

Media release

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Organic nutrient study misses the point

Lecturer in the School of Health Sciences at RMIT University Liza Oates says a study from Stanford University in the United States comparing the nutritional value between conventional and organic food is irrelevant for most organic shoppers.

The study showed there was no nutritional difference between the two types of food.

Liza says the fact that it failed to find more nutrients in organic food is relatively predictable, "There are a huge number of factors that affect nutrient levels in food. So, it is almost inevitable that trying to isolate one factor, such as the farming method, to explain these nutritional differences will be problematic.

"The study is based on a meta analysis of existing data that is trying to generalise by looking at foods from different growing seasons, climates and soils and it doesn't relate to Australian farms." She says.

General manager of Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA), Holly Vyner, says most people buy organic for what it doesn't have rather than what it does have.

"The *Australian Organic Market Report*, commissioned by BFA, has found that the number one perceived benefit of buying organic food is that it is chemical-free, followed by additive-free, environmentally friendly, hormone and antibiotic-free, and finally, no GMOs."

Holly says the definition of organic is well understood internationally and Australia is fortunate to have some of the world's most stringent organic standards.

"Consumers can ensure their dollars are being well spent on products which meet these stringent standards by looking for a certification mark as a guarantee such as the Australian Certified Organic 'Bud' logo."

In a separate published study from the United States comparing organically grown and conventionally grown strawberries, organic was proven to out-perform in areas of taste, nutrition, colour and longevity for shelf life.

Twenty-six farms were chosen for the study with half being organically managed and half managed using conventional farming systems.

The organic farms had been certified organic for more than five years which meant the impact of organic farming methods could be determined within the soil.

Holly says, "Analysis showed that organic strawberries had significantly higher total antioxidant activity which scientists believe can cut the incidents of cancer and heart disease, as well as other debilitating diseases."

There is a lack of Australian data comparing nutrient content between conventional and organic food.

A study like this needs to involve established organic farms, which Liza says, “would need to be long term and therefore quite expensive.”

The Stanford University study did confirm a number of benefits of organic foods.

It found organic foods have lower levels of pesticide residues and antibiotic resistant bacteria.

It also found organic milk contains more omega-3 fatty acids, which are considered beneficial for the heart and over all organic food had higher levels of phosphorus and more compounds known as phenols, believed to help prevent cancer.

What’s more the study highlighted research findings that show children who ate organic produce had fewer pesticide traces in their urine.

Now that has to be good.

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