

The True Cost of Organically Grown Food

The myth that we pay a higher price for organic food



Perhaps the question that we all hear most often in the Organic Industry is “why do organic foods typically cost more than their conventional counterparts.” From the perspective of the consumer, this is a very observant and legitimate question. Typically, organic produce is priced 20-25% higher than conventional product at the retail level. Sometimes the differential can be as high as twice as much, and sometimes only pennies. Below is some information that you can use in your discussion the next time you are asked “why organics are so high.”

Cost factors such as growing, harvesting, storage and transportation are generally higher for organically produced foods, as farmers must meet stricter regulations governing all of these steps. As a result, the process of organic farming is more labor and management- intensive, which means higher costs.

Because organic growers do not use toxic chemicals, more labor (and thus a higher cost) is required to deal with weeds and pests in the fields.

Organic agriculture tends to be on a smaller scale than conventional farming and thus organic farmers tend to pay more per acre to produce their crops - this according to Dave Decou of Organically Grown Company.

Because of their size, organic farmers can often face added distribution costs. There are typically many more stops and deliveries in the distribution of organic food than with conventional.

Historically organic farmers have not received federal subsidies or price supports for crops.

If organic farmers dropped their prices across the board to match conventional products, we would run the risk that some of the steps taken to nurture the soil may be side-stepped. If this happens, their farms will not remain sustainable in the long run.

It is very important that we are made aware of the real cost of growing food conventionally. There is mounting evidence that if all of the indirect costs of conventional agricultural production over time, including clean up costs due to pesticides in our water and soil, loss of soil and medical costs due to illness from pesticides were factored in, that organic foods would actually cost less.

According to Mike Italiano, with the Market Transformation to Sustainability, “we are taught that we can get whatever we want at the cheapest price possible. What we are not taught is the cost of our decisions. We need to consider the value of the food we eat,” said Italiano.