

Wal-Mart moves to cash in on organic suspicion of GMOs, conventional foods

Sales of organic food are booming again. The growth in sales of organic products in the U.S., food and nonfood, had slowed to 4.6 percent in 2009 but has since rebounded. Sales rose 11.5 percent in 2013, to \$35 billion, according to the Organic Trade Association.

Now the organics industry is bracing for its next big shakeup. Wal-Mart Stores, the nation's largest grocer, is expanding its selection of organic foods. And it's promising to sell the stuff at the same prices it sells nonorganic food.

Most organic food costs at least 25 percent more than regular fare. Wal-Mart says it will keep prices low by using Wild Oats, a well-known name in organics, as its supplier.

Retail's romance with organics has squeezed Whole Foods, which transformed the industry in the '90s by lavishly displaying organic food and repositioning it as delicious and upscale.

Studies differ on whether organic food, produced without synthetic pesticides, antibiotics, or chemical fertilizer, is any more healthful than conventionally grown produce, but that hasn't slowed its appeal. "There's a growing belief among a lot of educated people, and it's filtering into the mainstream, that organic is a better way to eat," says Jim Hertel, managing partner for Willard Bishop, a retail consulting company in suburban Chicago.

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