



## **EPISODE 919**

# **The Shocking Truth About Organic Food: Is Organic Really Better?**

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**SHAWN STEVENSON:** Welcome to the Model Health Show. This is finishing nutrition expert Sean Stevenson, and I'm so grateful for you tuning with me today. Today we're gonna be discussing organic versus conventionally grown foods. Which one is really better for you and does it even matter at all? The "organic" label isn't the guarantee of safety and quality that it once was. There are now loopholes in organic labeling, particularly when presumed organic food is coming from international sources. There's misleading beliefs about pesticide use. There's fraudulent organic labeling that has enabled some farmers to amass millions of dollars in additional revenue. There are even organic practices such as imtemperate tillage to reduce or eliminate the need for herbicides that can damage the health of the soil microbiome long term.

So what the farm is going on, we're about to dive into the science so that you can make an educated decision about feeding yourself and your family. Let's get right into it. First of all, where did this organic labeling actually come from? Well, in the wake of many seemingly harmless pesticides turning out to be dangerous to human health, a growing demand for organic options took place in the 1980s with enough research and lobbying. The USDA's National Organic Program was first enacted in 1990 with the laws being amended occasionally since then, among the no-nos in organic farming include the use of synthetic fertilizers, synthetic pesticides, and genetic engineering. And after a slow and bumpy start, the organic food industry has grown to be a powerhouse in the US food production economy growing steadily.

In recent decades, organic food sales now make up nearly 13% of all food sales in the us. In fact, the organic food industry made over \$70 billion in revenue in 2024 when this kind of money is at play. It's expected that big corporations are going to move in to try to capitalize on this. Over the years, the largest food manufacturers have gobbled up smaller organic producers and crowded out many others who were unable to match their market position. Being as it is, major players in the food industry have slowly eroded organic standards and found loopholes to exploit. For instance, in order to save a substantial amount of money, a growing share of foods labeled as organic are coming from international sources right into the U.S. Our U.S. agencies have agreed to comparable standards with other countries in order

to receive that organic labeling. While shockingly, only about 2% of all of these imports are actually inspected and verified to be organic again, only about two percent.

This in and of itself should be raising some major red flags for you in this conversation around organic versus conventionally grown foods. Now, the question is, can we actually trust the organic labeling? In these international dealings there wouldn't be any cases of fraud or cutting corners, would there? Well, as you'd expect, there are countless examples of this very thing happening. For instance, in 2023, the US Department of Justice published a report detailing the actions of an international corporation charged with a multimillion dollar organic grain fraud scheme. Essentially, two companies in Dubai and several individuals were purchasing non-organic soybeans and corn from places like Ukraine and Turkey, and then labeling it as organic and selling it for millions, even tens of millions of dollars to organizations in the US.

But let me be clear, the frequency of fraud isn't just an international problem. Many of these cases are happening right here domestically in the US as well. Because organic foods tend to come with a higher price tag, numerous sharks disguised as farmers have sought to take advantage of this. For instance, in 2023, a Minnesota farmer pled guilty to fraud in connection to a \$19 million scam to sell non-organic corn and soybeans as organic for bigger profits. While a Missouri farmer, my home state, recently pled guilty in his role in a \$142 million scheme to sell non-organic grain as though it was organic. Again, there are countless examples of this that most people have no idea about. So my question again is, who can we really trust? Well, it's really important to stay balanced and sensible in situations like this and to remember that the majority of farmers who've sought out certified organic labeling are really good people who are working hard to meet those standards.

The process to become a certified or organic farming operation here in the US is a lengthy one. It takes about three years to allow for any previous synthetic substances applied to your fields or used on the farm to be filtered out. And in that time, farmers are on the hook for the higher costs associated with organic farming without any guaranteed return. Then once farms have been certified, there's a yearly testing process which dives deep into the farm's yield and audits its books. One of the other major hangups is that organic certification has

evolved to favor larger commercial operations and is not as financially safe and scalable for some smaller farms.

And that's why many smaller farms like those you might see at a farmer's market, choose not to seek the organic certification and instead choose to share their organic practices through education and personal interaction with the families that they feed. Another misunderstood issue with organic foods relates to its exclusion of pesticides. Organic does not mean that it's grown without pesticides. Organic means that it's grown without synthetic pesticides in the farming process, it's natural that other creatures and critters in the environment are going to want to feast on the delicious food that's being grown.

