



Organic food supply, demand surges locally

By Sierra Countis
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Small markets continue to sell organic, while larger chains increase their offerings

Organic sales are climbing nationwide and the story is no different in Truckee and North Tahoe.

The growth in sales of organic food has been steadily climbing 15 percent to 21 percent every year since the '90s, according to the USDA. America's demand for organic goods has surpassed its supply, and mainstream superstores are jumping on the band wagon.

Mark Griffin, vice president at Lisa's Central Market in Truckee, said he thought the biggest scare for people is the reported existence of added hormones and antibiotics in dairy products.

"People read that and think there's gotta be a better way," Mark Griffin said.

Lisa's Central Market buys from more than 600 sources all over the world in order to bring its assortment of organic items to Truckee, Griffin said.

He said he has noticed an increase in the number of people who come into the store shopping specifically for organic items, and said he thought the skepticism some people had about organic food has subsided.

"Even famous chefs are asking for organic tomatoes because they taste better," Griffin said.

John Griffin (no relation to Mark Griffin) is the supplements manager at Tahoe City's New Moon Natural Foods, which has another location in Truckee. John Griffin said the stores sell only organic produce.

"Because we're a really small store it's not cheap," Griffin said. "But it (buying organic foods) matters to people."

Superstores like Wal-Mart and Costco have been rushing to increase their supply of organic goods. Mark Griffin said Lisa's experienced gaps in their store supply of Horizon milk when Costco increased its demand for the same product. Safeway stores in Truckee and the North Shore have expanded their selection of organic produce, as well.

Bob Kleidosty, Safeway store manager in Truckee, said the chain grocery store carries more than 200 organic food items, including dairy products, bread, deli items, and produce.

"People are wanting to eat healthier," Kleidosty said.

The organic product industry makes up approximately 2.5 percent of the country's food market. There are only about 10,000 organic farms in the United States, and the farms are having a difficult time keeping up with the increasing demand, forcing many organic manufacturers to import goods from overseas.

The cost of running organic farms is higher due to added workers to tend to crops because no pesticides or synthetic fertilizers are used. The environment-friendly farming protects plant and animal life from harmful chemicals, giving people another reason to support them. However, this farming method ups the price of organic food in comparison to conventional farming methods.

Organic food is produce grown without pesticides, fertilizers, hormones, antibiotics, or other biotechnology.

How do you know if it's organic?

- Look for the United States Department of Agriculture "USDA organic" round, green label. Mark Griffin said organic items are certified with stickers or printed with the organic label on the bag to ensure consumers are getting organically grown food.

- For food items to be deemed "certified organic" they must meet three criteria: the methods and materials in production must meet the organic standard, there must be clear documentation of said method, and lastly there must be a paper trail that traces the food product

Lisa Boudreau of Lisa's Central Market in Truckee sets out organic tomatoes on Friday. Studies show an increase in the demand for organic foods in the United States.



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Even superstores like Wal-Mart are jumping on the bandwagon.

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to its relative production site.

- Check out the Organic Trade Association's Web site, www.ota.com for more information about organic farming.

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