

My Kids Don't Eat Organic. Here's Why

Last summer my family joined a CSA (short for Community Supported Agriculture). We buy a share of a farm's output over the season, pay up front, and receive a box of fruits and vegetables every week throughout the spring, summer and early fall. Part of our share includes picking a certain amount of fruits and vegetables ourselves on the farm, which bills itself as organic. The farm sees it as free labor, as a mom, I see it as a learning opportunity. My daughter learned about how her food was grown and got countless hours of outdoors time in the fresh air.

One day as I was picking raspberries, my daughter ran off ahead to pick alone. Given that she is a toddler, far more berries ended up directly in her mouth than in her pail. A farm worker approached us and told me "You really should wash those before she eats them. There's a lot of junk and pesticides out here, on the berries in particular." I laughed and teased about the farm's status as organic, one of the few CSAs in the area that boasts of this. He looked at me grimly and reiterated the warning.

What exactly is organic and why do people pay sometimes a 100% markup for the designation?

In my supermarket, there's a gullible section of the produce aisle. It's not exactly labeled as such, but it might as well be. You can get bananas, cauliflower, lettuce and more that looks and tastes exactly like their non-organic cousins, but for \$1 or more per item. Customers think it's healthier, and parents convince themselves that buying fewer fruits and vegetables but spending more is worth it to keep their children "safe" on organic. Like most food crazes, organic is a marketing ploy – something I tell my kids when they reach

for the wrong kind of apples.

Over the summer *Forbes* published a blistering expose on the hoax that is organic produce. Henry Miller [wrote](#),

*Many people who pay the huge premium—often more than 100%—for organic foods do so because they're afraid of pesticides. If that's their rationale, they misunderstand the nuances of organic agriculture. Although it's true that synthetic chemical pesticides are generally prohibited, there is a lengthy list of exceptions listed in the Organic Foods Production Act, while most "natural" ones are permitted. However, "organic" pesticides can be toxic. As evolutionary biologist Christie Wilcox explained in a 2012 *Scientific American* article ("Are lower pesticide residues a good reason to buy organic? Probably not."): "Organic pesticides pose the same health risks as non-organic ones."*

Most parents, myself included, spend a great deal of time and energy teaching their kids about healthy eating and being responsible global citizens. Because both are important to me, when my kids reach for an organic item, I give them a variation of the admonishment, "We don't buy that; organic is a scam." I say it loudly, hoping other kids and parents around us will hear me.

One of the most important values parents can give their children is an understanding of the importance of caring for the world around them. For hardline progressives, that involves recycling. The rest of us care more about people.

What does buying organic do to the world's food resources? Here in the United States we are lucky enough to never fear mass hunger. This isn't true in many other corners of the world.

In the *New York Times*, Roger Cohen [described](#) his frustration with the privilege of those who promote the organic food

industry,

To feed a planet of 9 billion people, we are going to need high yields not low yields; we are going to need genetically modified crops; we are going to need pesticides and fertilizers and other elements of the industrialized food processes that have led mankind to be better fed and live longer than at any time in history.

I'd rather be against nature and have more people better fed. I'd rather be serious about the world's needs. And I trust the monitoring agencies that ensure pesticides are used at safe levels – a trust the Stanford study found to be justified.

Mothers never want to raise selfish children, but teaching them to only eat organic does just that. For the sake of our feelings alone (based on no real science about the health benefits of organic food), those who fuel the organic industry are endangering the diets of countless of others around the world who aren't fortunate enough to stroll down their grocer's aisle and choose among twenty different kinds of apples.

“If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.” The adage could describe many things: a boyfriend, a job offer, an email from Nigeria about a prince with a large bank account. It also perfectly illustrates the industry around “organic” foods and products. Nobody wants to raise a sucker, which means raising kids with a healthy skepticism about the claims presented to them.

From the emails they get in their inbox to the contents of their cereal boxes, kids should grow up encouraged to ask questions and seek out reliable evidence. In her [book](#), *Teachable Moments*, Marybeth Hicks encourages parents to use moments from everyday life to teach kids about life's bigger lessons instead of having scheduled, intense and awkward

lectures on the couch every few months. Walking down the organic produce aisle just such an opportunity for a Teachable Moment, when parents can and should have a meaningful conversation with their kids about the organic food industry and its impact on individual consumers and the wider world.

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