

Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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Affording Organic

Dear EcoGirl: I want to buy organic, but I'm worried about my budget, especially with current economic uncertainties. What can I do?

Signed, Struggling in Sebastopol

Dear Struggling: Yes, I understand your concerns. My first suggestion is to remember these key points.

The Big Picture

1) Organic is a grassroots success story. We only have this alternative to mainstream toxic food because of decades of hard work and vision by countless people around the world. Let's ensure that it remains.

2) Organic isn't always more expensive. Organic's popularity has brought prices down, often to conventional levels.

3) Organic's total cost is equal to or less than conventional's, when you include toxic farming's hidden health and environmental impacts. We do pay these indirect costs, just in ways that make us feel powerless and afraid. Organic improves our lives overall.

4) Organic supports our health. Eating well creates vitality and energy for everything in our lives. Isn't that the purpose of eating? We pay dearly for health insurance and illness. Isn't it smarter to reduce illness instead, by increasing our food's nutrition levels and avoiding toxics in our meals and environment?

According to healer and teacher Whitewolf Switzer, "When you take your health and well-being into consideration, the choice is clear — organic foods are cheaper than the costs of healing the illness and diseases created from ingesting conventionally-grown, highly-processed foods. Add to the calculations the costs of pollution, the

degradation of our air, our water (generally very polluted in agricultural areas), and our earth, and organics are a bargain for health!"

5) Our future food supply will need organics. Toxic pesticides and fertilizers require petroleum. As that gets more expensive and scarce, organic will become more attractive and necessary. By ramping up alternatives proactively we can help ensure a smoother transition, avoiding abrupt drops in our food supply.

6) Nature, not money, is what feeds us. An anonymous 19th-century Native American said, "Only when the last tree has died and the last river has been poisoned and the last fish has been caught will we realize that we cannot eat money." Organic makes our farming more respectful of nature's needs.

Saving Money on Organic

Still, our current economic system poorly reflects our survival dependency on nature. So, for those with tight budgets, here are some tips for frugally including organic in your diet:

1) Look at actual prices. Organic items are often priced about the same!

2) Shop around, comparing prices at different stores, looking for sales, and stocking up on deals.

3) Buy in season and directly from local farmers. This reduces transportation, handling, and other costs.

4) Shift your diet towards fresh produce and whole grains, and away from meat and packaged foods. What health experts recommend is also less expensive! Plus it tastes great and further reduces your environmental impact.

5) Discover easy ways to cook from scratch. Short on time? Make one-pot meals, such as soup or veggies with rice. Or find other quick recipes that you and your family enjoy. (Organic produce is often so delicious that only simple preparations are needed!) You can make dishes in advance and freeze them. Or share meals with family and friends, building community while creating wonderful memories!

6) Grow your own. Organic gardening can be nurturing and fun to do with friends and kids. If you have space, plant abundant crops like tomatoes and zucchinis. Even on a patio you can grow herbs like rosemary, basil, and thyme, which bring surprising freshness and depth to ordinary meals.

So there you have it, some fun ideas for including organic in your budget. I also encourage you to help adjust our economic playing field so that it rewards consumer choices that align with our overall shared well-being. To learn more about creative approaches for doing this, I highly recommend Paul Hawken's book, *The Ecology of Commerce*.

Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of The Organic Guides, and Editor and Lead Writer for The Next STEP newsletter. Email your questions to <EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info> for possible inclusion in future columns. View past columns at <www.AskEcoGirl.info>. Also contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this column in your periodical. "EcoGirl believes that everyone can be a superhero for the planet. Then she shows you how!"

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