



18 April 2007

To the Editor

To the editor,

Bettina Arndt makes several inaccurate claims about organic food (Organic myths pose real risks to health) and demonstrates a woeful lack of knowledge about organic food and farming. Her opinion piece was full of nonsensical claims and scientific howlers, and sadly, it seems it is she who's been deluded by the misinformation and reassurances of the chemical farming lobby.

While it's true that the absence of pesticides on crops can stimulate the production of naturally occurring plant 'toxins', many of these so-called toxins are powerful antioxidants in the human diet, and are increasingly thought to be the reason fruits and vegetables are so healthy for us.

'Unpasteurised' and 'organic' are labels and preferences that have nothing in common, and to quote a death due to unpasteurised juice in an article about organic food is misleading at best and deceptive at worst.

The US Centers for Disease Control DO NOT claim that organic food raises the risk of E.coli food poisoning and have been at pains to counter this inaccurate claim made by outspoken and discredited American organic critic Dennis Avery nearly 10 years ago. This erroneous claim has been shown to be false for so long I'm astounded to see it still printed. Numerous reviews have actually concluded that organic practices REDUCE the risk of on-farm contamination by pathogenic E.coli.

The organic movement is not based on a notion that scientific progress is inevitably bad. But it does question the sense of polluting our environment bodies and babies with constant doses of agricultural chemicals that organic farming shows are not necessary. Every time an agricultural chemical is banned it shows the nonsense of claims for the previous few decades that it was safe. Yet now-banned chemicals like DDT can still be found in Australian breast milk, and have been linked with a higher risk of breast cancer in multiple countries. Organic farming is NOT based on 'practices used a couple of hundred years ago', but rather an emerging and cutting-edge scientific understanding of soil ecology that goes far beyond the 60 year old technology of poisoning everything you don't want out of a field.

Yields in organic farming have been shown to be comparable if it's done right, and the price premium for organics is a result of the economies of scale enjoyed by conventional agriculture, which still represents over 98 percent of farming in Australia. The price for organics is the real price of real food, and organic consumers know that.

The health and environmental consequences of genetically modified crops are far from known. A recent German study showed that bees can be seriously affected, which may be contributing to the recent and very worrying demise of bee populations in Europe and the US. As this latest bee crisis shows, the risks should not be underestimated, nor should concerns be dismissed as baseless scaremongering.



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And finally, for the record, water cannot be certified organic in Australia or anywhere else, but can be registered as an allowable input in organic agriculture. Unfortunately the Australian labelling laws have failed to legislate the use of the word 'organic' on food products and so you get occasional labelling gaffes like 'organic water'.

Perhaps Bettina should stick to subjects she knows more about.

Yours sincerely,

Shane Heaton  
Nutritionist, Biological Farmers of Australia



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