MY FOOD SHOPPING "PHILOSOPHY"

The food media—magazines, blogs, websites, television, and cookbooks—can be both inspiring and intimidating. You might think that having the best, priciest, hardest-to-track-down ingredients is the key to cooking.

My approach is simpler than that: You buy the best ingredients available and combine them in ways that make sense on any given day. An omelet made with farm-fresh eggs, a locally raised chicken roasted with fragrant olive oil, sliced tomatoes straight from the garden—these experiences cannot be duplicated with supermarket ingredients. But those ingredients are precious and rare and therefore unrealistic for most people to eat every day.

So, shop at the farmers’ market, corner vegetable stand, and the grocery store. When you can, order online to buy real foods (like grains, beans, and such) directly from the source or a reputable food retailer. Spend your money on the best ingredients you can afford, invest in some pantry staples, and skip the Himalayan pink salt and black truffles.

What about organic? Organic options are everywhere now, even in small supermarkets. So, like many other people, I buy more organic animal foods and produce than I did twenty or even ten years ago. I also get lots of foods directly from their source, either at a farmers market or by shopping online. The choice is personal, financial, and yes, political. It becomes a cooking question when nutrition, freshness, and flavor are involved.

Here’s what I continue to say and do: If you can garden—even just some herbs—go for it. Choose local vegetables from a conscientious farmer over organic vegetables from a multinational corporation. Buy the best food you can find when you can’t find local. Avoid overly processed anything, organic or otherwise. And be flexible; there may be times when the best vegetable you can find is not only not local and not organic but might even be frozen.