



sustainable table

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Sustainable Table?

Sustainable Table is a consumer program founded to celebrate the sustainable food movement, educate individuals on food-related issues, and build community through sustainable food.

Sustainable Table introduces consumers to issues surrounding today's agricultural system and what's happening with food, in particular, the meat and dairy supply. Rather than feel discouraged about problems with the food supply, Sustainable Table celebrates the possibilities and realities of the growing consumer movement toward sustainability. Materials are informative, entertaining and action oriented.

Since there is no "sustainable" label, eating sustainably means understanding the issues, getting educated about food, and knowing the people who grow or sell it.

Who developed Sustainable Table?

Sustainable Table was founded by Diane Hatz and developed by the nonprofit organization GRACE. Sustainable Table was launched in 2003 to educate consumers about issues surrounding the food supply and to encourage individuals to switch to healthier, more sustainable eating habits.

How are *The Meatrix* films and the Eat Well Guide related to Sustainable Table?

The Meatrix films (www.themeatrix.com) and the Eat Well Guide (www.eatwellguide.org) are the first two projects of Sustainable Table. *The Meatrix* films were created to educate consumers about the problems with industrial meat and dairy production. The Eat Well Guide was developed to offer a solution to the factory farm problem by making it easy for consumers to locate, via an online directory, sustainably raised meat, poultry, dairy, and eggs from farms, stores, restaurants, and other outlets in the United States and Canada.

What is sustainable agriculture?

Sustainable agriculture is a way of growing food that is healthy, does not harm the environment, respects workers, is humane to animals, provides a fair wage to the farmer, and supports farming communities. Characteristics of this type of agriculture include: conservation and preservation, biodiversity, animal welfare, economic viability and socially just.

What is a factory (or industrial) farm?

The definition of a factory farm varies from state to state, but these industrial facilities share many characteristics, including:

- Hundreds to thousands of animals (mainly cows, pigs, chickens or turkeys) confined tightly together and provided little or no access to sunlight, fresh air or room for natural movement. Some facilities produce millions of animals each year.

(more)

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- Public health problems, including the overuse of antibiotics and food borne illness
- Liquid waste systems or “lagoons” to store raw manure
- Buildings that confine animals indoors and control their environment
- The corporation that owns or controls the industrial farm also owns the feed company, slaughterhouse, and final stages of production
- A decrease in neighboring property values because of odor and water pollution

Is organic food the best food for you?

Not necessarily. If you can only shop in a larger supermarket and don't have access to local farmers or farmers markets, it might be easiest to look for organic food. With organic food, you know you are getting food that has no added hormones, no antibiotics, no chemical pesticides or fertilizers, no genetically engineered ingredients, and no irradiation. So organic may be the best option in your area and it is much better than conventionally grown or factory farmed food.

Sustainable Table promotes locally grown, sustainable food from small family farmers. We encourage consumers to learn about the issues and know what questions to ask, and then to go down to a farm or farmers market and ask how the food was raised or produced. Each person needs to decide for themselves what they want and don't want in their food. Large corporations have recently begun to produce what is being called industrial organics – food that tends to be raised in huge monocultures and shipped thousands of miles and where animals are kept indoors with very limited access to pasture or outdoors. In addition, many farmers gave up their organic certification when the national organic program was implemented, yet they are still using organic (or what we call ‘beyond organic’) methods.

So, organic is definitely good – but if you learn about the issues, you might find even better options in your area. What's important to remember is to try to buy as locally as possible.

What are the differences between sustainable and organic agriculture? When is organic not sustainable?

Both organic and sustainable agriculture strive to preserve the land for generations to come. They have many similarities, but one system is not necessarily better than the other. The main difference between the two methods of production is that an independent third-party certifier approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) must certify organic food production yearly. Sustainable food has no independent certification process, and the consumer must rely on the word of the farmer. In addition, sustainability is more of a philosophy or way of life, whereas organic is a specific set of government-verified standards.

The issue can be very confusing, which is why Sustainable Table aims to help educate consumers. For example, even though organic is certified by the USDA, large corporations have found ways to raise dairy cows in confinement, and use huge acreages to plant crops and ship food thousands of miles to sell. These practices are not considered sustainable. The bottom line for any consumer is to know where your food comes from. By appreciating how your food was raised and produced, you can begin to celebrate your meals, rather than just eat!