

Buying Green When it Comes to Groceries

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One of the hallmarks of the “green movement” is buying food that is either more locally grown (to reduce the cost and environmental impact of shipping food) and/or buying organic. By buying locally-grown food you are reducing the transportation cost (and environmental impact of that transportation), and the electricity typically needed to manufacture and/or package the product. Organic food is grown or produced without the use of pesticides, fertilizers, antibiotics or growth hormones in an effort to both help people eat more healthfully and minimize the negative impact of conventional agriculture and food production on the environment. However, organic food is typically more costly – often much more costly – than non-organic food. There are ways to buy either locally-grown or organic food that won’t break your bank:

- **Prioritize your list.** While you may want to eat “completely green” it may just not be in your budget to make a complete switch. Start by buying items that are most important to you to be organic first – maybe it’s milk and dairy products for your kids, or starting out with fruit and vegetables. [The Environmental Working Group has a “Safe Shopper” list](#) that can help you determine what food or other purchasing concerns you have and what options you may want to consider.
- **Buy bulk.** By buying food in larger quantities you will save money. There are a few ways to buy bulk. Most grocery stores have bulk bins of flour, rice, cereal, beans, pasta and more. Buying food from the bins can create big savings and also uses less packaging. You can also buy organic food in bulk packages that are a lower price per pound than smaller packages and use less packaging. If you are single or have a small family you may want to consider splitting bulk food purchases with someone. The third option is to buy large numbers of organic items when they are on sale. Buy a case of soup on sale or buy produce that can be frozen and used later. Just remember not to buy more than you can use before it goes bad or can be safely stored.
- **Bring your own bag.** The grocery checkout line is an easy place to start making some environmentally-friendly choices. Plastic bags are made from non-renewable energy resources and paper bags are typically manufactured by paper mills that are notorious for polluting air, water and land resources. A better option is to consider bringing your own bags – either re-using bags you have already gotten from a grocery shopping trip or buying durable cloth bags that you can keep in your car and re-use. Websites like Reusablebags.com and Ecobags.com sell a wide variety of surprisingly stylish bags!
- **Buy from local growers or farmers.** Most areas will have some type of farmer’s market where you can save money on locally-grown food. You can get to know the growers or producers and even if they’re not organically-certified growers you can find out about their growing practices. It’s also encouraging to know that most farmers’ markets will accept food stamps for payment. Find the nearest farmer’s market through [Local Harvest.org](http://LocalHarvest.org).
- **Go co-op.** A food co-operative is a member-owned, member-governed business that exists for the benefit of its members. They have been in existence since the 1800s. Food co-ops operate to provide their communities with nutritious food choices, with earth-friendly products and to keep community resources within the community and preserve local farming and food production efforts. In order to shop at some co-ops you must be a member, at others membership is not required. You can find a local co-op through [Cooperative Grocer.com](http://CooperativeGrocer.com) or the [National Cooperative Grocers Associate website](#).
- **Sign up for a CSA subscription.** Imagine having a box or basket of organic, locally-grown produce delivered to your door every week? [Community Supported Agriculture \(CSA\)](#) subscribers get produce delivered directly from the farm every week, eliminating the bulk of the normal distribution costs. You can even purchase half-share

subscriptions or split the cost with another subscriber or family to share the food and split the cost. [Find a CSA site near you through the LocalHarvest.org website.](#)

- **Buy online.** There are several companies that will sell bulk organic food online that you can have shipped to your home including [Costco](#), [Amazon.com](#), [Diamond Organics](#), and [Door to Door Organics](#).
- **Shop by mail.** There are numerous mail order sources for organic food and “earth-friendly” items. Consider looking through the Organic Trade Association’s [Organic Pages Online website](#).
- **Grow your own.** Gardening is making an enormous come-back among “green spenders.” Consider checking out a book on vegetable and produce gardening from your local library, talking with local food producers (farmers, growers) or using websites like [Helpful Gardner.com](#), [Gardenweb.com](#) or [Burpee.com](#) to start a small garden plot of your own. If you don’t have a yard of your own, look for a community garden plot or talking with a friend or neighbor about going in to do some gardening together.



Chip Flowers
Delaware State Treasurer

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