

## Title: Living Naturally With Limited Availability of Organics –And On a Budget!

### Introduction

Times sure have changed! I was raised on a dairy farm back when we didn't have to worry so much about the foods we ate. We were strong, healthy, and rarely visited the doctor! We grew most of our own food and had our own supply of meat and unprocessed milk. Now that I'm raising my own family *off* the farm, I worry about what I feed my kids! There are so many horror stories about hormones, antibiotics, and various drugs in our water supplies, our milk, and our meat. Our vegetables may or may not be genetically engineered. Prescription medications cause more problems than they fix. Living naturally and eating organic foods is definitely the way to go!

When both parents work full time jobs and kids are running all different directions, it's hard not to depend on 'convenience' foods. Processed foods that only take a few minutes to prepare are the *worst* in terms of processed, chemically altered ingredients. The problem is when you live in a rural area, organic and whole food stores are not so plentiful. We don't have Whole Foods or Wild Oats Markets conveniently located around the corner! Most grocery chains are seeing the light and offering quite a few organic foods now, but they are so expensive! Those of us on a budget have a hard time affording such a luxury as eating healthy!

What we *do* have, at least in season, are locally grown produce stands everywhere! If there was ever a time to learn to freeze or can your own produce, it's now! We also have several local meat processors that buy most of their animals from local farmers.

### Tricky Labels

The foods you will be buying in the store are tricky! Just because a product is labeled 'Natural' or 'Organic' doesn't mean it's *all* natural or *all* organic! It may only have one organic or natural ingredient, and the rest is your usual artificial sweeteners and chemicals and processed food. Read labels and choose wisely!

Look for labels that say 'USDA Organic', 'Certified Organic', or '100 percent organic'. These claims are regulated by the Department of Agriculture and are held to a high standard. Certified organic labels are good for produce, packaged foods and for meat and poultry, but the government has not yet set up rules to certify fish as organic, so don't necessarily trust any organic-labeled fish you see.

### Natural Body Care

What we put on our bodies is as important as what we put in our bodies. "It is a medically recognized fact that our body absorbs significant amounts - about 70% - of what we put on our skin. That includes all synthetic or toxic chemicals that skin care products may contain."<sup>1</sup> There is great confusion about the difference between 'organic' and 'natural' products. Natural products may still contain synthetic pesticides, heavy metals, and other chemicals that we don't want in our bodies. "To be certified organic,

products including organic skin care must be made from materials that are grown on soil that has been certified as pesticide-free for at least three years.”<sup>1</sup>

### Healthy Water

An Associated Press investigation found a vast array of pharmaceuticals in the drinking water supplies of at least 41 million Americans.<sup>2</sup> They include antibiotics, anti-convulsants, mood stabilizers, and sex hormones, as well as over-the-counter pain medicines.

The concentrations are tiny, measured in quantities of parts per billion or trillion. That’s far below the levels of a medical dose. But some scientists are worried about the long term consequences to human health and wildlife.

### Getting Kids to Eat Healthy

Start them young! Once they get older, it gets harder and harder to get them to try new things! My six-year-old will try anything and likes a lot of stuff that even I won’t eat! My ten-year-old, however, will rarely ever try anything new, and will forego fresh fruit for chips every time!

I’m going to try a strategy I was reading about in a recent article online about getting your kids to eat the way you would like them to.<sup>3</sup> Tell them the facts and let them decide for themselves. It makes a lot of sense, because my children are very quick to defend what is right, and condemn what is wrong. If they find out how some of the junk food is made, and what it’s made of, they might decide to eat better. I’ve already established that I cannot ‘sneak ‘ healthy variations to my 10 year old. He knows the second he takes a bite! He thinks organic peanut butter tastes too much like peanuts. Go figure!

Making food fun also helps. Kids love smoothies, they are a lot like milkshakes. I have some recipes for quick, homemade ice cream that I can make as healthy as I want. I substitute organic, unbleached flour, organic sugar, and other ingredients that are not detected in baked goods whenever possible.

### Which Foods to Buy Organic

Because packaged foods are processed, even if they’re organic, it’s better to focus your organic spending on fresh foods like meat, milk, and produce.<sup>5</sup> There are certain types of produce that retain pesticide residue more than others. For example, it’s less important to buy fruits or vegetables that have a protective peel. Just wash them well before consuming.

More and more mainstream grocery stores are carrying organic foods. They are still pretty expensive, though. Many stores have developed their own brand of organics for a lot less!

Buying bulk organics also makes sense as long as you will use it all before it spoils. You may be able to find several people interested in going organic that would want to buy as a group and save!

### Avoid Artificial Sweeteners

“Using an artificial, no-calorie sweetener rather than sugar may make it tougher, not easier, to lose weight, U.S. researchers said Sunday.”<sup>4</sup> The researchers said sweet foods may prompt the body to get ready to take in a lot of calories, but when sweetness in the form of artificial sweeteners is not followed by a large amount of calories, the body gets confused, which may lead to eating more or expending less energy than normal.

