

Experts say there's nothing "insignificant" about organics

Australia's largest organic body - Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA) - has rejected claims by Britain's Food Standard Agency (FSA) that organic produce has no health or nutritional benefit over conventionally produced food, labeling the results incomplete.

Shane Heaton, nutritionist spokesperson and researcher for the BFA says despite the review finding that organic produce contains only slightly higher nutrient levels, the wider health and environmental benefits of organic over non-organic production are in no way 'insignificant'.

"Proof of the nutritional benefits is there, which adds to the raft of other benefits of organic food and farming," says Mr Heaton. "Fewer pesticides in foods, fewer additives, better taste, animal welfare, no hyperactivity-causing food additives - which the UK FSA finally confirmed in 2007 - and important environmental benefits such as carbon sequestration in organically-managed soils," he says.

The findings revealed by the FSA support previous research that organic produce is in fact more nutritious, but found no 'statistically significant differences' or any 'additional public health benefits' of organic produce.

"This review is little more than a rehash of the UK Food Standard Agency's long standing stance," says Mr Heaton. "All they've found is that more substantial research is needed, and we've known that for a decade," he says.

The BFA has referred to preliminary findings from the largest ever study of organic and non-organic production commissioned by the European Union (EU), which found overwhelming evidence that organic produce has significantly higher nutrient levels, results the FSA failed to include in the study.

Evidence from the \$27million, four-year EU study found organic fruit and vegetables contained between 20 and 40 per cent more antioxidants, which scientists believe can cut the risk of cancer and heart disease, Australia's biggest killers.

The research also found organic produce contained higher levels of vitamin C, antioxidants, beneficial minerals such as iron and zinc and substantially higher levels of compounds thought to boost health and combat disease.

Carlo Leifert, co-ordinator of the

EU-funded project, said the health benefits were so striking that moving to organic food was the equivalent of eating an extra portion of fruit and vegetables every day.

"If you have just 20 per cent more antioxidants in every portion of vegetables, then it's simply a question of maths - eating four portions of organic fruit and vegetables is the equivalent to eating five portions of traditional fruit and vegetables," he said.

Despite the FSA review finding no evidence to support the nutritional superiority of organically produced foods, researchers did acknowledge they could not make any comprehensive conclusions given the limited number of studies currently available for review, and recommended that a wider-scale, longitudinal study was required.

The FSA results also conflict with a 2008 review by the US Organic Centre's State of Science Review, which found organic plant based foods are indeed better for you, and deliver more essential nutrients per calories consumed.

The Review - New Evidence Confirms the Nutritional Superiority of Plant-based Organic Foods - found certain organic fruits, vegetables and grains contained higher levels of eight of 11 nutrients studied, including significantly higher concentration of health promoting polyphenols and antioxidants, linked to the prevention of cardiovascular disease, cancer and osteoporosis.

Nutrient levels were studied in 236 matched pairs of foods from organically and conventionally grown crops with similar soils, climate, plant genetics, irrigation systems, nitrogen levels, and harvest practices.

Organic plant-based foods were 25% more nutrient-dense than conventional alternatives in 75% of matched pair comparisons.

Australian Certified Organic (ACO) standards strictly prohibit the use of growth hormones, antibiotics, harmful additives, and genetically engineered drugs in food production.

BFA General Manager Holly Vyner says it is important that consumers know to look for a logo such as the ACO "Bud" logo as guarantee that they are buying truly organic produce.

"There is no guarantee that a product is organic unless it displays an organic certification logo such as the 'Bud'. There is no substitute for certified organic food when



it comes to delivering on everything from health benefits (including nutritional and antioxidant, and avoiding toxins); as well as animal welfare, maintaining viability and resilience of our farming sector, protection of biodiversity, waterways and the environment, and many important aspects of food safety, fair trade standards, and more." ◀◀

References

- QualityLowInputFood (QLIF), an integrated project funded by the European Commission. <http://www.qlif.org/>
- Food Standards Agency, 29 July 2009, Organic review, UK www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2009/jul/organic
- Charles Benbrook et al, 2008, Evidence Confirms the Nutritional Superiority of Plant-based Organic Foods, The Organic Centre - State of Science, USA www.organic-center.org/reportfiles/5367_Nutrient_Content_SSR_FINAL_V2.pdf

For 20 reasons to buy organic fully referenced with research visit www.bfa.com.au and follow the links.