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Photo by Kathy Haveman

Joe "King" Carrasco and his band rocked and reeled for a large crowd at Sneakers on Saturday night.

Organic foods natural preservative alternatives

By M. ELAINE HORN
 Of The Battalion Staff

Shelton's chickens don't do drugs. They are "natural" chickens, free of growth hormones, color enhancers and chemical additives, and one of many different natural foods produced by Shelton, a natural-foods manufacturer.

Shelton's chickens are a typical example of the natural food lines carried by stores such as the Brazos Natural Foods Store in Bryan.

Robert Atkins, co-owner of Brazos Natural Foods, describes natural and organic foods as those as close to their original state as possible. They are grown without chemical or synthetic pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers, and processed and packaged without preservatives, dyes, waxes or other chemical additives.

Gail McGlamery, a senior wildlife and fisheries science major, prefers eating natural and organic foods because she thinks they are healthier and taste better.

She says that for foods such as peanut butter, she wants to avoid chemicals. "I feel better knowing all that's in it is peanuts," she says.

In appearance, natural foods differ noticeably from conventional foods. The colors are not as bright, and the textures are not as smooth.

McGlamery says people are used to seeing perfectly red tomatoes and perfectly unscathed vegetables, and they shy away from natural and organic foods that are not as pretty.

Although the foods may look more rugged and less perfect, she says she feels better eating foods without preservatives, additives, and extra sugars and salts.

"My philosophy is if I want something salty, I want to put the salt on it," she says. "If I want something sweet then I'll sweeten it myself."

Many people question the health benefits of natural and organic foods. Chemicals and additives used in the United States are tested and approved by the Federal Drug Administration, so why should people be concerned about them?

Atkins says that although individual chemicals are tested by the FDA, the effects of multiple chemicals have yet to be determined.

Standards for labeling foods as organic or natural vary from state to state. In Texas, food is certified "organic" when the farm that produces it has been using organic agriculture

methods for three years. However, guidelines for the term "natural" have not been set.

"Natural" has no official meaning, Atkins says, and in different places, it means different things. "Natural" has been used and abused by the food industry over the past few years," Atkins says.

If his store discovers a product which is labeled and marketed as natural but actually contains additives, he will not continue to stock it.

McGlamery says she likes stores to guarantee that their foods are natural or organic, especially for items such as produce.

The price of organic and natural foods often runs 20 percent 50 percent higher than conventional foods.

For example, coffee at Brazos Natural Foods costs more than \$7 a pound on sale, while gourmet coffee at local supermarkets costs less than \$6 a pound.

Atkins says the coffee beans in a supermarket coffee are sprayed with pesticide which is banned in the country but often used in the countries where coffee beans are grown. The beans in his coffee are not sprayed with pesticides.

Atkins says that economics cause natural foods to be more expensive. In mass production operations, large manufacturers can spread out their costs over many packages, so the unit price goes down.

In the natural foods market, fewer people are doing business, so the price stays up.

McGlamery says that on her budget she can go to a natural food store only about once every two months. For her regular shopping, she goes to the health food section of local supermarkets.

She says that natural foods are definitely more expensive but she gets what she pays for. "If I had enough money," McGlamery says, "I'd buy them all the time."

Despite its small size — about the size of an average convenience store — Brazos Natural Foods stocks a wide variety of products. The shelves and bins contain everything from grains, flours, and pastas to juices, milks, and toaster pastries.

One drawback to organic and natural foods is that without additives and preservatives, the foods have substantially shorter shelf life. But Atkins says his products sell quickly so deterioration is not a problem.



Photo by Kathy Haveman

Displayed is a selection of organic and all-natural foods.

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