

# NATURAL! NO SPRAY! SUSTAINABLE!

## A DO-IT-YOURSELF POCKET GUIDE TO NON-CERTIFIED “ORGANIC” FOOD

HELPING YOU ASK THE RIGHT  
QUESTIONS AT THE FARMERS  
MARKET.



CORNUCOPIA  
INSTITUTE

# 1

### WHO GREW THIS FOOD? WHERE WAS IT GROWN?

You are looking for an answer like “we grew this food on our farm down the road.” This helps you steer clear of re-sellers who sell mostly conventional produce that they bought at wholesale.

### WHAT IS IN SEASON RIGHT NOW?

If a stand displays vegetables or fruit that are not in season, they may not be locally grown, especially if there are a wide variety of unseasonable items.

IS IT LOCAL?

# 2

### IS YOUR FARM CERTIFIED ORGANIC?

Buying local AND certified organic should be your first choice. Your patronage rewards farmers who have made the extra investment in certification to support the overall organic community.

### IF NOT CERTIFIED, HOW WAS THIS FOOD GROWN?

If a farm is not certified organic, then an inspector is not checking to verify that a farm’s “no-spray,” “chemical-free,” “natural,” or “grown using organic methods” claims are true.

### HOW DO YOU CONTROL PESTS, WEEDS & DISEASES?

Biodiversity and soil health are essential parts of organic farming, they are the bedrock of pest and disease control. Organic weed control strategies include cover crops, mulching, cultivation, and/or hand weeding.

### WHAT KIND OF FERTILIZER DO YOU USE?

Certified organic farmers primarily depend on compost and incorporating cover crops and other organic matter into the soil for fertility. No synthetic fertilizer should be used.

HOW WAS IT  
GROWN?

# 3

### HOW DO YOU MANAGE YOUR LIVESTOCK?

Organic rules require that livestock have access to the outdoors. For chickens, ask if they are moved to new grass regularly. For cattle, ask how many animals per acre—one cow per acre is a good rule of thumb.

### WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY GRASS-FED, 100% GRASS, OR GRASS-FINISHED?

Typically, beef cattle start their lives on grass and end them in a feedlot on grain. For the most healthy fatty-acid ratio (and best animal welfare) ask if the cows were grass finished, or 100% grass-fed.

### WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY PASTURE-RAISED OR FREE-RANGE?

Pasture-raised poultry and pork likely means that the animals are outside for most of the year. However, “free-range” often refers to chickens living indoors, just not in cages.

### WHAT KIND OF FEED DO YOU GIVE YOUR CHICKENS?

If a farmer is not feeding certified organic feed to their poultry, 85% or more of what the animals are eating is likely GMO and contaminated with herbicide residues.

HOW WAS IT  
RAISED?

# 4

### CAN I VISIT YOUR FARM?

If a farm is not certified organic, visiting is the best way to verify that the farm is operating with integrity. Ask the farmer if they host an open house day when visitors are welcome.

SEE FOR  
YOURSELF

#### THE CORNUCOPIA INSTITUTE

P.O. Box 126 · Cornucopia, WI 54827  
TEL: 608-625-2000  
[cornucopia.org](http://cornucopia.org)

THE CORNUCOPIA INSTITUTE is engaged in research and educational activities supporting the ecological principles and economic wisdom underlying sustainable and organic agriculture. Through research and investigations on agricultural and food issues, The Cornucopia Institute provides needed information to family farmers, consumers, stakeholders involved in the good food movement, and the media.