

## Understanding

### Current Food Lingo

As we have become more interested in the quality of our food and where it comes from, producers have begun to use different terms on packages. It is important to know exactly what these terms do and do not mean, so you can decide whether a particular product is right for your family and budget. Here are some brief definitions to help.

#### Organic food

The National Organic Program of the USDA (US Department of Agriculture) regulates all farming, wild crop harvesting, and handling operations that seek to sell products as organically produced. Organic crops are grown without common fertilizers, including petroleum and sewage sludge-based fertilizers. Animals are given only organic feed, have access to the outdoors, and are not given growth hormones or antibiotics. USDA also regulates the importing and labeling of organic products from other countries.

#### Natural food

Despite the widespread use of the term on food packages, no government agency has a precise definition for natural. In general, to be called natural, a product must be free of artificial or synthetic ingredients or additives, including color, flavor, or any ingredient “not normally expected.” This means that lemonade flavored with beet juice or cheese colored with paprika cannot be called natural. The FDA (Food and Drug Administration) continues to evaluate natural claims on a “case-by-case basis.”

#### Local food

Although ‘locally grown’ food is currently popular, the term does not have a legal definition. One national chain defines local as anything grown in the same state as it is sold; another says that it is anything grown 7 hours or less from the store. The definition most commonly accepted by consumers is that local food is grown within 100 miles of where it is purchased. Since there is no definition for local, you may want to ask where a food was grown and /or processed.

#### Food mile

Environmental concerns about the amount of fuel and resources used to transport food around the world have led to the concept of a food mile. This is the distance that food travels from where it is grown to where it is purchased and eaten. The more food miles, the less sustainable and environmentally desirable that food is. Produce that is flown or shipped from South America involves thousands of food miles, whereas produce purchased at a local farmer’s market may involve fewer than 50 or 100 food miles.

**Going Green: Simple Steps for Healthy Families**