Would switching to organic farming cut greenhouse gas emissions?

A new study, led by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture, gives the impression that a large-scale shift to organic farming would largely bring environmental benefits. And indeed, that's how the paper has been covered.

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But the progress the authors describe in the paper is only feasible by assuming massive changes in how much meat people eat, how much food is wasted, and how efficiently farms operate – an ambitious if not unattainable scenario. Their findings also rest on several flawed and unrealistic assumptions about how productive organic farms can be with limited nitrogen. Under more realistic assumptions, scaling up organic agriculture looks far less appealing, leading to large environmental harms, with limited benefits.

Converting all food production to organic, according to the study, would increase the amount of land needed for agriculture by 33%, and deforestation up to 15%, but would reduce greenhouse gas emissions up to 7% compared to a scenario following current agricultural trends. This is an unacceptable environmental tradeoff and so the authors note that scaling up organic would only be desirable and feasible if food waste and meat production were cut.

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Rather than focusing on organic production, we ought to promote any production method that minimizes land use and farming's other environmental impacts while providing enough healthy food for everyone.

Read full, original post: The Problems with a Large-Scale Shift to Organic Farming