

ORGANIC and FREE-RANGE

By Tanya Wyatt

We're luckier than we think up here in Port Elizabeth. When I moved over from London in March of this year, I thought, at first glance, that Port Elizabeth had very little to offer in the way of free-range and organic produce. I was quite wrong, and I couldn't be happier...

Before we get into what this lovely city does provide, I think it's best we clear up some misconceptions about the terms 'organic' and 'free-range'. First off, there is a fairly big difference between organic produce in this country and organic produce in the UK, and I guess that's inevitable, since the organic movement started in the UK and this means their standards set the benchmark worldwide (specifically the British Soil Association).

When something is labelled 'organic', it should mean that the farmer's land has had no chemical fertilizers applied to it within at least a 3-year period before any plants are grown on it for consumption, and that the plants (once grown for the consumer) are not sprayed with chemical pesticides. In the case of animals, no growth hormones or antibiotics (except in extreme emergencies) are given and the feed is grown as per the above criteria. There are, of course, many other areas covered when looking at certifying for organic produce, but this is the gist of it. When looking at human health, organic food should ideally make up 100% of the diet, since it contains no harmful chemicals or hormones and is more nutrient-dense than its commercially grown counterpart. Chemical additives can cause massive hormonal and enzymatic disruption, resulting in a body that becomes weakened in immunity and inefficient in function.

The term 'free-range' means exactly that – that the animals are given free range of the land, eating natural vegetation. Although a lot of our meat in this country is free-range, it doesn't necessarily mean it's particularly healthy. Animals may still be given growth hormones and antibiotics and may have their natural food supplemented with non-organic (and often poor-quality) feed that contains a high toxic load (for example, grains that have been genetically modified and sprayed with pesticides).

Even if not organic, this method of farming is far preferable to commercial farming, first and foremost because it allows for better welfare throughout the animal's life-cycle, which impacts considerably on the quality of the meat. It also means you're generally exposed to less chemical residue.

The reason I say we're lucky in this city is that we have some really outstanding farmers of free-range produce who are organic in their approach to farming. These are people who are particularly aware of the negative impact conventional farming methods have on our health and have experienced health issues themselves as a result of eating commercially raised or grown animals, fruits and vegetables.

The supplier that stands out for me farms on land called the Wistaria Trust, in Elands River. She raises chickens, beef and lamb and whereas she was previously feeding her chickens commercial feed (which unfortunately always seems to contain some genetically modified ingredients), she has now negotiated with her chicken feed supplier to produce a feed specifically for her, one that is devoid of growth hormones (and any other medication).

This will require a huge financial outlay for her, but it means that all her chicken is clean. She doesn't use pesticides on her land, so her grass (for her cows and lambs) is also clean. Her chickens are exceptionally large and very tasty, and she competes very nicely in price with Woolworths free-range chickens (which are not, strictly speaking, free-range ... but this is a story for another time). She delivers into Port Elizabeth monthly. Her contact details are 041-9555528 and rvolker@telkomsa.net

Another pair of farmers working hard to align themselves with the organic concept are Sue and John Hewitt, producing goat's milk products, such as milk, cheese and yoghurt. These you can buy at various outlets in Port Elizabeth, including Pickfruit, Health Matters (108a Prospect Road, Walmer) and Elephant Walk (Cnr Kragga Kamma and Seaview Roads, Colleen Glen).

Thirdly, Hanson's Meat Pantry (8 Buffelsfontein Road, Mount Pleasant) supply wonderful free-range beef and lamb and – if you're in the right area – will deliver. I have spoken to their supplier and they too are adhering to organic principles as much as they can, so are able to offer a superior and safer product.

In terms of fruit and vegetables, it seems the only suppliers of certified organic produce are Woolworths and they're frequently out of stock at the moment (apparently due to flooding in their main organic farming regions in the Western Cape). Elephant Walk in Colleen Glen offers locally-produced fruit and vegetables from people in the area who grow produce for their own consumption, so it's likely that these plants haven't been too heavily sprayed with chemicals.

Personally, and professionally, I would strongly encourage readers to start their own vegetable gardens. You honestly don't need a huge amount of space (lots of veggies can be grown in pots or in hanging baskets) and, once your seeds are sown, or your seedlings planted, time spent maintaining the garden is fairly minimal. The benefits, however, are massive.

Contact details:
Tanya Wyatt, Nutrition & Lifestyle Coach
041-5811679
tanya@thehappybodyco.com