## Genetically Engineered Foods

**Genetically modified (GM) foods** are foods made from genetically modified organisms (GMO) that have had their DNA altered through genetic engineering. GM foods were first put on the market in the early 1990s. The most common modified foods are derived from plants: soybean, corn, canola, and cotton seed oil.

Some argue that there is more than enough food in the world and that the hunger crisis is caused by problems in food distribution and politics, not production, so people should not be offered food that may carry some degree of risk.

Others oppose genetic engineering on the grounds that genetic modifications might have unforeseen consequences, both in the initially modified organisms and their environments. The unknown effects are many and widespread. It brings to mind the science fiction movies we’ve all seen of creatures engineered in a laboratory and escaping to wreak havoc on the world! I can’t speak for everyone, but it’s a little scary to me. I was also very disappointed to find a lot of the products I regularly use on the list of companies that support this technology.

Plants that are engineered to be toxic to insects could mean insect-free crops. This could result in declines in other wildlife (e.g. birds) which feed on weed seeds and/or insects for food and a multitude of other problems stemming from these issues.

Activists opposed to genetic engineering say that with this technology, there is no way to ensure that genetically modified organisms will remain under control, and the use of this technology outside secure laboratory environments carries potentially unacceptable risks to both farmed and wild ecosystems.<sup>6</sup>

As of now, there is no regulation of labeling for genetically modified foods, so you don’t know which ones have been, and which ones haven’t when you’re shopping in the produce aisle of your local grocery store.

- **Soy** and its derivatives including **soy flour** and **soy oil** (sometimes sold as oil for cooking without specification of its source). Soy is very common in processed foods, bakery, meat products and pet food.

Look out for the ingredients: *soy protein, soy lecithin, soy oil, soy sauce, soy isolates*. Soy is also common in **infant food**. Unless this food is organic, there is a considerable risk that it comes from GE sources, as a large part of soy is genetically engineered today.

Soy is also used as animal feed. If feed contains a harmful substance, it may appear in considerably higher concentrations in the meat than in the feed.

- **Corn** is also a common GE food. You can expect to find GE corn in for example *Corn Flakes*, *corn oil*, *corn syrup*, *high fructose corn syrup*, *corn starch*, *corn meal* and other corn based foods. Any of these products derived from corn may, in the worst case, contain some unexpected and undetected harmful substance generated by genetic engineering.

Corn is also used widely as animal feed.

- **Canola** (rapeseed), used most commonly as oil for cooking and in margarines and "lean" butter substitutes. It is also used extensively in baking.

In addition, the following GE vegetables, crops and plants have been approved for commercial use in the US by the end of 2005 (which was the latest update by January 10, 2007). For a full list of products in the US see "[List of Completed Consultations on Bioengineered Foods](#)" at FDA):

- Alfalfa
- Tomato
- Potato
- Rice
- Cantaloupe
- Sugar beet - (all kinds of sugar)
- Radicchio
- Flax (linseed)
- Papaya
- Squash
- Rapeseed oil, in some cases called Canola oil
- Wheat.

In the United States, GE foods are now common on the market. **Because labeling is not required in the US, it is difficult to avoid these foods in this country unless one only eats *organically grown food*.**<sup>7</sup>

You can find a list of foods from companies that actively support modern food biotechnology and some alternatives here: [http://www.truefoodnow.org/shoppersguide/guide\\_printable.html](http://www.truefoodnow.org/shoppersguide/guide_printable.html) .

## Conclusion

The best thing to do is start small, 'choose your battles' so to speak, and try to build a healthy eating environment in your home. Ignore the moaning and groaning from the kids (and the husband), and stock healthy alternatives to junk food. Cook with organic foods when possible. Grow your own

produce, or buy from farmer's markets or 'locally grown' produce stands. Learn how to preserve your own produce.

There are a lot of recipes on the internet for 'green' cleaning products, if you have the ambition and the time to make your own. I make my own skin care products, tinctures, salves, lip balm, and whatever else I find a recipe for that is fairly easy to make. I'm constantly on the lookout for new ones. My sister makes soap from scratch. At least we know what's going into the things we make! It's a continuing struggle and I sometimes wish I could do more, but I'm doing what I can and sharing my knowledge of the subject with friends and family. The more informed people are, the more they want to eat right and be healthy! The tide seems to be shifting in the right direction for better labeling, more organically grown foods, and less chemical additives. When that happens, we will all have more choices and lower prices for these foods that should have been there all along!

#### **Sources:**

- 1 Going Organic with Personal Care, <http://www.cindyshealth.com>
- 2 Pharmaceuticals Found in Drinking Water, <http://www11alive.com/news/health/article.health.aspx?storyid=112578>
- 3 Getting Kids To Eat Healthy Isn't Always Easy, <http://www.healthy.net/scr/news.asp?Id=9415>
- 4 Lab study ties artificial sweetener to weight gain, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/23097135/from/ET>, 2/15/08
- 5 How to Save on Organic Food, <http://abcnews.go.com/print?id=4538960>
- 6 Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genetically\\_modified\\_food](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genetically_modified_food)
- 7 What GE Foods Are on the Market?, <http://www.psrast.org/gefonmarket.htm>