



# Extension News Column

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Are you interested in organic foods? Today, shoppers can choose from an increasing array of foods labeled organic. But while organic foods continue to grow in popularity, they often seem to come with a higher price tag.

Organic food production is strictly regulated by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA). Farmers cannot use synthetic pesticides, growth hormones, antibiotics, genetic engineering, chemical fertilizers or waste products in the growing process. Foods with the organic label must come from farms that have been certified organic by the USDA. All these requirements can boost the cost of producing foods with the organic label. But if having some organic foods in your diet is important to you, there are ways to fit them into your food budget.

Money-saving tips for buying organic aren't that different from tips for buying conventional foods. First, analyze why it is important for you to buy organic. What health gains do you hope to achieve? Do you want organics to avoid pesticides, growth hormones or antibiotics in foods? Then, consider what you eat regularly. If eating organically is important to you, choose organic for foods you eat frequently to help you meet health goals. Buying organic carrots may be far more important than buying an organic turkey that you serve only one time a year.

Buy in bulk. As with conventionally produced foods, buying larger amounts is a common way to save because the unit price of the item is less. This strategy works as long as you use all that you buy. If some of the product is wasted, you pay more for what was consumed.

Buy fruits and vegetables in season. Consider buying from local farmers through community-supported agriculture groups or at the farmers' market. Here in Alaska, the organic label is very expensive to get. Talk to the farmer and ask if they use organic practices. Though they might not have the organic label, they may be using organic methods. These foods may meet your requirements for using organic foods, but may not be certified organic.

Search the store sales for items you use most often and then stock up on them. Purchase shelf-stable items such as canned goods, frozen foods and cereals to stretch your food dollars.

With the popularity of organic foods on the rise, some stores are developing their own organic brands or may carry private labels that are often lower-priced than national brands. Here in Fairbanks, both Safeway and Fred Meyers carry their own brand of organic foods. Check websites for your favorite organic food brands and special deals. Many brands and stores now host social networking sites where you can find specials not advertised elsewhere.

Finally, clip coupons and review your overall food budget. This is good advice whether you are buying organic or traditionally produced foods. Ask yourself if there foods you are buying that are not being eaten? How much are you spending on nonessential or less nutritional items that could be removed from your grocery list, so more dollars would be available for organic food?

Think about what you might be able to give up or do differently. Think about preparing more meals at home, eating out less often, or relying less on convenience foods. Those decisions can help make more money available for organic food purchases and other foods needed in your diet to reach your health goals.

If you are interested in organic foods, next year consider putting in your own garden. What better way to control what is on your food than to grow it yourself? Start now by observing what vegetables grow well in this climate. Don't forget to check with the Extension Office on the latest information on how to garden.

Roxie Rodgers Dinstel is a professor of extension on the Tanana District Extension Faculty. Questions or column requests can be e-mailed to her at [rrdinstel@alaska.edu](mailto:rrdinstel@alaska.edu) or by calling 907-474-2426. The Cooperative Extension Service is part of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, working in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.