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Organic food and impact on human health

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Abstract : Organic farming, also known as biological or ecological farming, should follow a well-defined regulation and the mode of production must be controlled by a certification body. Its main constraints are a minimal use of off-farm inputs, the prohibition of synthetic chemicals (fertilizers, pesticides, drugs), the use of organic fertilizers and natural pesticides, long crop rotations, the maintenance of the organic matter and microbial life in the soil, the prohibition of genetically modified plants. For animal husbandry, organic regulations concern welfare, use of organic feeds and the limitation of therapeutic treatments (especially antibiotics and hormones). Organic farming involves obligations in relation to means of production but not in respect of the nutritional, health, or sensorial qualities of the products. Foods marketed under the label "organic" must contain at least 95% ingredients from organic agriculture, possibly with food additives from a very restrictive list. The paper gives an overview of recent studies investigating the health value of organic foods and presents a framework for estimating the scientific impact of these studies. Furthermore, the problems connected with the different research approaches are being discussed. Recent human epidemiological studies associated consumption of organic foods with lower risks of allergies, whereas findings of human intervention studies were still ambiguous. The hypothesis might be that organic food increases the capacity of living organisms towards resilience. To confirm this, effect studies on specific markers for health are necessary.

Key words: Organic food, Health, Humans, Intervention.

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