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# gobar times

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A DOWN TO EARTH SUPPLEMENT FOR THE YOUNG AND CURIOUS

## GRABBING SOME

# Organic

## STUFF



*Become an aware consumer by  
ploughing through organic farming and  
harvesting info about its products.*



Cover Story

# UMM... IS THIS ORGANIC?

Become a smart consumer by learning how to pick out the truly 'Organic' stuff from amongst a host of food packets carrying various complicated labels.



Anamika Yadav



Vineet Kumar



**H**ello, friends! The other day, I went grocery shopping with my niece, Prisha, for buying some chemical-free and safe food. She's just like you, always eager to learn new things. As we walked through the store, Prisha explored all kinds of fruits, spices, chocolates, and whatnot!

But something really confused her—lots of description on the products she'd picked up. An apple proudly proclaimed itself as 'Organic' and another announced itself as 'Fresh'. A tetra pack of juice declared itself as '100% Natural' and a box of ghee held 'Pure' as a badge of honour. Something else read 'Authentic' and yet other was 'Genuine.' There were just so many labels!

Prisha wondered, "*Bua* (aunt in Hindi), what do all these different words mean? Isn't 'organic' the same as 'natural'? ...Why is mustard oil calling itself 'Pure' and olive oil, simply, as 'Original'?" And why are some products calling themselves 'Real' and others fancying as "Traditional"? I thought, buying organic stuff would be so easy!..."

Prisha knew that organic food is healthier but, "Is there something woefully wrong with other non-organic food products in the market?" she enquired.

Wow! It's when Prisha bombarded me with so many questions that I realized how confusing those labels can be for all you little champs. So, let's decode these various commercial terms and clear the buzz around 'organic food.'

## The World of Food Labels

Food labels? It's those jazzy words that are mentioned on a food packet that Prisha pointed out before. Let's dive into their world and discover how they are regulated for our well-being because, you know, they can be so misleading!

In our country, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) frames rules about the words one can use on a food packet. FSSAI monitors them as per the Food Safety and Standards (Advertising and Claims) Regulations, 2018. It's just a list of rules. Don't worry!

So, if any food item claims to be X and offers Y inside its packet, then it will be penalised. Thus, in this way, we can trust a food item based on its label.

## Call It 'Organic'

**Organic:** An organic food product is the one produced through organic farming. It avoids synthetic pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and genetically-modified organisms. When such an item is made from a single ingredient, it is labelled 'Organic.' To ensure that its status is organic, it is certified by our government under its Participatory Guarantee System for India (PGS-India). This certification allows an organic product to carry the 'Jaivik Bharat' logo and labels like 'India Organic,' 'PGS-India Green,' and 'PGS-India Organic.'

Different countries have their own logos, like the USA has 'USDA Organic' and European Union has 'EU Organic' for their organic foods. Do you know that Sikkim is the world's first fully organic state and has its own brand called the 'Organic Sikkim'? (Hey! Quickly locate Sikkim on a map.)

**Certified Organic:** This is another label for organic foods. The condition required for earning this label is the same as for the 'Organic' label. Just that, a 'Certified Organic' item should also be a multi-ingredient product and have a majority of its ingredients of a certified origin.

However, many organic farmers sell their produce first-hand to people, without any labels, on mutual trust.

## Random Food Labels

Sometimes food companies try to misinform consumers by selling their products using terms like, 'Natural,' 'Fresh,' 'Pure,' 'Traditional,' 'Original,' etc. The FSSAI has defined guidelines for their usage and takes strict action against their violation. However, we too should remain vigilant about such gimmicky branding—it doesn't guarantee any product to be organic or free from toxins.



Jaivik Bharat





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**Natural:** A food package labelled as ‘Natural’ contains ingredients that are solely obtained from plants, animals, microorganisms, or minerals, and do not have any additives. Simple processes like cooking, freezing, or fermentation are used for making it and its packaging is chemical-free. Multi-ingredient natural foods can be called ‘Made with Natural Ingredients’ if all the ingredients included meet the required standard.

**Fresh:** This means that a certain food has undergone minimal processing. It has been washed, peeled, or cut, and nothing much more. Note that if it has been processed to last long, we can't call it ‘Fresh.’ Freezing a food quickly while it is still fresh can be stamped as ‘Freshly Frozen’.

**Pure:** Food stuffs that brag themselves as ‘Pure’ contain only one ingredient, no additives, and minimal contaminants. Multi-ingredient foods of this sort can be called ‘Made with Pure

Ingredients,’ if all the constituents meet the same purity standards.

**Authentic, Genuine, Real:** These words are endorsed on a food container when the food is truly what it claims to be. If it is used to describe something, then it needs to explain why it is special or unique.

**Traditional:** It means that the way of making some food or its recipe has been around for a long time, like thirty years, without changing much. That's when it can be treated as ‘Traditional.’

