

Both small and large farms are needed for 'optimal' sustainable farming system

Small farms are inefficient but are more likely to grow healthful foods and might be more environmentally friendly, while large farms are sometimes environmentally unfriendly but raise large amounts of food efficiently and affordably.

The idea that we should replace the large, polluting farms with the small, diversified farms ignores what might be the best solution: Get the large farms to stop polluting. There are some hopeful signs that it's already happening. Cover cropping and no-till farming, which help improve soil health and reduce runoff, are on the rise. Recent droughts have underscored the importance of building up organic matter, which retains water, in soil.

Small and large both have benefits. Saying we need both isn't some kind of namby-pamby, can't-we-all-get-along compromise. It's the optimal system, with each kind filling a different demand.

What if advocates on each side focused on getting their own house in order? If you're in the small camp, work on efficiency. Perhaps you can reconsider organic's natural/synthetic line in the sand, which increases costs without benefiting either customer or environment.

Down the line, think about incorporating genetically modified crop varieties that are disease- or drought-resistant. Find ways to cut back on waste. And those in the large, why not make some of the basic organic-style practices, like cover cropping and no-till, standard? Consider a target level of organic matter in the soil, to cut back on water use. How about strengthening the conservation practices required for farms to receive federal dollars, even linking them to results like runoff reductions or increased organic matter?

Read the full, original article: [Small vs. large: Which size farm is better for the planet?](#)