

December 14, 2006

Janice Lieberman, Consumer Correspondent  
NBC News, Today  
30 Rockefeller Plaza  
New York, NY 10112

RE: "Organic foods: Are they worth it?"

Dear Ms. Lieberman:

I write in reference to your December 4, 2006, report on organic food. As Interim President of The Rodale Institute of Kutztown, Pennsylvania, I'm well aware of strong consumer support for organic food. The Institute is set in the midst of 333-acres of farmland used for commercial certified organic production, research and education comparing organic and non-organic farming systems.

Our research through 60 years scientifically documents that we can produce grain crops with similar yields -- and higher nutritional values -- using organic methods. We work with natural systems that protect water and build healthy soil without using pesticides and fertilizers.

We can validate what you acknowledge in your introduction -- that organic food is "better for the environment" and is "possibly more nutritious." In your report of December 4, I was surprised that you didn't factor those known and possible benefits into consumer value. Why not? There are documented public costs to pesticide and synthetic fertility contamination from non-organic farming, which organic farming avoids.

The underdeveloped infrastructure of organics doesn't mean food is older when it hits the grocery shelf, just that less of it is being regionally supplied. Local food, well handled, can be days fresher than jet-lagged produce from a different coast. Your quick cost-benefit assessment of organic food -- and conventional food -- based on four samples was too narrow to be meaningful. You didn't provide anything new to what regular organic consumers already know -- they get food they like that's worth what they pay for it.


Each organic food purchase is a vote for agriculture that depends on soil and whole-farm biodiversity for its bounty and to help manage pests. There's more life on organic farms, in organic fields and in organic food. This includes beneficial bacteria, insects and plants that each have a role in a complex living system.

Food grown in monoculture with legal pesticides applied may be closer to sterile but that's not what organic customers are looking for. "Shelf life" is a food-marketing concern, but not an indicator of food quality or nutritional value.

Our expertise is in exploring the profound benefits of organic agriculture. I'd be delighted to show you how we farm, and to help you visit other organic farms where your viewers can learn about the great care taken to bring them high-quality, healthy and wholesome food.

Please contact me whenever I can help you find organic examples that will interest your viewers. Ready to assist you will be our agronomist, Dr. Paul Hepperly (Director of Training and Research), and Jeff Moyer, Farm Manager for over 30 years. Both gentlemen have extensive experience in explaining the details, systems and promise of organics.

Best Regards,



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cc: Jim Bell, Executive Producer, Today show