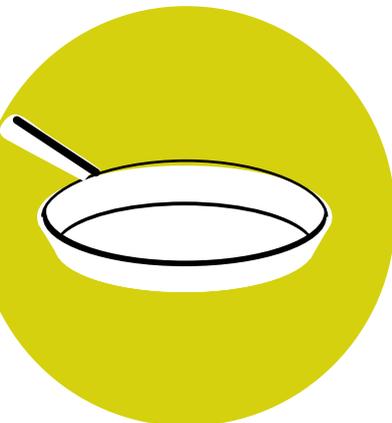


# Organic – always the best choice?



**Organic farming originates** from a reaction to environmental problems that arose as a consequence of, among other things, large-scale use of mineral fertilizers and pesticides and against industrial animal husbandry with poor animal welfare.

**Organic food** sold within the EU must be produced in accordance with the regulations developed within the union. In addition to this regulatory framework, there are a number of voluntary labels. In Sweden there is certification according to KRAV, which has additional rules. The rules are based on a number of principles, such as avoiding harmful substances, building production on local inputs and recirculation and allowing animals to behave naturally. About 18 percent of the agricultural land in Sweden is now (2016) in organic production.

Today, **research** is going on intensively to further develop organic food production and to evaluate whether it meets its goals.

## Can all food become organic?

In principle, all food can be produced according to the organic regulations, but some crops yield much less when grown organic.

However, a hasty global transition to hundred percent organic farming under current regulations is not very realistic and maybe not what is most sustainable in the long term. There are still many issues to be solved to produce food for a growing world population in a sustainable way.

## Is organic farming better for the environment?

In terms of **climate impact** and **eutrophication** there are no major general differences between organic and conventionally produced foods. It varies between different products, locations and produc-

tion systems. Eating less meat and avoid food waste is more important for these environmental aspects.

Because the use of chemical pesticides are very limited in organic farming, organic farming **reduces the spread of environmental pollutants** in nature. The use of chemical pesticides is also a serious **workplace safety problem** that causes health problems and deaths in many parts of the world.

Organic farming is more **beneficial for biodiversity**.

## Is organic food healthier than conventional?

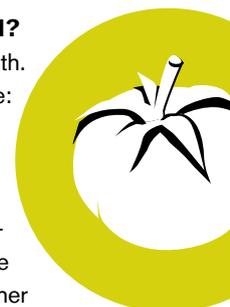
It is unclear whether organic food is better for health. There are two possible reasons why it would be: differences in nutrient content between organic and conventionally produced foods, as well as pesticide residues in conventionally produced foods. In both cases there are interesting initial research findings showing that organic food may be beneficial for health, but it is too early to say whether the difference is large or small.

In EU food samples are analysed to ensure that there are no health hazard levels of pesticide residues. But one problem here is that there are no standardized tests for endocrine disruptors, which especially fetuses and small children may be sensitive to.

## Will there be food enough for everyone?

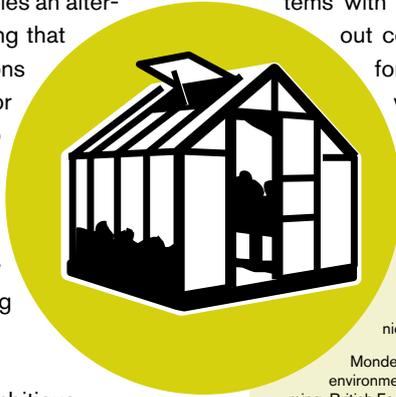
There is no food shortage in the world today. The food produced is enough to feed the world. People starve for other reasons, such as poverty and war. Poverty is primarily a political issue and is not affected by whether we produce food organically or not.

The food waste is extensive throughout the food chain and a large proportion of what is grown today goes to animal feed and food with “empty” calories. If we reduce meat consumption and eat more vegetables, the agricultural land would suffice to produce more food.



### Are there more reasons for choosing organic food?

Organic food consumption enables an alternative to the conventional farming that we can learn from. The limitations imposed by the regulations for organic production give rise to new ideas and innovations. For example, new methods to grow without pesticides and to feed animals on farm-grown locally produced feed-stuff are being developed.



Organic farming is also more ambitious when it comes to the animal welfare.

### Which organic foods make the biggest difference?

Coffee, tea and bananas are among the products where the most dangerous pesticides are used, and the organic choice can therefore make a big difference. Organic beef comes from animals that to a larger extent are fed on grass and natural grazing, which is good for the utilizing of resources and for preserving biodiversity.

There are of course also conventional products that are produced with little use of pesticides and in systems with low environmental impact. But without certification it is difficult or impossible for the ordinary consumer to figure out which products that might be.

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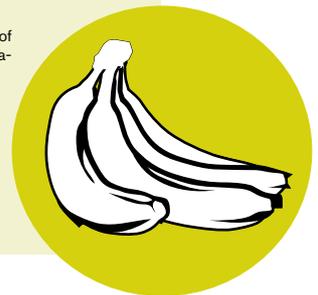
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EPOK – Centre for Organic Food and Farming at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) works with collaboration, coordination and information on organic agriculture research in a Swedish, Nordic and international perspective. EPOK is a resource for the entire SLU for communications with the outside world and to coordinate and initiate research and education.

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