

Buy organic?

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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I'm as down on big organics as the next guy who makes homemade sauerkraut out of cabbage grown by his farmer wife. As [Stephanie Strom details](#), the standards of organic certification could be much stronger, and most national organic brands are owned by the very mainstream companies they're standing in implicit objection to. Not exactly a recipe for systemwide reform.

Still, I think [Tom Philpott's right](#): Michael Potter of the independent holdout Eden's Organics, Strom's primary focus, goes too far in slamming the certified-organic label as a "fraud." Here's Philpott:

If you buy food labeled organic, you can be reasonably sure it was grown without synthetic pesticides or fertilizers, without genetically modified seeds, without (in the case of dairy, meat, and eggs) antibiotics and other dodgy pharmaceuticals, and on farms required to have a plan for crop rotation and (quoting straight from [federal organic code](#)) to "manage plant and animal materials to maintain or improve soil organic matter content." . . . Even the most processed certified-organic item on the supermarket shelf contains raw plant and/or animal material that was raised in ways fundamentally different than nonorganic fare. . . . Researchers looked at group of children fed a conventional diet for a week, then given a 100 percent organic diet for a week, and then returned to a conventional diet for a third week. They found that the level of organophosphate pesticides in the kids' urine plunged "dramatically" with the introduction of all-organic food, and then spiked anew with the return of conventional food.

I think that's exactly right. And Philpott, himself a farmer and activist-journalist, understands that even those of us who care a great deal about sustainable agriculture can't make the most pristine consumer decision every single time. Yes, we should try, and not be content to buy the organic version of whatever's most convenient at the supermarket. But for all those times we *aren't* cooking from scratch with ingredients we grew ourselves or obtained directly from the person who did, the organic label means something. For those of us who can afford it, it's worth

the extra money.