

Grassroot Food Choices

1. 'Local', 'organic' and conventional food terms

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There's a huge interest in eating 'local' food. But 'local' doesn't mean the grower has used 'organic' land management practices. They may be using herbicides and pesticides to manage the crop and land. They may be using chemical fertilizers to enhance soil fertility. They may be buying seed that doesn't have an audit trail and there's always a chance a local grower is using GMO seed.

It's very wise to ask questions as you source out growers and products that you want to eat. You decide who's philosophy matches your own and then vote with your food dollars and purchases. Do not assume.

And don't assume that a non certified 'organic' grower isn't one of the best organic farmers around. As the government of Canada prepares to take over the use of the word 'organic', increase the paperwork and hassles of certification of organic food and products many small scale growers will 'opt out' of the certification process. Some don't like the idea of government controlling food. Others have established clientele who don't request the certification seal to prove the crop is 'organic'.

Grassroot organic folks who have grown local food for a decade or more have figured out ways of managing and enhancing the soil quality. At the heart of organic agriculture is 'good soil' and learning how to build and manage soil fertility is the 'art' of organic management. They often grow a crop they plow into the soil as a 'green manure' crop.

Some organic growers recognize the value of 'open pollinated' seed; they can save their own seed year after year. Some buy hybrid seed for crops but can't save the seed. Usually there's an awareness with organic growers about the 'value' of the 'name' of the variety; heritage varieties can often get a higher price. You can visit www.seeds.ca the home of Canada's heritage seed program for more information about heritage seed and 'Seedy Saturday' where you can buy heritage seed.

Conventional seed may include GMO. Other growers buy 'wheat' or 'barley' seed that doesn't have a 'variety name' or audit trail of who grew the crop. Corn, wheat and soyabean crops may have GMO contamination as herbicide resistant varieties have been sold for all these crops and seed mixing is possible without 'farmer' and 'variety' identification on the seed lot.

Crop rotations help break disease cycles. Sometimes growers do use chemicals to control disease and pests. There are 'approved' products for organic growing and as with any

product it's 'buyer beware'. As you vote with your food dollar find growers who have the same philosophy you have about conservation, soil management,

When you buy 'local bread' as the baker where he or she gets the flour. Is it being grown and milled in Canada? White flour is often used in breads; is it 'bleached' or unbleached flour. Again, remember 'local' grain doesn't mean 'organic' grain.

Is an acre of 'local' conventional grain more carbon credit friendly than an acre of Saskatchewan grown organic grain? Nobody knows; there's no established 'value' for carbon credit so we can't compare which is better. Local is not always sustainable or appropriate for the land; organic can mean monoculture. You can only find out answers by asking questions.