



BEYOND PESTICIDES

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December 5, 2006

Today Show
NBC Universal
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, NY 10112

Re. *How Fresh Is Organic Food?*
A Call for More Truthful & Accurate Reporting

Dear NBC Today Show Producers:

I appreciate your attention to organic food in your December 4, 2006 segment *How Fresh Is Organic Food?*, but I am troubled by the serious lack of focus on the hazards of chemical-intensive agriculture and food commodities. The piece, reported by your consumer correspondent, Janice Lieberman, glosses over key organic issues and leaves viewers with the impression that chemically-treated food is safer and thus preferable. Nothing could be further from the truth. As a disappointed viewer and concerned consumer, I am writing to ask you to do a follow-up story, giving equal time and thorough consideration to the value of organics. Please take the following into consideration:

1. Your piece does not articulate effectively the hazards of pesticides and the importance of curtailing their use. The key issues for concern are pesticide residues in and on food commodities and agricultural practices that hurt the environment and those working on farms. Pesticides found in and on food are known to cause cancer, birth defects, reproductive problems, respiratory illness, and behavioral effects such as learning disabilities. Consumer demand for organic food and the growth of the organic industry plays a major role in reducing pesticide use and promoting sustainable practices. Pesticide problems associated with chemical agriculture, from water contamination (the U.S. Geologic Survey (2006) has documented pesticides are present in virtually all of the nation's waters tested) to drift to food residues, pose a serious public health and environmental threat. Responsible consumerism through organic agriculture is also encouraging good land stewardship and a reduction in hazardous chemical exposures for farm workers. While promoting a dirty dozen list, as you

do, can be a first step, people are concerned that their purchasing practices may be harmful to the environment that they depend on for a healthy life.

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2. Creating a false choice between chemically-treated food with less bacteria and organic. Because of the hazards of pesticides, the Today Show piece created a false choice between what you characterized as safer chemically-grown food and more dangerous organic food. Instead, the choice is to adopt cleaning practices that wash off harmful bacteria, while recognizing the important role that bacteria plays in digestion and the environment. In fact, the most harmful of bacteria, E. coli, which was associated with spinach contamination this summer, is not a function of organic food production. Nevertheless, the solution is not more chemicals in agriculture and steering people away from organics - it is finding solutions in washing and sanitation practices.

3. Additionally, no mention was given to other health concerns resulting from conventional agriculture, such as use of antibiotics in animal production. Antibiotic use in animal production has been linked to antibiotic resistance in bacteria. Neglecting to mention this and the resulting problems in treating human and animal illness is misleading.

4. Your piece also glosses over a key issue when it comes to the freshness of organic. People increasingly want fresh food, rather than food preserved by chemicals for lengthy periods. Buying organic may in some cases sacrifice a longer expiration period, but is preferable to more synthetic chemicals in food with effects and interactions that are not fully evaluated. Buying organic and local is increasingly an option consumers are turning to through farmer's markets and Community Supported Agriculture. Not only does this emerging system allow consumers to know who and where their food comes from, but also supports the economic need to buy American and support local economies.

We would be happy to work with you to put together a more balanced piece on organic food and food production practices. Thank you for your attention to this issue.

Sincerely,



Jay Feldman
Executive Director