

Everyone's going organic

Organic food is produce that has been grown or animal flesh that has been farmed without the use of chemicals, pesticides or genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

It not only has the benefit of being free from artificial and potentially harmful substances, its production is kinder to the planet and is therefore more sustainable. Plus, animals used for organic meat are reared naturally and are therefore not subject to the sometimes harsh conditions of intensive farming.

While experts are wary of categorically stating that organic food is 'healthier', it is certainly free of additives, has its nutrients intact and is fresher, as it is not kept artificially fresh and needs to get to shops more quickly. The downside is that organic food costs more to produce, so it costs more to buy. It is not always available as it is not artificially protected from seasonal weather or disease, and it doesn't last as long.

'Organic' doesn't apply just to food

An increasing amount of organic clothing – made using organically farmed and renewable materials – is available in South Africa. There are also organic cosmetics and home furnishings. Producers must comply with extensive regulations and are subject to rigorous inspections in order to keep their organic status.

The organic industry worldwide is growing at an incredible annual rate of 25%. According to Organics South Africa, sales of organic food in this country soared from about R5 million before 2003 (including exports) to R155 million in 2005. One thing particularly relevant to South Africa is that organic agriculture gives huge opportunities for previously disadvantaged farmers as it uses low-cost methods that are labour intensive.