

As a certified organic farmer, I am appalled by the misinformation published about organic products in the WSJ on August 5. I am a fourth-generation family farmer, so I know first-hand that there is a real and important difference between conventional and organically farmed crops.

I worked alongside my dad farming tree fruit, grapes, and chickens. When he passed away and the farm saw hard times in the 1980s, I made the choice to transform my family farm into a 100% certified organic operation. At the time there was not as big of an organic market as there is today, so I was taking a big risk, especially because it takes three years to transition a farm before you can market your product as organic.

To be organic, I had to transition my land using organic production methods. I could no longer spray any pesticide I wanted or add any fertilizer I wanted. Instead, I had to control for pests and disease with nontoxic inputs specifically reviewed and approved for use in organic production. I also had to focus on building soil health because healthy soils mean strong, healthy plants resistant to disease and pest pressures. Healthy soils also mean better water retention. Biological fertility is also very difficult to leach down into our underground or off into a stream.

Being an organic farmer means that I voluntarily comply with a strict set of standards designed to protect our families and our farms. The Organic industry is the ONLY agricultural segment that asks to be regulated and fights continuously against the dilution of these regulations. Everything—from the labels I use to the materials I apply—undergo scrutiny by a USDA-accredited organic certifier who comes to my farm at least once a year to inspect my records and my field to ensure I am following the rules.

Being organic allowed me to save my family farm and supply thousands of families with fresh organic produce directly with a subscription based service. Now organic produce is available in every major retail store because consumers want organic. Consumers choose organic because they simply want good food grown with good practices. There is nothing confusing or deceptive about a farmer putting in the hard work to grow the food that their customers want.

But finally, I would invite Dr. Miller to come visit; Stanford's just a few hours up the road. I'd like him to listen to the crickets & birds in our organic orchards, see the earth worm activity in our furrows, and scoop-up a double handful of organic earth... I know if he does, he'll rewrite his column as a passionate advocate of Organic farming, and I'll have a new friend.

Vernon Peterson

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