**Original:** It is used for the foods that are made in a specific way, which hasn't changed much over time. It can also refer to the initial way of making something or when a product is revived—as it existed before—after being unavailable for a long duration. That's when it be claimed as ‘Original.’

**Other labels:** Apart from the ones discussed here, there are many arbitrary labels which you'll find on the shelves of any store and these may or may not be true. (Here's a homework: define 'vegan'!)

**An organic food is the one which is produced through organic farming. It avoids synthetic pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and genetically-modified organisms.**

## What's Organic Really?

You know, most foodstuffs on our tables today are grown using excessive chemicals than recommended, causing environmental, health, and livelihood issues. To tackle this, our government is promoting organic farming, which is a special,





environment-friendly way of cultivating food. It is advancing it through schemes like Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana, Mission Organic Value Chain Development for Northeast Region, and National Mission on Natural Farming.

Before the Green Revolution of the 1960s, which was launched to address our growing food demand through high-yielding crops and artificial inputs, our country predominantly practised organic agriculture. Organic farms use natural compost made from plant leftovers or animal waste, like cow dung. They use natural extracts made from various botanical sources, like neem leaves, as insecticides and pesticides. They also practice local farming techniques, like crop rotation, to control weeds and enrich soil nutrition. All these methods make their yield really nutritious and safe to eat. And healthy food means a healthy country!

By the way, you can also muddy your hands at organic farming in your kitchen gardens!

### Organic Benefits

Organic food is like a superhero for our health! When we choose organic, we select food that doesn't have harmful residues which trigger diseases inside our bodies. Plus, organic fields require less irrigation and fertilization, which makes them cost-effective, eco-friendly, and also climate-friendly. Not only that, by preferring organic food, we also fund the incomes of our poor farmers. Do you know that India ranks ninth

in the world in terms of having maximum area under organic cultivation and first in terms of the population of organic farmers? So, opting for organic farming is a win-win situation for us!

### Organic Challenges

A major challenge regarding organic food is the lack of public awareness about its benefits. But, now that you have learnt about it, do spread the word about its advantages among your family and friends.

Next, the market for organic food is very limited so it is not economical for farmers to practise it on a large-scale. This also constraints their product's supply for us. So, now onwards when you go grocery shopping, make sure you shortlist organic veggies and fruits in your basket.

Further, you can also proactively approach any organic farmers nearby and source cereals from them directly. Just as you have family doctors, you can have a family farmer too! In this way, you can support local farmers committed to sustainable food practices and ensure a regular supply of organic produce for your home. Remember: it's only when you ask for more organic, farmers will grow more organic.

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Lakshmi Venugopalam

# This Van Mahotsav, its Mangoes

**Celebrating the forest festival by relishing the joys and culture of mangoes in this season**

**E**very July, when the Van Mahotsav is held, the Chipko Movement is recalled. But here's the thing: big trees are no longer as respected as they were in my time. The balcony of any flat, nowadays, overlooks a sea of buildings and sad-looking pocket gardens. Green spaces and roads with trees on the sides are a luxury. I wonder why. Are there any trees on-route to your school? Near your home?

Trees provide home to animals and shade to us in scorching summers. We get wood from them to build houses, and even to craft your cricket bats and hockey sticks; and get paper to make books. We make Ayurvedic medicines from their buds, flowers, and leaves; and dyes from their bark.

At the rate they are being cut, we'll have to go to a zoo to see them someday!!! Trees were here since millions of years, before animals or us. But they cannot protect themselves. We have to do that.

Let's start with our favourite, mango! I don't think anyone says 'no' when offered a mango. It's the fruit we relish from Kanyakumari to Kashmir and Porbandar to Puri. Foreigners too love and grow it in as far as Mexico, Florida, and Hawaii. Its best varieties are also available in Dubai and London now.

A Hindu myth says that Manu, the first man, asked Lord Brahma, the Creator of the Universe and everything in it, to grant a fruit which could be enjoyed by everyone. The Lord said, '*evamastu*' (so be it) and poured a few drops from his *kamandal* (pot) into the soil. Thus, sprung the mango plant! (Yes, it's an *Amar Chitra Katha* story!)

Sushruta, the father of Ayurveda, considered mangoes beneficial for our heart and lungs, and taught his disciples about the medicinal properties of its flower, bark, and seed. He even believed that mangoes help us to think better. Well, they certainly help us feel better when the *aam panna* cools us down from the hot sun. Doesn't, it? Not only is it tasty, but is also rich in vitamins, iron, magnesium, and proteins. That's why, Emperor Ashoka too got mango trees planted all over his kingdom. In fact, a fruit resembling mango was also identified in the Harappan artefacts, as some scholars claim historically. Are you surprised?

