

For and Against Organic Foods

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Organic Interest

All over the world organically grown foods are becoming more popular as people worry more about the health and the safety of the food they eat. Despite getting advantages, they are likely to be paying more unnecessarily, which is not compatible to the economic level of most of the people. There are some technological advances in the agricultural revolution. Using pesticides in farms and growth hormones to animals are some examples. People are afraid of the harms they can cause. As seen in Nepalese context, cancer incidence is increasing in Panchkhal valley of Kavrepalanchowk district in the recent time due to increased use of pesticides by the farmers for more productivity in the decades.

What are organic foods?

Organic food is produced without using most conventional pesticides, fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients or sewage sludge, bioengineering or ionizing radiation. Organic meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products come from animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones. (USDA). For some Genetically Modified (GM) foods do not come under organic foods.

What Makes Organic Foods Better Than Non-Organic Foods?

A number of studies have identified nutrient and animal welfare benefits from organic production. Organic milk, for example, contains higher levels of Omega 3 than conventional milk. Parents are buying huge quantities because Omega 3 is associated with benefits in development of the brain and nervous system in children. Another study published in 2007 found higher levels of vitamin C and other nutrients, such as polyphenols, beta-carotene and flavonoids in organic tomatoes, apples and peaches. In a Danish research published in 2003, a study showed that organic products contain more flavonoids, a well-known antioxidant defense against any diseases such as cancer and heart disease. Organic foods do not contain dangerous pesticides. Advocates of organic foods claim that it contain more nutrition like 27% more vitamin C, 21.1 % more iron, 29.3% more magnesium, 13.6% more phosphorus, and higher protein. Evidence shows that animals grown with organic feeds are much healthier than those animals grown and fed with conventional feeds, same thing with organic grown vegetable and fruit crops with no synthetic chemicals.

Although some studies show that the minimal amounts of residues of chemical pesticides found on non-organically grown foods are not dangerous to your health, many people just don't believe it. Studies show that children who maintain conventional diets have more pesticides in their bodies than

those who eat organic foods. Some experts believe that these pesticides may possibly lead to problems impeding with normal neurological development. Many organic food advocates also wish to avoid the antibiotics and growth hormones that are used on conventionally grown farm animals. These substances pass from the dairy products and meat we eat into our bodies. This use of antibiotics may be one of the causes of antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria. Almost all herbal medicines are produced form organic techniques.

Environment

Organic farming is not only better for the animals, it is better for the environment. Organic farms are much more compatible with wildlife and land conservation programs. Organic farming reduces pollutants in groundwater and creates richer soil that aids plant growth while reducing erosion, according to the Organic Trade Association. It also decreases pesticides that can end up in your drinking glass; in some cities, pesticides in tap water have been measured at unsafe levels for weeks at a time, according to an analysis performed by the Environmental Working Group (EWG). Conventional technology is highly responsible for the biodegradation. We are now facing global warming, the coming generations will be facing its cost intolerably.

Demerits

The major potential harms of Pesticides (and other materials) which is found in the non-organically grown foods are- Birth defects in newly born babies, impairment of growth and development in children, and Cancers, Alzheimer's, Obesity etc in grownups. The demerits of organic foods are they are not easily available and are very expensive.

Fear of GM

There was news in Nepalese media which reported that corns of some farmers provided zero yield/harvest this year. Those farmers who solely depend on their crops are on the verge of becoming everything worst possible as they have lost their base of livelihood. GM (Genetically modified) plants and animal products are patented by private research centers and lack natural breeding capacity. This has made farmers hugely dependent on them. Thus small scale farmers are just like the tax payers. As seen in India and many other countries, this practice is making life of small scale farmers a difficult one. As experienced from past local crops need not be hugely replaced by GM, in the time of need they can be the friend of farmers. Most of the GMs are high yielding, unlike their claim lack natural breeding capacity and nutritious value.

Dispute on the benefits of Organic

Despite huge popularity, the organic movement has come under pressure from some people about its benefits. In 2008, Professor Lesley Regan effectively accused organic producers of taking advantage of consumers by charging higher prices for food that offers little or no benefit. Professor Tom Sanders of King's College, London, backed this view, saying: 'Lots of people have been looking at this for about 30 years and no-one has really ever demonstrated convincingly that organic food contains a higher level of nutrients.'

