Organic Foods Lesson Plan for Middle School Students

Learning Objectives: The goal of this lesson is to introduce students to organic farming practices and how they benefit health and the environment.

Procedure:

1. Using the information below, have students research and define "organic foods" and discuss its meaning.

Organic foods: Foods grown and processed using all natural, organic farming and manufacturing methods. Organic foods are grown and processed without synthetic pesticides, growth hormones, antibiotics, chemical fertilizers, bioengineering or ionic radiation.

- USDA Organic Foods Definition

2. Watch the brief Environmental Working Group's video about the effects of pesticides on children.

3. Research and discuss how organic foods are grown and why they are environmentally friendly. If possible, invite a local organic farmer to speak with the class. Topics to cover include:

- Farmers repel unwanted insects naturally by introducing harmless predator bugs that eat unwanted bugs or natural insecticides such as natural botanical oils.
- Farmers weed crops without pesticides (e.g., by hand, mulch, maintaining healthy soil, etc.).
- Farmers compost and rotate crops to keep them healthy.

4. Have students research and discuss how pesticides may harm the environment:

- Pesticides can harm ecology and wildlife (e.g. contaminates bodies of water and kills fish and other micro-organisms; pesticides are carried by the wind across large areas and may kill plants and other wildlife that come in contact with it).
- Pesticides may kill species other than the target species (the species it was created to kill).
- Pesticides may harm human health, development and growth.

5. Research and discuss the differences between animals raised for organic meat and dairy products and those raised for non-organic foods.

- Animals grown for non-organic foods use antibiotics and/or growth hormones which may linger in foods and be transmitted to humans upon eating. This can lead to antibiotic-resistant bacteria or other developmental issues.

  CDC: Antibiotic Use in Food Producing Animals

- How are both types of animals housed? Are they allowed free-range grazing for optimum health and well-being or are they confined in unsanitary tight spaces?

6. Using the Environmental Working Group's Dirty Dozen Plus/Clean Fifteen list, identify which foods should always be purchased organic and discuss why this is the case.

7. Discuss the USDA organic labeling program using the USDA Labeling Guide.

8. Break students up into two groups -- one group in support of organic foods and one group in support of non-organic foods. Have them debate the pros and cons of each type and come to a consensus about which is better.

9. End the lesson by asking students if they will incorporate organic foods into their diets (if they do not already). Discuss why or why not.