

### Trends in Organic Food Summary Statement

The organic sector is now one of the most rapidly growing segments of the global food market. Consumer demands are pointing toward preference for natural products with potential health benefits and farmers have been adapting to fit this demand. Organic farming includes banning pesticides and genetically modified organisms in attempts to provide food with authentic taste and quality.

Organic farming has growing influence on consumers. The sales of organic food products in recent years have been increasing in almost all European countries, particularly in developed countries such as Romania. The rising popularity of organic foods in the global North and their increasing availability in mainstream supermarkets is generating a rapid increase in the volume and range of organic imports. This is increasing South-North trade in tropical products, fresh and processed fruits and vegetables, etc. The Dominican Republic is one of the leaders in the organic export market, booming in bananas, cocoa, and coffee exports in particular. However, small-scale producers are becoming less secure in the face of recent market trends that disempower small organic producers and are recommended to pursue a commodity network approach.

The health benefits of organic foods are unclear. Evidence does not suggest marked health benefits from consuming organic versus conventional foods, although organic produce may reduce exposure to pesticide residues and organic chicken and pork may reduce exposure to antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Organic food seems to contain fewer pesticide residues and statistically more selected health-related compounds such as polyphenols in plant products and polyunsaturated fatty acids in milk and meat products, but the health relevance for consumers is

not clear yet. A gap was identified between consumer expectations and what can be guaranteed according to food quality. To close this gap, a quality model for organic food was described which puts together principles, criteria and measurable parameters. The current European organic regulation provides only generic indications about processing, permitting the use of the additives and processing aids included in a positive list and prohibiting only the use of GMOs and irradiation. The relation between food process and quality is complex. For example, heat treatment results in higher lycopene availability in tomato paste. Even organic food is mostly complex and processed.

Local and organic food are given a central role in food sustainability, and they are often treated interchangeably without specifying what is local. It is often not identified that organic is strictly regulated by national and international laws but with no regard to geographic location. Consumers often perceive that organic means healthier and it is suggested that confusion be reduced in advertising. Traceability through product measurements may help to detect fraud. Tests are being conducted to ensure organic food has been appropriately distinguished from conventional foods so that the USDA organic seal has significant meaning. Methods difficult to authenticate are not easily related to food quality criteria such as nutrition and cannot show if the “plus” expected is present in the food or not. Tests on large sample sets and under more practical conditions still have to be performed.

It is appropriate for foodservice managers to understand the growing trend of organic products and that the benefits of organic food are unclear. Evidence does not suggest marked health benefits from consuming organic food.

## References

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