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## What we can say - the quality and benefits of organic food

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The following statements about the benefits of organic food are acceptable under the British Code of Advertising. They can be used by companies in adverts, on leaflets, and as part of on-pack sales promotions such as a prize competitions or 'buy one, get one free' offers. The Soil Association has been advised by the Committee on Advertising Practice (CAP) (part of the Advertising Standards Authority) that they should be acceptable under the Code.

The Soil Association is encouraging organic food companies to make use of these quotes, but we strongly advise that all advertising and promotional copy is cleared in its entirety with the CAP. The statements must be used in full in the exact form in which they appear on this document. If you want to summarise or make other use of these claims, please contact the CAP for advice. The CAP has drawn up guidelines for organic advertising claims and has a 24-hour-turnaround copy-checking service: call 020 7492 2100 or email [copyadvice@cap.org.uk](mailto:copyadvice@cap.org.uk) To find our more visit [www.cap.org.uk/cap](http://www.cap.org.uk/cap)

Although these statements have been checked by the CAP, it is not within the CAP's remit to adjudicate on any complaints arising from advertising matter. It is the CAP's sister organisation, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), that is responsible for this - reviewing the evidence relating to any given complaint and either rejecting or upholding the complaint itself. Copy advice given by the CAP will be taken into account by the ASA when it is dealing with a complaint but is not binding - the ASA may overrule copy advice from the CAP. The ASA's adjudication of complaints examines the use of text in the round, so the context in which this material is used will be considered as well as the robustness of the material itself.

Claims made on packaging (excluding claims within copy about promotional offers - see above) are a matter for Trading Standards authorities as they do not fall within the remit of the ASA and CAP. As with the CAP, the service offered by Trading Standards is advisory rather than compulsory. To seek Trading Standards advice, contact your local Trading Standards office.

If you have any further queries, please contact the Soil Association's Marketing Department on 0117 987 4579.

### **February 2006**

#### **Animal welfare**

No system of farming has higher levels of animal welfare standards than organic farms working to Soil Association standards.

Organic farming has the potential to offer the very highest standards of animal welfare. Compassion in World Farming believes that the Soil Association's welfare standards are leaders in the field." (Joyce d'Silva, Director, Compassion in World Farming.)

The Soil Association believes there are no better standards for animal welfare than organic standards - in many instances they show an improvement over conventional standards.<sup>1</sup>

The Soil Association believes that no chickens or eggs are produced to higher standards than those with the Soil Association organic symbol.

Soil Association chickens are truly free range, generally spending more of their lives roaming outside, in smaller flocks, with more space in their houses, and better access to fresh grass and air than non-organic chickens.

### **Vitamins and minerals**

No food has higher amounts of beneficial minerals, essential amino acids and vitamins than organic food.

The use of synthetic fertilisers, plant breeding, and longer delays between harvesting and consumption have led to reduced trace element and vitamin content in food.<sup>2</sup>

### **Pesticides**

The best method of reducing exposure to potentially harmful pesticides would be to consume organically grown food, where their use is avoided<sup>3</sup>

"Consumers who wish to minimise their dietary pesticide exposure can do so with confidence by buying organically grown foods" (US scientists).<sup>4</sup>

"Consumption of organic produce represents a relatively simple means for parents to reduce their children's pesticide exposure" (US scientists).<sup>5</sup>

The Rt. Hon Clare Short MP says that "over the last half-century, agriculture has been transformed through the intensive use of agrochemicals. The inputs have helped to increase food production, but the cost has been high - unacceptable health and environmental damage."<sup>6</sup>

Looking at the bioaccumulative pesticides used in non-organic farming, the British Medical Association say that due to the manner in which pesticide residues are stored in fatty tissues they may remain in the body for several years, and there is concern regarding possible neurobehavioural and neurotoxic effects, mutagenicity, teratogenicity, carcinogenicity, and allergic and other immuno-regulatory disorders.<sup>7</sup>

Under Soil Association standards only four chemicals are allowed in sprays on organic crops - 430 are allowed on non-organic crops. As a result, organic foods contain fewer pesticide residues and fewer 'cocktails' of chemicals than non-organic food, including 'conservation grade' food or food from 'integrated pest management' farming.<sup>4</sup>

Some pesticides are endocrine disrupters.<sup>2</sup>

### **Additives**

Some chemical additives that preserve food, or add colour or flavouring, affect individual well being, for example, tartrazine food colouring is linked with hyperactivity.<sup>2</sup>

Only 32 of the 290 food additives approved for use across the EU are permitted in organic food. The

controversial additives aspartame, tartrazine and hydrogenated fats are banned in organic food. Therefore a wide range and large quantity of potentially allergenic or harmful additives are avoided on a diet high in organically grown foods.<sup>8</sup>

### **Antibiotics**

"Prophylactic and regular use of antibiotics is not permitted in organic standards for animal husbandry. There is growing concern that antibiotic residues in meat and dairy products could result in the development of antibiotic resistance in bacteria that are prevalent in humans, thereby reducing the effectiveness of antibiotics used to treat human disease" (World Health Organisation).<sup>9</sup>

Antibiotic additives routinely added to animal food to speed animal growth are linked with bacterial resistance in humans to the same or closely related antibiotics.<sup>3</sup>

### **Fats**

No hydrogenated fats are allowed in organic food.

Eating organic food allows people to avoid hydrogenated fats completely.

The UK Food Standards Agency says that "trans fats have no known nutritional benefits and because of the effect they have on blood cholesterol they increase the risk of coronary heart disease. Evidence suggests that the effects of trans fats are worse than saturated fats".<sup>10</sup>

When hydrogenated fats are made, trans fats are created too.

The US National Academy of Science's Institute of Medicine says that there is no safe level of trans fat consumption and that consumers should consume as little as possible of products containing this substance.<sup>11</sup>

Organic standards require that cattle be fed on predominantly forage-based diets. Research suggests that a diet high in forage rather than grain reduces the saturated fatty acid concentrations and enhances the content of omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids in beef.<sup>12, 13</sup>

### **GM**

The use of GM ingredients is prohibited by organic standards laid down by European law.

Buy organic food – it is the only way you can be sure of avoiding GM through legally enforceable standards and independent inspection.

### **Wildlife, environment and jobs**

Overall organic farming supports more farmland wildlife than non-organic farming.<sup>14</sup>

The Sustainable Development Commission believes that "organic certification represents 'the gold standard' for sustainable food production."<sup>15</sup>

The Government, their statutory advisors (English Nature, the Environment Agency) and NGOs, including the RSPB, say in the Organic Action Plan that organic farming has environmental benefits. The government stated that organic farming is better for wildlife, causes lower pollution from sprays, produces less carbon dioxide and less dangerous wastes, has high animal welfare standards and

increases jobs in the countryside.<sup>16</sup>

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How can I support the work of the Soil Association?

The Soil Association is a membership charity, we urgently need your support to continue our work. As public support for the Soil Association continues to grow, our ability to influence the thinking and policies of government and big business grows with it. In this way we help to develop a truly healthy and sustainable future. Join us today and help us to continue campaigning for sustainable agriculture and organic food. You can join the Soil Association on our website, over the phone or by writing to us.

## [Further Reading](#)

Please see the Soil Association website library, <http://www.soilassociation.org/library>, for more information

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