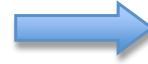


Organic Food: Is it Truly Better for the Environment?

Today, organic foods dominate the shelves of many grocery stores. Many consumers are faced with the pressing question; is organic food truly better for the environment? The truth is that there are many arguments for both sides.



[Brief introduction introduces key points, could be a little more descriptive]

One positive aspect of organic food is that it prevents topsoil erosion. Topsoil erosion is a huge environmental problem that is caused by industrialized farming. In fact, approximately one third of the nation's topsoil has eroded. Each lost inch accounts for 6% of decrease in farm yield (www.nrdc.org). This is significant because if farmers continue to lose crop, they will eventually expand and industrialize more land. Soil erosion is also negative because it leads to increased susceptibility to flooding, which is damaging to the environment. The Soil Conservation service estimated that more than three billion tons of topsoil is eroded from the United States farms each year (<http://soils.usda.gov/>). Soil is the foundation for organic farming, whereas in conventional farming soil is used as a medium to hold plants in a vertical position acceptable for fertilizing. American farms are suffering from severe soil erosion, which is taking a toll on the environment. Apart from preventing soil erosion, organic farming also helps protect water quality.



[First paragraph shows a positive aspect of organic farming: protection from erosion]

Good topic sentences/transitions between paragraphs

Water quality is another problem that Americans face due to industrialized farming



techniques. The EPA estimates that pesticides pollute the primary source of drinking water for more than half of the country's population. Organic farming is exempt from this statistic because their techniques do not utilize harmful pesticides. Pesticides are really harmful because their toxic runoff pollutes lakes, rivers and streams. This can cause eutrophication, dissolved oxygen deficiencies, which takes a toll on wildlife. Many organisms thrive only within certain dissolved oxygen concentrations. When this amount drops too low, organism life is depleted. Riparian habitats are also destroyed by this toxic runoff, which further accounts for wildlife depletion and lack of biodiversity. Water quality is an indicator of the health of the environment, and pesticides in the water results in an unhealthy environment. Besides maintaining healthy water quality, organic farming promotes biodiversity within their crops.



[Second paragraph shows another positive of organics: better water quality due to lack of pesticides/fertilizers]

Organic farmers provide more variety of produce in comparison to conventional farming techniques. Because conventional farming is so focused on producing a large yield, this often sacrifices species biodiversity of crops. Mono cropping is the technique in which farmers plant the same crop on large plots of land year after year. While this approach tripled

production between 1950 and 1970, it has led to a lack of biodiversity of plant life (www.abbeyvegetarianrecipes.com). Farmers used to grow approximately 80,000 different crops, and this has been reduced to about 150 (www.wholefoodsmarket.com) This leads to an increased strain on overburdened farmland. This lack of natural diversity of plant life negatively affects soil quality. To replace the nutrients in the depleted soil, harmful chemical fertilizers are used. Furthermore, this leads to farmers being more reliant on pesticides because year after year, the same pests are returning. Because there is so much plant diversity on organic farms, this leads to biodiversity with animals as well. "An organic farm is the equivalent of reforestation. Industrial farms are the equivalent of clear cutting of native habitat with a focus on high farm yields" (www.organic.org). Organic farms simply promote nature and natural biodiversity, both in regards to crops and organisms. While there are several pros to organic farming, there are also many cons to support the negativity of organic farming.

[Final paragraph about positives of organic farming discusses monocropping and yields. Closing sentence effectively moves to the topic of the more negative aspects of organic farming]

One concept of organic farming to consider is the food miles necessary to bring the food to the store. A study conducted by student researchers in the Department of Rural Economy at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada portrayed that greenhouse gas emitted when produce is transported from great distances cancels out environmental benefits of growing the food organically. In fact, two organic items in particular; mangoes and green peppers, are shipped much further than their conventionally grown versions, which is negative toward the environment in terms of their carbon footprint (www.sciencedaily.com). The emissions related to transporting organic foods could turn out to be much greater than transporting conventional foods, which is negative on the environment. While organic farming has a negative carbon footprint, it also be easily disguised.

[Note how each of the body paragraphs is focused and tight, each discussing one aspect of the overall argument (a positive or negative aspect of organic farming—here, negative aspects)]

A huge environmental issue with organic farming is the idea that many non-organic foods can be disguised as organic. Organic is a tool used by people interested in sustainable production, yet it is unnecessary to be sustainable in order to be certified organic. Local production and the support of local economies is the true future of sustainability (www.salon.com). Conventional goods can be disguised as organic, therefore misleading consumers and damaging the environment. People who support the environment and therefore are looking to purchase organic goods can actually be tricked into purchasing industrialized goods, which, in their production, harmed the environment. Consumers need to be vigilant in knowing the source of their goods, and knowing how to read the labels on foods so that they are aware of what they are purchasing. While the label organic can be misleading, organic farming is also losing its initial values.

The values of organic farming are rapidly changing. Ten to fifteen years ago, organic farmers pushed for national standards to clarify the organic label. Organic foods are not mass-produced, and therefore organic farms often do not produce a high yield. Yet, organic farming by small farmers has been successful, they may be paving the path to big businesses. These organic standards that small farmers pushed for could actually be destroying the name of organic agriculture. If you want to supply to the large supermarkets, you have to have a large yield. Several large companies own organics: General Mills owns Cascadia Farms; Kraft Foods owns Boca Burgers, and Heinz is working on producing organic ketchup to sell at Whole Foods. All of these large companies are taking away from the central idea of organic farming. Organic farms were meant to be small (www.salon.com). Organic farms may become negative for the environment. When organic farms become larger and more industrialized, they could be as bad as conventional farms. Organic farms are simply meant to be smaller operations in order to meet their goals of being environmentally friendly.

Comment: Organic farming is being mass-produced, leading to negative environmental practices as well

While there are several positives and negatives of organic foods, it is very important to consider organic food on a case-by-case basis. Of course there are pros and cons, but it is imperative to be well educated in order to make a good decision. Ideally, someone who is concerned about the environment should purchase locally grown, organic foods. The food is still grown organically, and does not have to travel long distances, making it less sustainable. Locally grown, organic food is simply the best of both worlds, and should be purchased whenever possible. If not possible, it is important for a consumer to make an educated choice when shopping for food. It is challenging to make generalizations about organic food because there are several factors that must be considered.

[Conclusion briefly discusses positives and negatives, and closes with the idea that consumers should be educated about their options before purchasing (ties together argument about positives and negatives by arguing for careful, informed choices.

Overall, this paper flows well, has a solid outline and organized paragraphs with a good intro/conclusion]

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[Works cited page is in APA format; some of the in-text citations above need to be tweaked to be consistent with this style]

