



Organic is not just for the chosen few

-Organic Trade Board, Feb 10

Survey results released today by the Organic Trade Board, a group of key organic producers, reveal that 83% of Britons now buy organic food, dispelling the common misconception that organic food is only for the small minority who are totally committed to organic principles.

The research supports recent Mintel report findings which agreed that organic is now mainstream with brands like Yeo Valley and Green & Blacks competing in the wider food market and Tesco reporting that a quarter of their customers buy organic products once a month.*

These findings and figures are a reflection of just how far the organic movement has come. Since the Soil Association was founded in 1946, the spread of organic has gradually become more and more mainstream.

Since the early nineties, organic farming in the UK has grown rapidly and now accounts for 4% of agricultural land area with nearly 3276 farms**. This growth has been driven by consumers and policy makers who see organic farming as making a contribution to the environment, wellbeing, society and nutrition.

In the 1980s and early 1990s organic produce was really only available in farmers markets and from small artisan producers, making it seem premium, specialist and inaccessible. However consumer demand and increased awareness about the benefits of organic food and farming have meant that major retailers have taken notice and organic ranges are now widely available in supermarkets. For example, according to their website, Tesco now stock more than 1200 organic lines in their stores. This is all supported by the Organic Trade Board research, which found that 64% of respondents buy organic food from supermarkets.

Despite these great leaps forward, the current recession has inevitably had an effect on shopping habits and 2009 saw a significant sales dip across the whole of the organic sector. However sales figures are showing signs of improving during the last three months of the year. The market is still in decline at -9.7% although this decline is reducing (TNS 12 weeks to 31st Dec 09).

Paul Moore from Crazy Jack comments, "When the recession hit we lost distribution, but interestingly where distribution stayed our sales increased. This shows the organic consumer is an informed one because they make their purchase decisions before they leave home. We have a wide consumer base from mums wanting the best for their kids through to students and the older generation. They buy our product for many reasons – taste, environment, health, animal welfare and so on."

The Organic Trade Board, a group of key organic producers, carried out research to investigate Britain's attitude towards organic food. The research is the first part of a major generic campaign which is being planned for 2010 to make organic more accessible to the general public and drive greater general awareness of the benefits of organic food.

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According to the research, the top ten reasons the public buy organic food are:

1. Naturalness/unprocessed 40%
2. Restricted use of pesticides 34%
3. Better taste 30%
4. Better for my wellbeing 28%
5. Better for the planet 25%
6. More care in farming 24%
7. Kind to animals 22%
8. GM free 18%
9. Encourage wildlife 16%
10. Helping climate change 12%

This clearly shows that there is a multitude of reasons that people buy organic food and it also demonstrates that people do have an understanding of what organic means. The Soil Association defines organic farming as meaning that:

- Pesticides are severely restricted – instead organic farmers develop nutrient-rich soil to grow strong healthy crops and encourage wildlife to help control pests and disease
- Artificial chemical fertilisers are prohibited – instead organic farmers develop a healthy, fertile soil by growing and rotating a mixture of crops using clover to fix nitrogen from the atmosphere
- Animal cruelty is prohibited and a truly free-range life for farm animals is guaranteed
- The routine use of drugs, antibiotics and wormers is disallowed
- The use of GM ingredients in animal feed and retail products is banned

The Organic Trade Board's research further highlighted how widespread the buying of organic food is now in the UK with 64% of people buying organic food from supermarkets. It also showed that people would be keen to buy more, with a third of respondents saying they would buy more organic if there was a wider choice and better ranges available.

Finn Cottle from The Soil Association comments, "This research highlights how accessible and mainstream organic food has become in the UK. It is something that over three quarters of the population have in their shopping baskets and there is clearly a demand for even more choice and availability."

The Organic Trade Board research also showed that less than 7% of people actually think that organic means 'smarter/posher' so organic appears to be shrugging off its label of exclusivity. In fact, the 2009 Organic Market Report by the Soil Association showed that C2, D and E social groups now represent 50% of organic consumers. Strengthening the argument that organic is not just for the minority, a goldenriversfarm.co.uk survey in December 2009 showed that 90% of people were going to buy an organic or free range turkey for Christmas despite having to spend £15-£20 more.

The consumer is clearly realising the benefits of organic and this has spread through to the mass market, dispelling the myth that buying organic is just confined to the minority.

*BBC Good Food, February 2010

** Figures sourced from Soil Association

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The Organic Trade Board survey was undertaken in the last week of December 2009 and the first week of January and questioned over 3000 respondents through onepoll.com.

A new website from the Organic Trade Board, www.iloveorganic.co.uk will be launching later in February to promote organic food.

Gender and age skews:

- 66% of 30- 35 year olds buy organic at the supermarket and 64% of 41-45 year olds do
- 50% more 19-25 year olds would buy organic products if their friends recommended it rather than 41-55 year olds
- Men were twice as likely than women to buy organic products if their friends recommended it
- Over 26s are more likely to buy organic products at least once a week than under 25s
- Men are more likely to buy organic products for special occasions
- Under 21's are most likely to buy organic pastas and sauces
- Younger people are more likely to see organic food as a once in a while treat than older people

Further regional breakdown is available upon request for the areas of London, South West, South East, West Midlands, North West, Yorkshire, Scotland, North East, East Anglia, East Midlands, Wales and Northern Ireland.

About The Organic Trade Board

There are so many questions surrounding organic – what is it? Why you should choose it? Where do you go to get in touch with likeminded organic shoppers and share ideas? It's hard to find simple, easily accessible information about organic produce.

That's why in 2009, a group of organic companies and organisations came together to improve customer communications and convey the organic message in an easy to understand way.

Many of your favourite organic brands are involved and some companies who may not be so familiar to you.

Pledgors :

3V Natural Foods, Agrico UK LTD, Alara, Alastair Sawdays, Alvis Bros, Anglo Beef Processors, Bart Spices, Be Organic, Berry Gardens, Bioselect UK, Calon Wen, Capescan, Clearspring, Community Foods, Daioni, Dale Farm, David Alston, Doves Farm Foods, EcoS Consultancy, Essential Trading Co-operative, Fresh Naturally Organic, G's Marketing, Garden Organic, Green & Blacks, Greenvale AP, Grove Fresh Ltd., Helen Brownings Organic, Hi Peak Feeds, Humphrey Feeds, JSR Services, James Paton & Co, Manic Organic, James White Drinks, Kallo Foods Ltd, Langmead Farms, Langmeads of Flansham, Laverstoke Park Produce, London & Scottish, Manor Fresh Ltd, Mark Measures Associates, Mole Valley Farmers, Natracare, Natural & Organic Products, Noble Foods, Norton Organic Grain, OF + Consulting, Oliver's Wholefood Store, OMSCo, Organic and Natural Business Magazine, Organic Centre Wales, Organic Arable, Organic Farm Foods, Organic Farmers

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& Growers Ltd, Organic Food Federation, Organic Research Centre, Organico, Organix, Pertwood Organic Cereals, Phil Jones, Pip organic, Planet Organic Limited, Poupart, Produce World Ltd, Rachel's, RDA Organic, Respect Organics, Rookery Farm Eggs, Rhug Organic Farm, Seeds of Change, Sharpham Park, Shipton Mill Ltd, Slade Farm Organics, Scottish Organic Producers Association, Taste Matters Ltd, TIO, Tesco, Triodos bank, United Irish Organics Ltd, URENBIO, Vintage Roots Ltd, Waitrose, Welsh Black Cattle Society, Wyn & Val Buick Yeo Valley

