

Organic on a budget

The UK Government has committed in law to cutting the country's greenhouse emissions 80% by 2050. And with our industrialised food and farming system currently responsible for around 30% of UK emissions it's clear that we need to make fundamental changes to way we grow and eat our food. Only radical changes to our diets and farming systems can achieve the level of greenhouse gas cuts needed. And some of these changes can be made the next time you shop. Buying organic food and supporting organic farming, alongside a shift to less and mainly grass-fed meat and dairy products, with more seasonal fruit and vegetables should be the first step for anyone who takes climate change seriously.



Unfortunately many people, even those who in other areas of their lives consider themselves green, are happy to ignore the climate impact of their weekly non-organic shopping, and continue to buy the 'cheapest' possible food available at the check-outs, regardless of the environmental and social costs that we all end up paying eventually.

The Soil Association believes it is possible for most of us to shop and cook organically without compromising on quality. It might require some creativity and life-style changes, but these changes have the potential to leave both you and the planet healthier and happier. So use the following tips to stay healthy, ethical and green whilst saving money.

- Sign-up to an organic box scheme. Get local, seasonal and organic fruit and veg delivered straight to your doorstep, and get excellent value for money while you're at it. Use our box scheme directory to find your local supplier
 - [Box scheme directory](#) [PDF, 2.3MB]
- Cook fresh fruit and veg from scratch. Avoiding over packaged convenience foods is usually both healthier and cheaper. Try our *Grown in Britain* cookbook which has a comprehensive guide to seasonal British produce
 - [Buy Grown in Britain from our shop](#)
- Eat less meat, and when you do try lower cost cuts such as belly of pork or neck of lamb. Offal too can provide tasty nutritious meals. Get friendly with your local butcher for advice on cuts
- Cook in bulk. Make meals in larger batches, use herbs and spices, and cheaper ingredients like tinned tomatoes or beans and pulses to bulk things out, and then freeze left over portions. This is a great way making less into more.
- Join or create an organic buying group. Bulk-buy your store cupboard staples with a group of friends at wholesale prices. We're working to encourage more buying groups around the country and have produced a guide to getting started
 - [Setting up an organic buying group](#)
- Join or start your own local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) scheme in partnership with a local farmer. CSA is a partnership between farmers and the public where you make an annual investment for a share of the harvest and can prove great value for money
 - [Community supported agriculture](#)
- Grow your own, for the freshest, most local food you can get, right on your doorstep - and free
 - [Organic growing advice](#)
- Keep your own chickens and enjoy a great house pet and super fresh eggs every day. You can learn more about chicken keeping, and range of other courses on growing and cooking, through a Soil Association Organic Farm School course, supported by the Daylesford Foundation
 - [Organic farm school](#)
- Write a shopping list. As a nation we we throw away 6.7 million tonnes of food every year. By planning meals in advance, buying what you need and not what you 'fancy', and using left-overs you should be able avoid the need to throw away any food at all, and save up to £50 a month
- Take a walk on the wild side. There's plenty of free wild food available and identifying and picking it is a great way of having fun outdoors.
 - [Advice on foraging from forager Fergus Drennan](#)
- Become a Soil Association member and get saving! Organic Connect is our directory of offers and discounts exclusively for Soil Association members. Bringing our members closer to organic producers and independent shops it includes super-savings that can make a real difference to your shopping bills.

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Some consumers feel that organic has become a 'fashion label'. What does 'organic' mean and what are its benefits for producers and shoppers?

Organic food is produced from natural and sustainable farming systems which avoid the use of pesticides and which prohibit the use of artificial fertilisers and GM technology. Around 31,000 tonnes of chemicals are used in farming in the UK each year to kill weeds, insects and other pests that attack. In organic farming, natural methods are used to control pests, weeds and disease. For example, developing a good soil and healthy crops, which have natural resistance to pests and diseases, encourages natural predators and well-designed crop rotations.

Organic farming releases less greenhouse gases than non-organic farming, mainly due to the non-use of artificial fertilisers. Given that 30% of our individual carbon footprints is down to our food and drink consumption - choosing organic, local and seasonal food can significantly reduce your impact on the environment.

