

Viewpoint: There's nothing wrong with organic farming, but it's not the 'pinnacle of sustainability'

Organic food sales in the United States reached \$50.1 billion in 2019, up 4.6% from the previous year, according to the 2020 Organic Industry Survey conducted by the Organic Trade Association. In comparison, the growth rate for total food sales was about 2 percent.

But consumers who feel that organic is the be-all and end-all for sustainability are missing a bigger picture. Any kind of growing method involves a degree of compromise, including organic agriculture. Organic farmers use pesticides too. They are derived from natural sources, but that doesn't necessarily make them safer. And most organic farmers still till the soil, which kills the life within it and subjects it to erosion. Organic farming generally is a good system, but it definitely is not the pinnacle of sustainability.

Unfortunately, the agriculture community isn't always good at educating consumers about other forms of sustainability, such as the use of cover crops that he advocates.

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Farmers likely would get nowhere if they tried to engage the typical supermarket shopper in a debate about, for example, whether genetically modified foods are good or bad, or whether a product labeled organic is all it's cracked up to be. Instead, farmers need to tell their stories and show those shoppers that they, too, care about responsible farming.

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