

## Organic Milk FAQ

### **What's the difference between organic milk and regular milk?**

In terms of quality, safety and nutrition, there's no difference between organic and regular milk. Both contain the same combination of nutrients that make dairy foods an important part of a healthy diet<sup>1</sup>.

Organic milk is one choice among many in the dairy case that can help people meet the U.S. government's recommended three servings a day of milk and milk products.

### **What about claims that organic milk contains no pesticides, antibiotics or hormones?**

The definition of organic milk refers to farm management practices, not to the milk itself. Stringent government standards ensure that both organic milk and regular milk are wholesome, safe and nutritious.

#### Antibiotics

The U.S. dairy industry tests all milk entering dairy plants to ensure that antibiotics are kept out of the milk supply. According to the most recent Food and Drug Administration (FDA) data, less than one tanker in 1,000 tests positive for any animal drug residues, including antibiotics. In those rare cases, any milk that tests positive is disposed of immediately and does not get into the food supply. (FDA National Milk Drug Residue Database)

#### Pesticides

Pesticides are not a health concern in any U.S. milk products. Because they are found in the water and soil, extremely low levels of pesticides can be found in all foods - organic and conventional. But, thorough FDA and USDA testing shows that milk ranks among the lowest of all agriculture products in detectable residues. Any levels in milk have been well within U.S. and international safety protection standards.

#### Hormones

All cows have a natural protein hormone (bST) that helps them produce milk. Some dairy farmers choose to supplement their cows' bST to boost milk production, helping to ensure a plentiful milk supply. Extensive studies have concluded that the milk from these cows is the same wholesome product that we have enjoyed for generations. This has been affirmed and reaffirmed by the FDA, among other leading U.S. and international health organizations. A 2008 study in *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* analyzed the composition of organic milk, milk labeled "rbST-free" and regular milk, and found that the label claims were not related to any meaningful differences in milk composition.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vicini J. et al. Survey of retail milk composition as affected by label claims regarding farm-management practices. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*. 2008;108:1198-1203.

**What's the difference between organic farming and conventional farming?**

Dairy farmers across the country are committed to producing high-quality milk and maintaining proper animal care and environmental practices on their farms.

Conventional dairy producers use best management practices to ensure that dairy cows are healthy by providing them with comfortable living conditions, nutritious diets and good medical care. Organic dairy foods must additionally meet the requirements of USDA's National Organic Program. This includes using only organic fertilizers and pesticides, and not using rbST. Dairy foods can be labeled "USDA Organic" only if all of the additional criteria are met.

**Does organic milk taste better?**

The taste of milk, regardless of whether it is organically or conventionally produced, can differ slightly from bottle to bottle and season to season. Factors that may impact taste include location of the farm, breed of the cow, variations in cows' feed from farm to farm, and even the time of year. Milk that is ultra-pasteurized for longer freshness may have a slightly different taste. People should do their own "taste test" to see which kinds of milk they prefer.

**Is organic milk fresher than regular milk?**

Not necessarily. Most milk, including organic and regular milk, is delivered to stores within a few days of milking. With modern distribution systems, both types of milk may travel hundreds of miles from farm to retail outlet. Dairy farmers and processors work diligently to provide fresh milk to the marketplace.

**Why does organic milk cost more than other milk?**

It is costly for dairy farmers to follow the government standards that are required to receive the "USDA Organic" label.

**If I buy organic, am I doing more to help support small family farms?**

There are large and small farms in both the regular and organic categories. Organic farming has more to do with farm management practices than the size of the farm itself. Of the 60,000 dairy farms in America today, the majority are smaller farms with less than 200 cows. The vast majority of U.S. farms – big and small – are family owned and operated.

**References / Additional Sources of Information:**

- USDA Organic Standards: [www.ams.usda.gov/nop/Consumers/Consumerhome.html](http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/Consumers/Consumerhome.html)
- USDA General Milk Safety Standards: [www.ams.usda.gov/dairy/stand.htm](http://www.ams.usda.gov/dairy/stand.htm)
- American Dietetic Association on Organic Foods:
- [www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xsl/home\\_4143\\_ENU\\_HTML.htm](http://www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xsl/home_4143_ENU_HTML.htm)
- Dairy Farming Today: [www.dairyfarmingtoday.org](http://www.dairyfarmingtoday.org)

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[www.nationaldairycouncil.org](http://www.nationaldairycouncil.org) for more information*