

Acting as Your Buying Agent: Weaver Street Market's Commitment To ORGANIC FOODS

By Ruffin Slater

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the good news is that America's appetite for organic food is so strong that supply can't keep pace with demand. Organic food sales are growing at a feverish rate of 15 to 20 percent each year, compared with 2 to 4 percent for total food sales. Mainstream supermarkets, eyeing the demand for organic foods in stores such as Weaver Street Market, have rushed to add organic offerings. Even Wal-Mart said earlier this year it would greatly expand its organic selections.

The bad news is that in order to close the gap between organic supply and demand, large food companies are compromising organic standards. They are lobbying the government to water down organic requirements, and are attempting to circumvent some of the standards that do exist.

A chicken producer in Georgia, Fieldale Farms, persuaded its congressman to slip a provision into an appropriations bill that would allow growers of organic chicken to substitute conventional chicken feed if the price of organic feed exceeded a certain level. After an outcry from members of food co-ops and other consumers, this rule was repealed.

However, last year the Organic Trade Association, which represents big organic companies, convinced Congress to weaken the organic label by allowing synthetic ingredients. This was a dark-of-night decision, made without any public input, and was done despite more than 325,000 constituents and 200 organic companies opposing the action.

Giant dairy farms are making a sham of the requirement that cows have access to pasture.

The Cornucopia Institute has demonstrated that Horizon and Aurora Dairies, which operate large factory farms of over 5,000 cows in the arid west, do not offer viable pasture as required for certification. (Photographs of these farms can be viewed at Cornucopia's web site www.cornucopia.org.)

Another casualty in the rush to increase organic production is the erosion of important values traditionally associated with organic farming, such as improving the environment, keeping family farmers in business, and treating farm workers fairly. Many large organic farms are starting to operate in a manner strikingly similar to large conventional farms, including shipping product nationwide and relying on migrant farm workers.

in this rapidly changing environment for organic foods, we want you to know that Weaver Street Market's commitment to organic foods continues to embody the spirit of the organic foods movement, and not just the letter of governmental organic standards. Our purpose is to act as your buying agent for foods that are in keeping with the mission of our co-op. We seek out food that is produced in a sustainable fashion, food that is locally produced, and food that provides a fair return to producers. Organic is certainly a part of our food values, but those values extend beyond organic, so we want you to know how organic fits into our product selection decisions.



- 1.** We emphasize organic products that meet a higher standard. We seek out organic products from small farms that embody the spirit of organic farming, rather than factory farms that do the minimum to get by. For example, we carry organic dairy products from Organic Valley, a cooperative of family farms, and have discontinued products from factory farms like Horizon Dairy.
- 2.** We carry products from small and local producers whenever possible, whether or not they are organic. Maple View Farms milk is a good example. These producers contribute to a sustainable food system, retain artisan production techniques, and allow family farmers to stay in business. We also give preference to Fair Trade products that ensure the producer receives a fair price.
- 3.** We continue to carry products from industrial organic producers when there is no small-scale alternative. Although these products may not have all the advantages that we seek, they are still better than non-organic alternatives. According to Consumers Union, a "growing body of research shows...that by eating organic foods, you can reduce your exposure to the potential health risks associated with those chemicals."

Our purpose in product selection is to implement our co-op's values on your behalf. As your buying agent, we are very interested in your opinion about the products we carry. Please send your comments to Claudia Tolan, head of product selection, at claudia@weaverstreetmarket.coop. We are here to meet your needs. Please tell us how we can do it better.