organic livestock producers to use organic feed. The switch has created an uproar among organic advocates who are launching campaigns to protect the original standards.

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