Rhetorical Context

Subject: Organic food v.s Conventional food

Audience: People who are misinformed, unaware, or are apathetic to the differences between the benefits of consuming organic as opposed to conventional foods.

Purpose: To persuade the audience that the consumption of organic food is better than non-organic for the overall health of consumers.

Occasion: Personal interest and curiosity as to what goes into the foods we eat influenced my interest in researching this topic even further.

Thesis Statement: The consumption of organic food and foods with no antibiotics or added preservatives is better for the overall health of consumers.
Organic Over Conventional

As we roam the aisles of the grocery stores in search for our breakfast, lunch and dinner items, milk, eggs, chicken, and other food products we consume on a daily basis, we are bombarded with hundreds of different products with many different labels. Some claim to be “all natural,” “farm fresh,” and “organic.” What do these claims really mean? Can we trust them? Where is our food really coming from and what can we do to ensure that what we are consuming isn’t negatively affecting our health? It seems that many of the health issues we face the most today are food-related. Whether it is high cholesterol, certain cancers, heart disease, obesity, etc, it seems that many of them can be directly connected to what we consume, or don’t consume as nutrition on a daily basis. Choosing to eat organic food and foods with no antibiotics or added preservatives over conventional foods and meats and poultry that are well taken care of is better for the overall health of consumers because it can greatly reduce the risks of many illnesses and diseases.

Organic food has been of course, present from the very beginning. The rise of conventional and processed foods came about when there was a higher demand for foods as well as technological advances such as refrigeration and convenience stores which allowed foods to last much longer in homes as well as on the shelves. Foods that are canned and pre-packaged include preservatives that help to prolong the shelf life of a product as well as preserve the product for the consumer. Animals that are killed for consumption are given antibiotics to prevent disease
among cattle as well as certain steroids or growth hormones in order to produce ample amounts of meat for the population. However, it should be questioned if said preservatives and antibiotics actually do more harm for the consumers than they do benefit them.

The USDA considers a product to be organic if at least ninety-five percent of the ingredients making up the product actually are organic. Foods containing less than seventy percent of organic ingredients cannot use the USDA organic seal or include the term “organic” on their labels other than on the ingredients list (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research). The phrases such as “all-natural,” “farm fresh,” and “hormone-free” may be truthful, however, they should not be confused with the term “organic” unless they have been USDA approved as being organic.

Organic farmers use fertilizers such as manure or compost to feed soil or plants. They use beneficial insects such as ladybugs and birds that help reduce the presence of pests and diseases. They feed their livestock organic foods and allow them access to the outdoors. They use a system called “rotational grazing” where the animals are moved from pasture to pasture with the intent of maximizing the growth of the plants that these types of animals eat. They also provide a combination of healthy diets as well as clean houses in order to prevent the risk of disease among their livestock.

Conventional farmers use chemical fertilizers to promote growth which can leave residue on the produce that might potentially be harmful to the consumer. They use pesticides and herbicides in order to control pest interference, however, these can also be harmful to the products and the consumer. Conventional farmers give animals antibiotics as well as growth hormones to prevent disease and produce more meat. The problem with this method is that the growth hormone can hinder the livestock and give them health problems. The antibiotics build up a resistance to
bacteria and induce sickness in livestock very quickly due to their poor living conditions. Many livestock that are taken care of by conventional farmers are kept in inclosed spaces with no access to grass or the types of forage that the animals would typically eat. For example, cows and other cattle are fed a substantial amount of corn because it makes the animals gain weight faster. This can cause many health risks to the cattle as well as the consumer and will be discussed further.

It is better to consume organically grown produce because they contain higher levels of essential nutrients, vitamins, and antioxidants that would otherwise be lost if grown in the conventional way of farming. In a review done by Walter J. Crinnon, chairman of the Environmental Medicine Program at the Southwest College of Neuropathic Medicine, a study was conducted where scientists tested whether organically grown foods were higher in vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals than conventionally grown foods. Scientists tested produce such as grapes, apples, potatoes, strawberries, oranges, plums, peaches, pears, and blueberries (in addition others) and discovered that all of the products grown organically resulted in higher levels of nutrients, antioxidants, vitamin C, iron, magnesium, and anthocyanins which are responsible for repairing cell damage caused by free radicals(8, 9). In addition to this study, scientists also found anti-cancer potential in fruits and vegetables that were grown organically. Organic vegetables suppressed thirty-seven to ninety-three percent of mutagenic activity when measured against the main carcinogen in cigarette smoke and auto exhaust. Strawberries that were grown organically blocked the reproduction of colon cancer cells as well as breast cancer cells more than conventionally grown fruits and vegetables (7, 9). The comparison done in this research between the health benefits of organic as opposed to conventional foods provides solid evidence to many
consumers as to questions they may have had concerning the issues or importance of choosing one of the food products over the other.