And if you're not careful, an organic farming practice can get obliterated by what we refer to as pests. Organic farming utilizes naturally derived pesticides with a focus on things like *Bacillus Thuringiensis*, AKA, BT, and spinosad as common examples. They're both derived from soil bacteria that deter various pests from eating the plants. In addition, things like neem oil and Diatenacious Earth, along with other plant extracts are commonly used as pesticides in organic farming. These are approved under strict guidelines and are often used alongside other organic pest control methods, such as crop rotation and soil tilling. There have been numerous studies conducted on naturally derived pesticides as well.

For instance, a meta-analysis published in 2009, reviewing numerous studies, found that BT is largely non-toxic to humans. Although one study found that it can possibly be a short-term irritant in a small percentage of people stimulating pre-existing conditions such as allergies and asthma. Again, it's widely studied, utilized for decades. With this one we're talking about over a century and proven to be largely safe overall. Herein lies the difference. Yes, organic foods utilize naturally derived pesticides. They are nowhere near as blatantly dangerous to human health as many synthetic pesticides have been proven to be according to researchers at the University of Louisville.

More than 300 environmental chemicals, mostly synthetic pesticides have been linked to fatty liver disease. Your liver is largely responsible for handling the weight of the toxicants that you're exposed to in our world today, and pesticides are inherently meant to be deadly.

The suffix side means to kill, but it's supposed to be deadly to just smaller organisms like pests. Though it seems to be forgotten that you are largely made of small organisms too, i.e., the trillions of bacteria that live within your body. And that's why studies like the one that was recently published in scientific reports found a direct correlation between pesticide consumption, inflammation and gut damage.

Now, before we go any further, we really need to clear something up. We tend to lump the chemicals used in farming, under one umbrella term, that we refer to as "pesticides". Pesticides in their truest sense are designed to kill pests. Now, what a pest is pretty ambiguous, but it can include a wide range of bugs and other critters that could damage your crops. What's included under the pesticide umbrella are one. Insecticides to kill insects like caterpillars, aphids, and beetles. Two, rodenticides to kill rodents, three herbicides to kill weeds, and four fungicides to control fungal diseases. With conventionally grown foods, you're usually going to find a cocktail of all of those.

And in particular, conventionally grown grains are one of the most pesticide and herbicide laden cash crops in the world. Now, have you heard of something called glyphosate? Well, according to the environmental working group, conventionally grown grains are by far the largest source in the consumption of glyphosate in the US Diet today. The controversial glyphosate is just one of the herbicides used in wheat production. Data published in the journal, interdisciplinary Toxicology Details, how glyphosate can increase the risk of everything from cancer to Celiac disease to infertility. And the most alarming thing is that this study was published almost 10 years ago.

Numerous peer-reviewed studies have come out since detailing the dangerous risk associated with glyphosate, including the World Health Organization whose classified glyphosate as a group to a carcinogen, meaning that it is a probable cancer causing agent in humans. And glyphosate is incredibly difficult to escape in our modern society. The environmental working group has published data affirming that up to 80 to even 90% of popular grain-based products are now contaminated with glyphosate. And here's another not so fun fact. Glyphosate isn't just used in the growing of conventional grains, it's largely used as a drying agent for these grains.

So being saturated in glyphosate post-harvest, in order to speed up the production process. So this is for you to be mindful of when it comes to what you're buying for yourself and your family. And a quick step here when it comes to purchasing grain-based products is to make it a mandate to go organic whenever possible. Because a recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association Internal Medicine, found that eating organic foods free from pesticides and herbicides led to a significant reduction in the risk of cancer for nearly 70,000 test subjects who were analyzed. While another study published in environmental research, took several families and put them on a completely non-organic diet for five days and for another five day stint.

Place them on a completely organic diet to measure the difference in exposure to glyphosate. At the end of the study, the researchers found that switching to an organic diet can dramatically reduce glyphosate levels in the human body with participants experiencing an average drop of over 70% urinary glyphosate levels in just six days. We know that organic foods provide you with notably less synthetic pesticide exposure. But as far as being more nutritious, having higher amounts of things like vitamins and minerals and antioxidants, some health authorities don't believe that there are significant benefits to choosing organic options in the first place.

So what does the data say? Well, one of the largest studies comparing the nutrient content of organic versus conventionally grown foods was just published in 2024. The study reviewed 147 studies and found that about 30% of the studies found that organic foods were superior in their nutritional content. Another 30% of the studies found that some organics were more nutritious, while others were not, and 40% of the studies found that there isn't any significant difference as far as the nutritional content is concerned. So all of the well-meaning folks who are touting that organic doesn't make a difference when it comes to nutrition are both right and wrong.

