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Non-Organic vs. Organic Farming

There is much controversy over whether organic or non-organic farming is better. Another big question is whether a farmer can make a living farming organically in rural places in the United States. This paper will address the positives and negatives of both organic and non-organic farming, and discuss whether organic farming in Nebraska could be feasible.

There are many guidelines that one has to follow in order to be considered “organic.” Crops need to be raised by a producer that uses practices that are in balance with the natural environment. Yields also need to be planted on a rotating basis in order to keep the good nutrients in the soil. If one is switching from non-organic to organic, his/her fields need to be free of pesticides for three years (“Sustainable Table”). This could be a problem for any farmers who are trying to switch from conventional farming methods to organic farming methods. During those three years when they are trying to switch, farmers are not going to get much profit from their crops because they can’t be sold organically, and they won’t get much for selling them to conventional buyers. For many small organic farmers, the process is too time consuming and costly. Also, many people have started to buy organic food because they believe it is healthier. Because of this increased demand, large corporations have started to farm organically, because they want the profit. Stores like Wal-Mart, Safeway, and Kroger compete with these small organic farms, and many times, the small farms don’t survive (“Sustainable Table”).

Many small studies have been done on non-organic and organic farming. One specific case studies six small farms in Africa and South America. All of these small farms switched from using pesticides to organic farming methods. Yields decreased in five out of the six cases, and profits increased in only three out of the five cases. Researchers said that market linkage was a key role in this study, and those with market access were more likely to profit by switching to organic (Bennett and Franzel). This would also seem to be the case in rural areas of the United States. Another drawback of organic farming is that because no pesticides are used, dangerous bacteria and toxins may get into the plants. This, then, would make it difficult to feed the world because there is substantially less food production from organic farming (“Conventional/Modern”).

But there are also positives to organic farming. One benefit is that more land is being protected from pesticides, which in turn helps the environment (“Sustainable Table”). The high yields produced by non-organic farmers are dependent on the use of many chemicals and fertilizers. This can reduce the soil fertility year by year, and cause run-off which can potentially contaminate the water people consume (“Convention/Modern”). Because organic farmers tend to grow a number of diverse crops, organic farming may secure the future for more sustainable agriculture (*Royal Society of Chemistry*).

A major benefit of non-organic farming is that farm land that would otherwise be unsuitable for farming is able to be farmed. Because the land does not have to be tilled for weed control, the soil retains its structure, which allows it to hold the maximum amount of water without much run-off. Non-organic agriculture permits many acres of land to be farmed with a small amount of labor. Also, yields are much higher, which bring the cost of the goods down (*Royal Society of Chemistry*)*.* This allows conventional farmers to produce enough to feed the world.

Organic farms in rural areas have a difficult time prospering. For example, in Nebraska, there is not much of a market for organic farming, unless one lives near an urban area. However, some people have made it work around the Fremont area. In 1974 in eastern Nebraska there was a huge drought. Many of the conventional farmers’ fields had little to no yields, but the organic farmers’ fields made it through the terrible drought. They said this was because there was hummus buildup to help withstand the heat and damage, and animals like pheasants and quails kept away all the insects (Blobaum). However, non-organic family farming seems to be suited best for rural areas in Nebraska. Our small population, lack of access to urban areas, and high yielding grain crops make Nebraska part of the breadbasket of the world.

The question of whether to farm using organic or non-organic methods is a controversial issue of today. There are advantages of both, but people wonder if organic farmers can be prosperous in rural Nebraska. Determining whether to farm organically or conventionally could either benefit or harm our future world and the people that need to be fed.

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