

The Musts and Myths of Organic and Locally Grown

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So you've been known to occasionally spend extra on organic milk, mosey over to the free-range meat section, and make an effort to [support your local farms](#) by buying berries from a roadside fruit stand. Still, I'm betting the farm that if you're confused about when to go local, when you should go organic, and when it's all just baloney, you're not alone.

I reached out to two experts in the field for some solid answers. [Joy Bauer](#), nutritionist extraordinaire, breaks down the musts and myths of organic and local, while [Ryan Hardy](#), the fresh-market-obsessed chef at The Montagna in Aspen, provides five easy ways to include the best of both into our diets. I hope this helps you figure out the best ways to bring farm-fresh food closer to your home.

WHAT IS LOCALLY GROWN?

Locally grown means seasonal food from small farms. Some say it applies only to foods grown within a 100-mile radius; others stretch it to 250 miles.

MUSTS: Seasonal fruits, seasonal vegetables, milk and dairy. **WHY?** Local crops harvested at their peak of freshness and flavor offer superior nutrient density, and buying produce from local growers reduces the environmental impact and costs of transporting product.

MYTHS: Local food is *not* necessarily organically grown. However, there is truth to many local farmers' claims that they do *not* use pesticides. **WHY?** They just can't advertise themselves as certified organic unless they've gone through the certification process, which is lengthy and expensive.

WHAT'S ORGANIC?

For plants, organic means grown on certified organic land without synthetic fertilizers or chemicals (like pesticides). Genetic modification and irradiation are also off-limits. For animals, organic means access to the outdoors, only organic feed for at least a year, and no antibiotics or growth hormones.

MUSTS: Apples, cherries, grapes (especially if they're imported), nectarines, peaches, pears, raspberries, strawberries, bell peppers, celery, potatoes, and spinach. **WHY?** Because these fruits and veggies have been found to contain the most pesticide residue, even after being washed. If you want to go the extra mile, also buy your beef, poultry, and dairy organic. Organic meats and dairy are much more expensive than nonorganic, but they'll also reduce your exposure to toxins.

MYTHS: You don't need to worry about buying these organic: bananas, kiwi, mangoes, papaya, pineapple, asparagus, avocado, broccoli, cauliflower, corn, onion, sweet peas, and seafood. **WHY?** Because these fruits and veggies tend not to carry pesticide residue, and seafood has no USDA organic certification standards (so "organic seafood" doesn't mean much).

Now that you've got the dirt on organic and local, check out Chef Ryan Hardy's 5 easy ways to bring the benefits of both to your table:

- 1. Go to farmer's markets.** The farmer's market may not always easily fit into your busy schedule, but taking 30 minutes to buy good foods for your family is worth the time.
- 2. Demand it at your local store.** Ask your local grocer to get in products you want -- be specific and follow up.
- 3. Talk with local chefs who use local, organic ingredients.** Chefs are notoriously picky about finding the right product. Ask about the ingredients they use.... You'll probably find out that most are easily obtainable.
- 4. Buy what's in season.** Food is at its cheapest when it's at its best -- so take advantage and eat fresh fruits and vegetables when they're at their peak.
- 5. Eat more greens.** Farm-fresh salad greens are exciting additions to all kinds of dishes, not just salads. Try adding them to pasta, serving them under a steak, or simply sandwiching them with goat cheese between bread.