But if you actually look a little bit deeper into the data when comparing fruits and vegetables, in particular, when organics are found to be superior in their nutrition, they are very superior. It wasn't uncommon to see two to three times plus higher rates of essential nutrients like vitamin C, calcium, zinc, and magnesium in organic options. While organic options also had

consistently lower rates of heavy metals. Keep in mind, this isn't the only large study to analyze this comparison. A meta-analysis of 343 studies published in the British Journal of Nutrition. Found conclusively that organic foods are higher in antioxidants, significantly lower in heavy metals and lower in synthetic pesticides than their conventionally grown counterparts.

So taking all of this into account to blatantly say that are organic foods, organic fruits and vegetables in particular are not more nutritious than their organic counterparts is simply not consistent with what the data says. One of the most notable places that you see a difference in organic versus conventionally produced foods is in animal products like beef and dairy. Specifically looking at what the animals are eating and whether or not they're eating conventionally raised grains as the vast majority of animal products are today. One of the most notable organic standards is to not include the use of antibiotics. Most folks don't realize this, but the majority of antibiotic use in the US is for the food system.

According to a report from the FDA, department of Health and Human Services, over 80% of all antibiotics sold in the US are for use in food producing animals. Now, why would these antibiotics be needed in such large quantities? You might think that it's to prevent and treat growing diseases in these animals from the abnormal diets that they're fed. Just as if we were to eat abnormal diets, we develop diseases. The same thing happens in the animal kingdom. Grass is the predominant food that cows evolve to eat. But today, they're routinely being fed exorbitant amounts of pesticide laden grains, and it's even common in some farming practices to feed cows monstrosities like pounds of candy wrappers and all.

So yeah, sicknesses might occur from eating abnormal food, but the antibiotic use in the dairy and beef industry is not for treating illnesses. All the way back in the 1940s, it was discovered that feeding subtherapeutic levels of antibiotics to cows improved their feed efficiency aKA more output of meat or milk for a given amount of feed, and the animals would gain weight faster. Which according to data from Kansas State University, is a result of alterations in the animal's microbiome, decreasing the amount of lean bacteria. And increasing the amount of fat bacteria that shuttles more calories into the animal's tissues.

And if you think that this whole process would have an effect on the nutrition that's garnered from these products, then you would absolutely win this round of Factory Farm Family Feud. The research isn't clear whether or not this rampant antibiotic use has a direct impact on humans who are consuming conventionally raised beef and dairy products.

But here's what we do know. According to peer reviewed research published in the British Journal of Nutrition, the beef from these animals fed an abnormal diet of conventional grains, contains up to five times less Omega-3 fatty acids than what's found in grass fed beef. This is a crucial missing factor for our metabolism and overall health when it comes to our diet. As data cited in the European Journal of Clinical Nutrition reports that these Omega-3 fatty acids have anti-obesity effects and improves levels of satiety hormones. Additionally, research from the College of Agriculture at California State University was published in Nutrition Journal assert that grass-based diets elevate precursors for vitamin A and E, as well as increasing disease fighting antioxidants like glutathione and superoxide dismutase activity compared to grain fed, primarily corn and soy-based versions of beef.

And just to share one more comparison, grass fed beef contains about twice as much of the valuable fatty acid CLA. Scientists at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health found that higher intake of CLA is associated with greater reductions in body fat. If you're going for beef to fulfill some of your protein requirements, then quality truly does matter. Yeah, there's a whole spectrum from grass fed to grass finished to grass fed to grain finished, to grain fed to grain finish, to screw it, let's just feed 'em candy. Grass fed beef is clearly healthier, if not for avoiding the potential problems from rampant antibiotic use. Then simply for the fact that you're getting more nutrition along with the protein that helps to support healthy hormone function.

Improving your quality is one way you can actually eat less protein, but activate more satiety and fat burning hormones. The same thing holds true for chicken, pork, fish, bison, lamb, or any other commonly eaten animal-based foods. The vast majority of data shows that when these animals are allowed to eat their natural diet, their food products are far more nutritious. If you eat meat, it would be in your best interest to avoid eating animals that are raised, consuming antibiotics, synthetic hormones, and abnormal diets. I've been saying this



statement for about 20 years now, when it comes to animal products, it's not, you are what you eat, it's you are what you eat, ate, because of all the complexity in the industry of organic foods.

I cannot stress the importance of getting to know where your food actually comes from. If you're going to eat animal foods, make it a mandate to start visiting and supporting your local farmer's markets and utilizing verified regenerative food sources from places like Wild Pastures. Wild Pastures delivers 100% grass fed, grass finished beef pasture raised pork pasture raised chicken and wild caught seafood. All of the food is raised on regenerative family farms right here in the USA, and they're also raised on pastures free from pesticides and other chemicals. No antibiotics, no added hormones, no added steroids, no feedlots and absolutely no GMOs with fast delivery right to your door. And right now with your Wild Pastures subscription, you're gonna receive 20% off for life.

