Organic Farming Debate

**Directions**: Underline any claims against organic farming.

**The Ecological Case Against Organics**

**By Christie Wilcox**

Organic farming tugs at our heartstrings, harkening back *(go back to something)* to a simpler time when life was rugged and man lived off the land. We’re told organic farming is not only better for us, but also better for the environment. While it sounds like the perfect solution, the fact is [our notion of organic farming is an idyllic fallacy](http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/science-sushi/2011/07/18/mythbusting-101-organic-farming-conventional-agriculture/) *(an argument that uses poor reasoning).*

But perhaps the crux (*the main feature)* of the organic argument is the idea that natural methods are better for the environment. The trouble is, [organic farms are only about 80 percent](http://www.sciencemag.org/content/296/5573/1694) as productive as conventional ones. Already, we have cleared more than a third of the Earth’s ice-free land for agriculture. To farm entirely organically, we’d need more. Decreased productivity isn’t just a space issue; it has real environmental consequences. While organic farming can be better for wildlife, [a systematic review by Oxford University scientists](http://www.ox.ac.uk/media/news_stories/2012/120904.html) found these benefits come at a high cost, as organic varieties actually produce more carbon emissions per unit of food, contributing to the devastating effects of climate change.

Until organic farming can rival the production output of conventional farming, its ecological cost is devastating, and so far, science has been unable to support claims that organic foods are [safer](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22336149) or [healthier](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/04/science/earth/study-questions-advantages-of-organic-meat-and-produce.html). Organic farming does have many potential upsides, but it isn’t a panacea *(something that will make everything about a situation better)*. Instead, its methods need to be considered alongside conventional ones to create the best balance of productivity and sustainability.

2) What are the author’s arguments against organic farming?

**Directions**: Underline any claims for organic farming.

**Buying Organic is a personal Choice**

**By Marion Nestle**

Questions about organic food raise three issues: productivity, benefits and costs. Productivity is easy. Since the early 1980s, careful productivity studies conclude that organic yields are only slightly lower than conventional yields, and organic production leaves soils in much better shape — boding well for future productivity. The yield difference is too small to have much of an effect on world food supplies.

Next, benefits. If crops are grown without pesticides, they won’t contaminate soil and water, foods will contain fewer pesticides, and people who eat organic foods will have lower levels in their bodies. The Stanford study and others confirm all this. Critics of organics say: “So what. Pesticides are safe.” They point out that nobody has ever died from eating industrially produced broccoli. Although science does not presently demonstrate long-term harm from eating pesticide-treated vegetables, pesticides are demonstrably harmful to farm workers and to “nontarget” wildlife, and they accumulate in soils for ages. If pesticides were all that benign, the government wouldn’t need to regulate them, but it does.

I choose not to be a guinea pig in a long-term pesticide experiment. We should do all we can to give everyone that choice.

2) What are the author’s arguments in favor of organic farming?

3) Do you believe there is a stronger case for or against organic farming? Why?

**Homework:** Write down one question you have about organic farming and research the answer to it. Cite your source!