Even non-organic food products are sold in the name of organic which is deceptive, and a part of earning money by dealing on the emotion of the people. Some of the organic food manufacturers even want to ban low level household production of organic food to make people more depended on their business. They seem to make money out of everything:- organic or conventional food.

Organic dealers blame that the some researchers, who are informally funded by pesticide companies, deny the facts that organic foods are beneficial. They accept the truth that the low productivity of land without using chemical fertilizers and pesticides (and antibiotics in animals) will bring a serious problem of food shortage.

Defense by Non-Organic

They defend that they also know the harmful effects of pesticides. They try to use as minimally as possible. They teach protective ways to farmers, like using masks and protective methods etc. They claim that such food materials become free from any harmful materials after careful washing, airing, drying or cooking.

Defense by Organic

They defend saying that people should be aware of their health and environment. And they should be working for sustainable health and land. They should not be destroying the ecology and their physiology. Since the production is not as easy as conventional and organic techniques are expensive. Insects are controlled by using natural predators or some nets. Organic land using techniques to make land fertile are few examples of growing plants. The next thing is cultural rituals and constant care of the land by dedicated farmers are some other techniques applied in organic farming.

Discussion in Nepalese Context

Small scale Nepalese organic farming can be turned into large scale organic farming. They can make better economic benefits as most of the Nepalese farming is organic because of the lack of pesticides and fertilizers in most of the places. Though the organic products may not be affordable to all Nepalese, they can make economic benefits, like Yarshagumba- which is not affordable to average Nepalese. Locally prepared foods and animal products in the villages of countries like ours are beneficial, and are more like organic, which are truly nutrient rich, and contain almost zero harmful substances. It can be good tool to an economically backward

country/people to go ahead.

Since the health and environment is adversely affected due to unbiased use of pesticides and fertilizers or medicines, farmers need to be trained on reasonable use of those things. (Since the trainings are sponsored by pesticide companies (formally or informally), their use is promptly advocated) as it is seen in most of the health sectors which are less affected by pro-people governance.

Organic farms and market price need to be monitored and regulated by reliable agencies, e.g. Government agencies, which remain unbiased to any pro-organic and pro-non-organic business community. Developed countries have councils or higher organization that controls the quality and legal aspects of organic foods. People's right to food (as claimed by pro-non-organic advocates) and right to health (as claimed by pro-organic advocates) should be respected.

Nepalese farmers can benefit from organic production

Most of the animal products, fruits and vegetables are almost like organic in the villages as they sufficiently lack those pesticides, fertilizers, and growth hormones. They can learn more on better organic farming and can sell their products in the international market for their economic betterment. The seeds of crops that Nepalese farmers use should not be discarded, as farmers can earn from them better in the time of need. And more importantly farmers can be victim of genetically modified seeds. Genetic modification may be a good technology for the students of science but it has not always been so to the farmers, it has become a tool of earning to the private research companies. As seen in India, farmers are made dependent on private seed dealer whose hybrid seeds could not reproduce in the next season. Traditional farmers' seeds have been patented by the private companies. Hence they cannot use their own, if they use those they have to pay the tax. This is how the grass root people are victimized indirectly in the name of science and law. It was one of the reasons of increased suicide rate of farmers in India. (Remind Peepli Live). Hence grass roots should be supported in education and empowerment.

Government Support to farmers

Small number of Nepalese involved in Organic farming, say that government is advocating rampant use of pesticides and such things. Government still seems unaware of the health, environmental and economic benefits of organic farming. Government lacks enough laws and reliable mechanism to monitor the farms and market. As Nepal can do a lot in Tourism sector, which is one of the sectors of organic consumption, it is equally important to foster organic farming. People should be allowed to use harmful pesticides cautiously. They should be informed the methods of growing foods organically, and using non-organic food cautiously (washing or cooking well before eating). If farmers earn by better farming methods, one of which is organic farming and marketing, their economic condition improves, which is the first goal of Millennium Development Goals.