

# Additive-free food

■ Certified organic food is grown with balanced soils and no pesticides, and its popularity is catching on

By Jessica Etheridge  
for the Emerald

Forty dollars at the grocery store will give you the option of eating well or just eating.

If you're tired of macaroni and cheese, Big Macs and frozen pizza, organic foods offer a diet alternative that can be pleasing to both your health and your taste buds.

With the substantial increase in the popularity of organic foods, some larger companies are jumping onto the bandwagon. General Mills recently acquired Small Planet Foods, the producer of Cascadian Farms and other organic brands. Meanwhile, H.J. Heinz recently bought 19 percent of the Hain Food Group, which makes a variety of organic and other natural products.

Katherine DiMatteo, director of the Organic Trade Association, said it may be awhile before organic foods become the norm.

"Getting to 5 percent of food sales in 10 years would be miraculous," she said.

Organic foods are found at natural foods stores such as Sundance Foods or Oasis, but the bigger chains, such as Fred Meyer, also have health food sections where organic foods can be purchased. Another location to find organic foods is at the Eugene Farmers' Market.

According to the Organic Foods Production Association of North America, "organic" refers not to the food itself, but to how it is produced. Organic food production is based on a system of farming that maintains and replenishes the fertility of the soil. Natural foods are produced without the use of toxic pesticides and fertilizers. These products are minimally processed to maintain the

integrity of the food without artificial ingredients or preservatives.

Many farmers will advertise organic practices, such as not using pesticides, and siphon off potential organic customers, DiMatteo said. But they will do this without making the commitment to having their products comply with the certification requirements of monitoring groups.

"Certified" means that the food has been grown according to strict uniform standards, which are verified by independent state or private organizations. Certification includes inspections of farms, fields and processing facilities, detailed record keeping and periodic testing of soil and water to ensure that growers and handlers are meeting the standards that have been set.

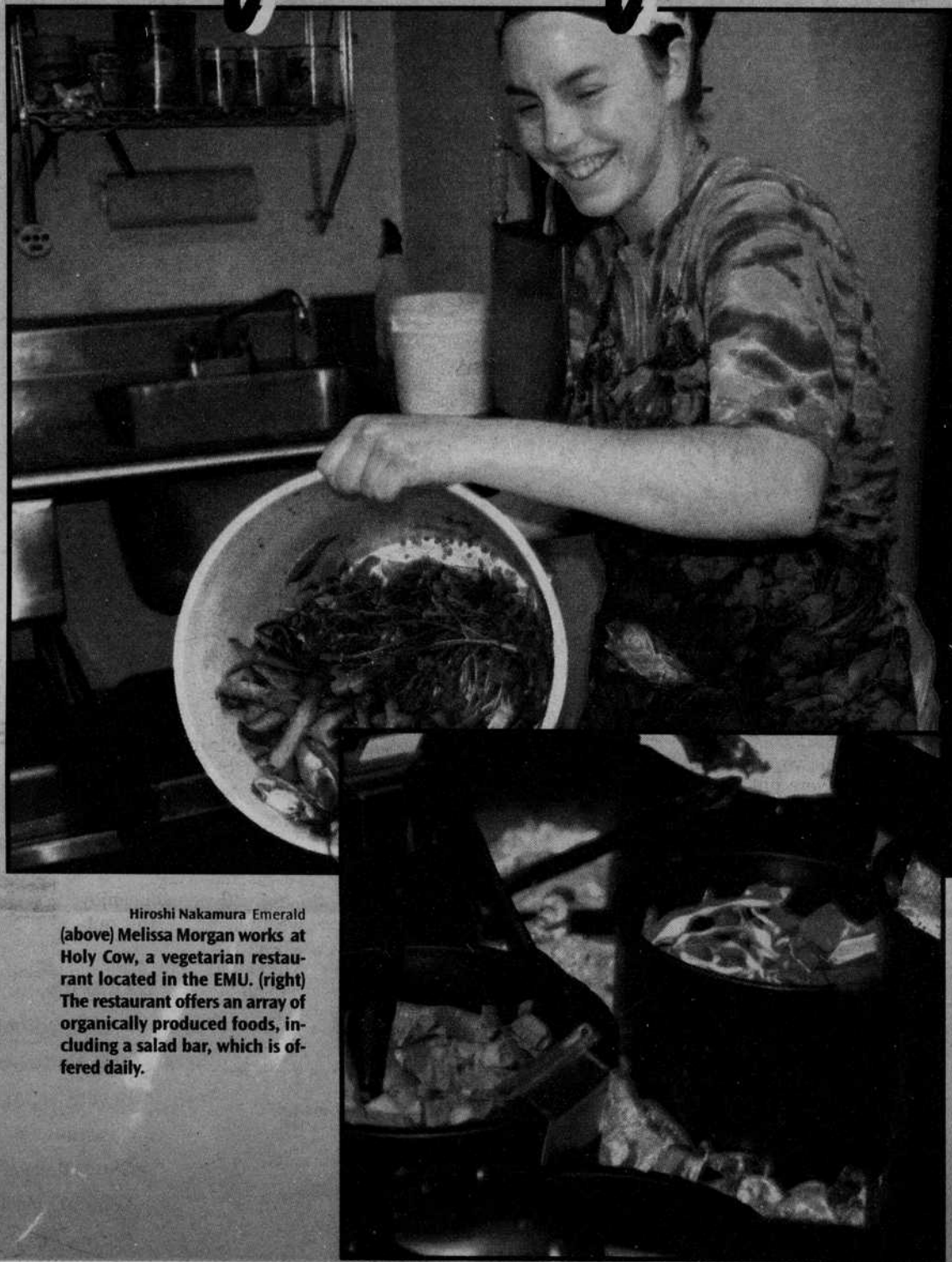
The pressing question that everyone seems to be asking is "Is organic food better for you?"

OFPANA states that there is no conclusive evidence at this time to suggest that organically produced foods are more nutritious. However, well-balanced soils grow strong healthy plants, which many believe taste better and contain more nutrients.

Many restaurants across the country, such as Holy Cow, located at the University, are using organic produce because they think it tastes better and is healthier for the consumer. Organic growers often select varieties to grow for their flavor, not only their appearance.

Prices for organic foods reflect many of the same costs as conventional foods in terms of growing, harvesting, transportation and storage. But organically produced foods must meet stricter regulations governing all these steps, making the process more labor and management intensive. Also, farming tends to be on a smaller scale.

To test the organic option for yourself, visit the Holy Cow, located on the second floor of the EMU.



Hiroshi Nakamura Emerald  
(above) Melissa Morgan works at Holy Cow, a vegetarian restaurant located in the EMU. (right) The restaurant offers an array of organically produced foods, including a salad bar, which is offered daily.

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