

It's no secret that a healthy food movement is sweeping the nation, putting the pressure on school food service programs. In response, many schools and universities are cutting out fatty foods, implementing more green practices, buying organic, and serving more local food to students. However, not all food service programs have the sufficient funds to go 100% organic. Learn how your school can still be part of the healthy, sustainable movement without draining your bank account and what changes are being made nationwide.

***You don't have to be 100% organic.***

Yes, organic foods can be priced significantly higher than their non-organic alternatives, but it's okay to not buy 100% organic. Eating organically grown products can reduce the amount of pesticides entering your body, which could reduce illnesses in the future. It has become a concern that long-term exposure to pesticides could lead to cancer, developmental and reproductive disorders, as well as other serious illnesses. If going 100% organic is not feasible at your establishment, focus on buying organically grown fruits and vegetables that are known to contain higher amounts of pesticides.



The Environmental Working Group (EWG) reported that the following foods contain the highest amounts of pesticides if grown conventionally and should be purchased in organic form, as reported in [Farm to Table](#):

- Apples
- Celery
- Strawberries
- Peaches
- Spinach
- Grapes (imported)
- Sweet bell peppers
- Potatoes
- Blueberries (domestic)
- Lettuce

On the other end of the spectrum, your school can save money by buying non-organic versions of these foods that were reported to contain the least amount of pesticides:

- Onions
- Sweet Corn
- Pineapples
- Avocado
- Asparagus
- Sweet Peas
- Cantaloupe (domestic)
- Kiwi

- Watermelon
- Sweet Potatoes
- Mushrooms

Being aware of the amount of pesticide exposure in your fruits and vegetables is a way to save money, while still participating in the healthy food movement.

***Buying local can be advantageous.***

Establishing a farm to school approach at your school can help support the local economy and provide fresher, higher-quality food to your students. Buying locally can also help prevent over-buying, reducing the amount of food waste due to spoilage. Even though locally grown food may present greater costs, other costs can be eliminated along the way, such as payments to processing plants, packagers, and delivery expenses. Numerous schools and universities nationwide are buying from area farmers' markets or even growing their own food onsite in their very own garden. The food at farmers' markets may not all be organic, but many farmers are beginning to use more natural growing methods, presenting healthier options. Learn more about how your school can find a farm to school program here: <http://www.farmtoschool.org/>.



***What are other school food service programs doing to promote healthy eating and what sustainable practices are being adopted?***

From organic vending machines, school gardens to composting, schools and universities nationwide are stepping up their food service operations and working to instill healthier lifestyles among their students.

Schools in California and Texas have vending machines containing soy milk, some of which only charge a dollar. As it's too early to tell if the vending machines will be a success, the schools are hopeful and realize that the prices can play a huge role.

Schools are also trying to eliminate the amount of waste at meal times, by eliminating trays to reduce water use, installing clearly-labeled recycling stations, and using biodegradable packaging. In addition, many food scraps are being composted at schools and excess food is sometimes sold at reduced prices or given away to cut back on waste.

School gardens are also increasing in popularity. This not only enables fresher food to be served, but gives students the chance to get their hands dirty and acquire new skills. Elementary schools to colleges have begun growing their food onsite.

See how "[12 of the Most Healthy and Sustainable College Cafeterias](#)" are taking an active role in improving their food service operations and facilities.

***Want to make healthy food more appealing to students?***

Marketing can play an important role in encouraging students to eat healthy. It is important to present signage that displays if the food is organic, where it was purchased if local, and even health benefits of organic food. Simplicity could also be a driving factor among students. Try selling healthy snack options in homerooms, resource centers, or even well traveled areas with a [mart cart](#). This will create an easy way for students to purchase the healthier and organic options.

Being a 100% organic cafeteria may not be likely at your school, but you can still find ways to deliver healthier food to students and make your food service practices more sustainable.

Is your school participating in a farm to school program? What percentage of the food served at your school is organic?

