

Reality of organic food doesn't match pastoral image

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The organic farming movement started as a response to industrial-scale agriculture. The goal of the movement was to raise food in a more “natural” way, using traditional techniques. The image of a 19th-century-style family farm has always formed a significant part of the movement’s pastoral narrative.

Organic certification is not a testing regime, nor is it a guarantee that foods are free of chemicals and pesticides. The U.S. Secretary of Agriculture famously stated that organic certification is a marketing tool and not a guarantee of food safety, nutrition or quality.

So, why do people buy organic food? It breaks down three ways:

First, there is a widespread belief that organic food is more nutritious. The organic industry and consumers were apoplectic when an examination of 237 studies by independently funded Stanford University researchers could find little difference in nutritional value of conventional and organic produce.

Second, organic fruits and veggies are lower in some synthetic pesticide residues. Whether that makes organic produce safer to eat is unresolved, as organic foods often have higher levels of so-called natural pesticides that are allowed by organic certifiers. Approved organic pesticides carry the same kind of health risks as conventional chemicals.

Third, proponents argue that organic methods build healthier soils and that conventional industrial-scale farming damages soil, water and reduces bio-diversity.

Early proponents of the organic movement began to question the value of the organic brand as soon as organic foods became a multi-billion-dollar industry. Food writer Michael Pollan began to see “cracks in the pastoral narrative” as early as 2001 and his investigation revealed that industrial-scale organic farms were in most ways indiscernible from conventional farms.

Read full, original post: [Weekend Extra: Take the guesswork out of buying organic](#)