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Myth Debunked? 'Green' Foodies Need Not Shell Out More 'Green'

September 14, 2011 - Elyse Glickman, Jewish Exponent Feature

When it comes to celebrities and trendsetters, it may genuinely seem that the grass is always greener on their side, especially when it comes to easy access to organic foods.

However, the more the rest of us educate ourselves on what's out there, the faster that paradigm will change.

Prices remain slightly higher for organic foods at supermarkets and produce shops. But organics experts note that, as the trend and the demand for cleaner food becomes more widespread and mainstream, the prices will generally be coming down.

Green is big business these days, but it doesn't have to stretch a family's wallet anymore. Physicians, nutritionists and parenting experts argue that investing a little more time and money in environmentally sound foods will help individuals and families save money in the long run -- in the form of lower medical expenses and higher productivity at work and school.

Philadelphia-based author Paige Wolf has made it her professional mission to dispel myths about organics, especially the misconception that organic food is pricey. Through her blog (www.paigewolf.com) and book, *Spit That Out: The Overly Informed Parent's Guide to Raising Children in the Age of Environmental Guilt*, Wolf offers up-to-the-minute information about shopping organic on a budget.

Wolf recommends downloading Smartphone apps available to stay up on the latest trends and tips on how to stock up and freeze organic produce when markets like Whole Foods stage a sale.

She also acknowledges that while shopping 100 percent organic may be a strain on a family's time and wallet, one way to go almost-organic inexpensively is to study up on the Environmental Working Group's (www.ewg.org/foodnews) "Dirty Dozen" fruits and vegetables (those likely to have pesticide residues, including apples, celery, strawberries and peaches) and "Clean 15" (those least likely to have pesticides if not certified organic -- onions, corn, avocados, kiwis and others protected with a removable skin; these can be purchased in the regular produce section with confidence.)

"We have to be our own consumer advocates and vote with our wallets," says Wolf.

"However, as demand increases, there will be some vendors who may take advantage of

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the situation by misinforming the consumers about what they are selling.

"For peace of mind, consumers can take advantage of the dozens of CSAs," she says of community supported agriculture programs (www.localharvest.org), "that deliver to local drop-off points directly from the farms."

As a restaurateur with a health-conscious celebrity following (including Alicia Silverstone, Shaun White and Orlando Bloom), South African-born Andy Soboil says he hopes his message about going organic via O-Burger, an "organic hamburger house" concept in West Hollywood, Calif., will help make Americans realize how accessible organic food is. (O-Burger's veggie patty, lauded on Current-TV and actress Silverstone's website, has made such an impact that a restaurant with a similar name -- since changed to Burger.Org -- and concept has opened in Philadelphia on South Street.)

"When I started this business three years ago, I found it challenging to procure the items I needed for my concept to work," admits Soboil, who has plans to open locations in Philadelphia and other East Coast cities.

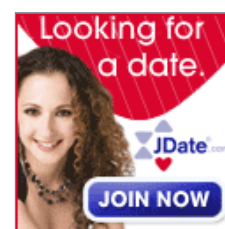
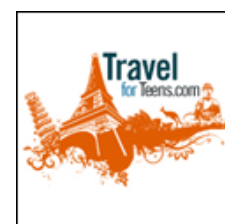
"As green and organic have become more mainstream, finding quality organic foods has become easier and more affordable."

Skeptics who may want a second opinion on the organic food revolution may look to Shari Portnoy, a New Jersey-based registered dietitian (www.FoodLabelNutrition.com), whose writings have appeared in a number of Jewish publications. Her position on organic food is that while it is better for the environment, individuals should first take a good look at their diets and weight before opening their wallets.

"The term 'organic' is so ubiquitous that marketing and ad agencies have led us to believe the term is synonymous with 'healthy,' when, in fact, it is not often a reliable indicator of a healthy product."

So is it all worth it? Money Crashers (www.moneycrashers.com/how-to-eat-organic-on-a-budget) covers the basics on shopping organic without going broke. Indeed, writes the website's Myscha Theriault: "Believe it or not, eating organic food does not have to be expensive. Over the past few years, the growing interest in organic food and its many benefits has led to more competition and increased availability."

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