

Point-counterpoint: Organic vs. conventional farming—which is best?

Some think organic one day could replace conventional agriculture. But do the technological limits that define organic farming—no synthetic fertilizers, irradiation or genetic engineering, for starters—leave it less room for growth?

Backers of conventional agriculture say they have the same goals as organic farmers, including better environmental stewardship. But they add that their ideas aren't constrained by a particular philosophy or by definitions.

Meanwhile, both sides must balance concerns about the environment and health with realities of the market in a race to find solutions that will feed more people with limited resources.

Catherine Badgley, an associate professor in the department of ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of Michigan, makes the case that organic food can feed the world. Arguing against that is Steve Savage, who consults for the agricultural industry and also writes about food and farming.

YES: Our Current Global Food System Does a Lot of Harm

By Catherine Badgley

The global food system is at the root of many environmental and health crises. Synthetic fertilizers cause dead zones in our oceans. Fossil fuels hasten global warming while enabling harvests of wasteful and unhealthy foods. Mechanized, industrial farms decimate rural employment and lead to misuse of vital resources on a massive scale.

Organic farming can reduce these problems, grow enough food for the world and provide robust economic returns.

NO: Organic's Yields Are Too Low, and It Limits Innovation

By Steve Savage

There are many reasons why organic-only agriculture will never feed the world.

Let's start with yields. Studies have shown that organic yields are lower than yields of conventional farming. Detailed survey data from the National Agricultural Statistics Service for 2011 shows that for organic farming to equal conventional farming's production of 14 staple, human-focused food crops in the U.S., 14.5 million more acres would be required—an area roughly equal to all of the farmland in Indiana. Extrapolate that to the world, and it's easy to see there is no possibility of an organic-only food supply.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: [Can Organic Food Feed the World?](#)