As stated before, livestock that are grown conventionally are fed foods that they were not biologically designed to eat and given growth hormones and antibiotics that become resistant to bacteria and cause the animals to become ill. The film Food Inc. is a documentary about the current food industry and it offers a look into the factories and farms and methods used in the production of foods we find in stores all around the nation. Cows, for example, are kept in fields where there is no grass and no sanitation. They are fed copious amounts of corn in order to become bigger and heavier faster, but their bodies are biologically made to consume grass. Many may wonder what the problem would be with feeding livestock corn, wouldn’t it be a safer and more natural way for the animals to become bigger without the help of hormones? While corn does make animals bigger because of it’s high starch content, it provides a more diverse breeding ground for the dangerous bacteria E. coli that forms in the intestines of animals as well as giving the consumer a higher fat content which can eventually put them at risk for heart disease.

Most of these cows are kept in cramped spaces with poor sanitation due to the fact that they will be slaughtered quickly, they are forced to walk in their own manure and this harbors dirty conditions and a higher risk of diseases that are later transferred to humans after the consumption of the meat. A simple solution would be to alienate the sick cattle from the healthy ones and only slaughter the unaffected ones. Unfortunately, it is not that simple. Many times it is difficult to tell which animal is sick, and because they are kept so close for such a short period of time, it is nearly impossible to tell. After many of these cows have been killed, the meat that is produced such as ground beef is actually a mixture of many cows. Essentially, the hamburger patty a family may consume for dinner could potentially be a mixture of many different cows. One of the
cows included in the patty may have been a sick one, thus, increasing the risk of illness in the consumer not just in consuming the meat, but also in consuming any vegetables that may have been fertilized with a sick cow’s manure. Cows that are fed grass are typically leaner than other cattle and have approximately eighty percent less *E. coli* in their intestines. According to an article written in *Time Magazine*, cattle that are grass fed contain higher amounts of omega 3 to omega 6 fatty acids which is believed to reduce the risk of cancer, heart disease, arthritis and improvement of cognitive functions (Kluger, 34).

Hogs and chickens are not excluded from these complications and risks. Most conventional farmers use enclosed chicken houses with ventilation where the chickens do not leave the house unless they die or are taken to be killed. In these houses, the chickens are given growth hormones in order for them to have bigger breasts. This creates problems for the health of the chickens because the weight of their upper bodies is too much for them to carry and they can only take a few steps at a time before the weight becomes too much and they have to rest. Both chickens and hogs are given antibiotics that become resistant to the types of bacteria present similar to the cows. For example, the Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), is a deadly pathogen which is mostly found in hospital settings. However, it has been showing up in hog farmers who contracted this from their animals. According to the article “What’s So Great About Organic Food?”, the University of Iowa conducted a study where epidemiologists found that forty-nine percent of the hogs tested were positive for MRSA, and forty-five percent of the humans who handled them were also in positive (Kluger, 34).

Many do not see the harmful effects conventional foods pose to consumers. They believe that the chances of their produce being infected are almost one to one million. However, these risks are something that pose a real threat to the public whether it is short term or long term. Many
should consider that the conventional food industry runs more like a business than anything else. They produce a mass amount of produce to gain profit. While we do have intercessors such as the USDA that inspect these industries and the food to make sure they are “safe”, we never really know what exactly goes into the foods we consume and there is no way of making sure that the conventional foods we are consuming are not doing our health any harm.

Of course, this is not to say that everyone should cease eating meats immediately, switch to organic foods only and become vegans. It would be unrealistic and impossible for the food industry to switch to strictly organic farming: there are simply too many mouths to feed. However, there are things people can do to decrease their chance of developing harmful diseases or infections in the short and long term. Whenever possible, buying organic produce especially meats, is always most beneficial simply because the fruits and vegetables have higher amounts of vitamins and minerals in them and the meats contain higher levels of the essential omega fatty acids we need, not to mention the lack of harmful pesticides and hormones in each of them.

Additionally, there are things we can do ourselves to also reduce our risks of sicknesses without necessarily buying everything organic. Dr. Mehmet Oz, vice chairman and professor of surgery at Colombia University suggests that people avoid synthetic colorants, buy foods without labels, wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly, peel fruits when possible, and buy seasonal fruits (TimeHealth). Food is not just something we should all enjoy, but also something that we know will provide us with the vitamins and minerals we need essential to maintaining a healthy balance and not something that we have to worry about negatively affect our health and putting us at risk for infections and chronic diseases that we face so much today.
Works Cited