Well, your mothers and grandmothers will tell how important mango leaves are during festivals. Even now, I fondly remember how children in my village competed to knock down the *kachchi kairi* (raw mangoes) with stones. Secretively climbed its trees to pluck them and happily rode on the swings tied to its branches. This is the fun city-kids miss!

Just as mango, the mahua, jamun, deodar, and bel are also very useful trees. Find out about them. That's how you'll learn more about trees and take care of them. I know what you are thinking: who ever listens to children? But with practical knowledge, you can become true tree warriors, fighters, and protectors.

*The author is a 76-year-old independent writer based in Pune. Previously, she co-curated the Minaaz Art Gallery, Hyderabad and managed the 'Malle Thota' (Jasmine garden) village farm in the outskirts.*





In this modern era, students inhabit a tech-dominated environment. No wonder, it motivates them to study Science. With the everyday progress of the digital world, it is expected that they'll have a bright future. On the fall side, the Commerce and Arts see a declining trend. It's no news that in our country, enormous chunks of high schoolers pursue engineering or 'doctory'. There's certainly an increasing 'demand' in these fields but a lack of interest amongst candidates is draining workplaces. In fact, many kids aren't even much informed about their subjects and their 'scope'. Even if they are, their parents dissuade them from enrolling into other streams.

Commerce is definitely not a priority because it 'lacks' good income and job security. People brand it as a subject of 'losers,' and a wastage of time and money. Technology and Medicine are indeed crucial but focusing recklessly on them is an injustice to students. What's more: an unbalance has seeped into these specializations. Imagine a country filled with abundant Science professionals and lacking efficient wealth managers. This problem is critical enough to suspend an entire country's economy. Degraded financial organizations supervising stocks



Saniya Malik

or funds can render the markets into a no-way-out position. This has sunk many countries into indebtedness. Hence, the call for awareness is alarming.

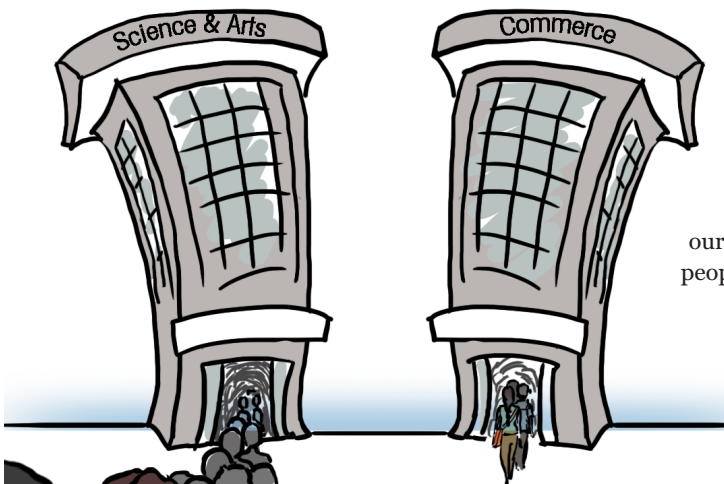
Finance is actually the study of cash and investments, and its management by individuals, businesses, and governments. It is a broadly concerned with money

management and mainly aims to assist people in saving, handling, and growing their money. As a field of little importance, myths are a sure guest. But, to be honest, this subject promises huge prospects. It is due to the mob mentality of our school goers that deems the subject unprofitable. The point of job security is genuine, however, the fact is nothing is secured in this world. Unemployment is skyrocketing among engineers too.

The bitter truth of our society is that no one has the courage to step out of their safe zone. That's why, every parent here wants to follow the crowd. The worst is yet to come but can be overcome with some effort. At first, create awareness within yourself and then in the society. In this 21st century, every student should remain fully updated—gain as much information about their careers as possible. They can seek help from their teachers or advisors. They can fruitfully use the counselling sessions

held in their schools, which many skip due to their overconfidence. Taking part in MUNs (Model United Nations) and other academic events will also be a great opportunity. Such things will develop their understanding of finance, which will also make them more industry-prepared. Planning one's future will turn him/her into a responsible citizen of our motherland! At last, it all depends upon how people take these suggestions.

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## SCIENCE, COMMERCE, OR ARTS?

Ignore the rat race of engineering and medicine, and hear this daring voice for choice that passionately invests into 'Commerce'



A photograph of a woman in a black sari and a young boy wading through a flooded street. The woman is holding a large yellow umbrella. The boy is looking back over his shoulder. The street is filled with brown floodwater, and rain is falling heavily. In the background, there are trees and a car.

# NO RAIN NO PAIN

In the past 123 years, the warmest February of our country was in 2023. A little later, Biparjoy became the most long-lasting cyclone of our past half-century. Currently, Delhi recorded the highest rainfall in four decades. Flash floods, landslides, and extreme weather events are wreaking havoc across the country and India's battle with natural disasters is reaching alarming proportions. As all this fury becomes the new normal, experts attribute it to the escalating levels of climate crisis and global warming.