Plus free shipping and \$15 off of your first order. Phenomenal, phenomenal. Just head over to [wildpastures.com/model](https://wildpastures.com/model) to take advantage of this right to now. That's W-I-L-D-P-A-S-T-U-R-E S.com/model. Yet, another cool thing about wild pastures is that they have these incredible subscriber only discounts that come along from time to time as well. And so I'm always saving and also in a position to be able to share. And so again, head over there, check them out [wildpastors.com/model](https://wildpastors.com/model). Invest in the companies that are doing things the right way because we're truly voting with our dollars. And in closing, I wanna provide you with some practical tips and insights to help you to navigate this whole terrain of organic versus conventional foods.

Tip number one is to get educated, learn about sustainable agriculture and why it can be scalable and cost effective. And why today more than ever, it can be a solution to feed a growing population. Tip number two is to find a local farmer's market, find and visit farmer's markets on a regular basis. There are literally thousands of farmers markets in the US. You could just do a Google search for your area and find a farmer's market to visit. Get to know the farmers, get to know their practices. And also, funny enough, it's a way that I found to be able to save money on our food budget. Each and every month by visiting farmer's markets,

getting much higher quality, even fresher food, and often being able to find these foods at a less expensive price point.

I'm telling you right now, there are few things as healing as getting closer to where your food is coming from. So that's tip number two is to regularly visit your local farmer's markets. Tip number three is to grow something. This could be something tiny, but get involved in the process of feeding yourself. Now again, this does not have to be anything crazy, and it can be something as like some broccoli sprouts or having a plant with some herbs. Just being able to actually be involved and to utilize something that you grew. With your own two hands. This could be even, you know, making some yogurt yourself.

But just getting involved in the process really does tie you into the process more to understand the value of associating in a closer proximity of where your food comes from, and just even having that life skill to be able to grow. Sun can be handy. You never know when the zombie apocalypse might rear it's ugly head. Number four is to support your local CSAs community supported agriculture. There are incredible programs across the nation where folks are investing in community supported agriculture, community gardens and things like that, where you're getting a delivery of whatever's in season and being able to, again, have this proximity.

It's a really great way to save money as well. But CSAs are another invaluable resource. Tip number five is to support farm to table and organic menu restaurants. More and more restaurants are popping up and also evolving their menus to include organic and sustainably raised food items. Farm to table is something that you can be mindful of and again, you're voting with your dollar. Invest in these amazing restaurants help to keep their doors open. It's a very competitive industry, but just letting the industry know that, hey, we value this proximity and we value food quality. So that is tip number five. And lastly, and the most important tip and insight and strategy and mindset of all is to invest in yourself.

With organics tending to have a higher price tag associated with them, it's a reframe in your thinking. And when I first learned about some of the science regarding organic foods, this was. Over 20 years ago, I was living in Ferguson, Missouri, and in this one bedroom apartment

I was trying to get my degree and I was on the struggle bus, right? Just the environment around me. It was very difficult to navigate. I was surrounded, really inundated with ultra processed foods to be able to get access to higher quality foods. I often had to go outside of my environment, but that investment paid me back dividends that I would've never even imagined.

The most important being a dramatic transformation in my own health, the health of my body, the health of my brain, and being able to navigate this world and to feel empowered and also able to be of higher service. And so invest in yourself. Invest in what you're putting in your body. There are few things more important than that. I truly do appreciate you so much for sharing your time with me today. I hope that you got a lot of value outta this. If you did, please make sure to share your voice, share the episode. You could share this on social media. Of course, you could tag me. I'm @ShawnModel on Instagram, and you could pop over to the YouTube channel.

I think you'd absolutely love the YouTube version of this episode and to see all the visuals that go along with this and the studies and all that kind of cool stuff. And listen, we got some amazing masterclasses and world-class guests coming your way very, very soon. So make sure to stay tuned. Take care, have an amazing day, and I'll talk with you soon. And for more after the show, make sure to head over to the model health show.com. That's where you can find all of the show notes. You can find transcriptions videos for each episode, and if you've got a comment, you can leave me a comment there as well. And please make sure to head over to iTunes and leave us a rating to let everybody know that the show is awesome and I appreciate that so much and take care. I promise to keep giving you more powerful, empowering, great content to help you transform your life. Thanks for tuning in.