Not only is organic food rated best for animal welfare by Compassion in World Farming, recent European research shows that it is mainly artificial fertilisers that depress beneficial nutrients in fruit and vegetables, so generally all organic food will contain more healthy nutrients. In processed organic food, artificial colourings and additives - such as aspartame, MSG and hydrogenated fats - are banned. Buying organic and supporting organic farming systems will benefit our health and the future health of the planet. See our top five reasons to choose organic:
<http://www.soilassociation.org/Whyorganic/Whatisorganic/Fivereasonstochooseorganic/tabid/334/Default.aspx>

Why are some organic products considerably more expensive than non-organic ones? How can you justify this, especially in an economic downturn?

Contrary to popular opinion you can eat an organic diet on a budget if you're willing to get creative in your kitchen and rethink your shopping list - which we think is more fun anyway! Some top tips: sign up to an organic vegetable box, eat less meat, buy dried goods in bulk, make a shopping list to avoid waste, cook in bulk and from scratch and then freeze meals in batches. Not only cheaper but healthier too.

And where organic is more expensive you really do get what you pay for. Organic farms have 50% more wildlife, support more and better farming jobs, and cause less pollution. Crucially, as the world faces the terrible threat of climate change, organic food generally has a lower carbon footprint than non-organic. Government targets state that we have to cut greenhouse gas emissions 80% by 2050 - research shows that organic farming systems can take carbon out of the air and put it back safely in the soil, fighting global warming while at the same time producing healthy food.

It may not be possible to go completely organic, but make your first organic priority those foods you eat a lot of, e.g. milk and yoghurt. Tea, coffee, cocoa and bananas are all crops that may be heavily sprayed, contaminating the environment and harming plantation workers. Switch to buy organic, fairtrade versions if you can and reduce your meat consumption. Producing a meat-based diet requires seven times more land than a plant-based one!

Does this price differential go to the organic producers or are some retailers marking up the prices of organic goods to appeal to 'well-heeled' customers?

Bigger retailers can charge a premium for organic produce. Avoid this by buying directly from the producer through farmers markets, box schemes and farm shops.

Isn't local produce more important than organic?

Whilst buying locally is great it is not a guarantee of quality. An intensive farm or battery reared hens are 'local' to some people! Preferably buy local and organic if you can. Organic, seasonal, locally produced food is going to be fresher than anything you can buy in the supermarket. Because many nutrients break down with time, local and seasonal food is often more nutritious too. But unless it's organic, it may have been grown with pesticides and on farms that are a disaster for wildlife and animal welfare.

Organic farming offers the best, currently available, practical model for addressing climate-friendly food production. This is because it sequesters higher levels of carbon in the soil, is less dependent on oil-based fertilisers and pesticides and confers resilience in the face of climatic extremes.

Organic produce has gained a reputation of only being within the grasp of rich people. Is the Soil Association concerned about this and what are they and other organisations doing to give ordinary consumers access to organic food?

Good food should be accessible to everyone. The Soil Association, which was founded by, amongst others, those campaigning for social justice and improved public health outcomes, has a core belief that access to healthy, seasonal, organic produce should **not** be a privilege for the few, and buying organic food should **not** be seen as a luxury.

Quite often organic is cheaper than branded items, and where it is slightly more costly, you are getting value added in terms of the benefits to the environment, health and communities.

As a percentage of what we earn, we currently spend less on than ever before, at the same time that diet related health problems are increasing. And then there is the problem of climate change. Food and farming is responsible for around one fifth of all the UK's greenhouse gas emissions - as much as all of our transport, or all of our domestic power. Recent research reveals that if all UK farmland was converted to organic farming, at least 3.2 million tonnes of carbon would be taken up by the soil each year - the equivalent of taking nearly 1 million cars off the road.

Many of our communities are suffering diminished life-chances due to basic lack of food access, education or other factors and we are working hard to change this through projects such as our Food for Life Partnership, Community Supported Agriculture Schemes, and the Open Farm Network. All of these reconnect people with how food is produced, fostering good food culture around strong communities.

If we are serious about tackling climate change all of us; Government, industry and the public alike; need to get serious about supporting organic and sustainable agriculture. Business as usual is no longer an option - we must start producing more sustainably, and that requires us as consumers to begin voting with our knives and forks.



Help us campaign against a dramatic escalation of industrial pig farming in the UK. If we don't act now, thousands of pigs in the future could be kept in massive factories - changing British farming forever. If you agree with us, say 'not in my banger' today and sign up below,
www.soilassociation.org/notinmybanger.aspx