

To the Editor:

Here is an op-ed (423 words) by Janine Gibson of the Canadian Organic Growers for your consideration. Ms. Gibson can be contacted through Karen Ageson at 613-216-0741 or office@cog.ca.

Growing Up Organic

Demand for organic food in Canada has been growing steadily at 25 percent a year, blossoming into a billion dollar a year powerhouse. With new federal regulations passed in December and a new "Canada Organic" logo backing organic claims, the Canadian organics sector can expect this growth to continue.

Especially since people are becoming more health conscious and concerned about the safety of our food system. As a result, attention to organic foods and buying locally will continue to rise indefinitely.

Consumers need to be aware of new information about our food, especially as it relates to our and our children's health. That's why scientists, children's health experts and the general public will be discussing what it means to grow up organic at a one-day conference in Toronto on February 17th, 2007 (see www.cog.ca).

This conference, the first of its kind in Canada, is being hosted by Canadian Organic Growers. Participants will include Thomas Pawlick, author of *The End of Food*; Ellen Desjardins, Public Health Nutritionist and Registered Dietitian; Wendy Mesley of CBC Television; and Kathleen Cooper, researcher with the Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA) and co-author of *Environmental Standard Setting and Children's Health*.

Organic agriculture offers an environmentally friendly food production method, designed to work with nature, not against it, by promoting healthy, diverse communities of native species and maintaining the health of soil organisms, plants, livestock and people.

The organic standard bans the use of synthetic herbicides, pesticides, growth hormones, antibiotics, additives, genetically modified organisms and irradiation. The result is food that has fewer toxic residues and a healthier ecosystem that will sustain food production over the long term.

With the growing popularity of organics, people are asking many questions. Some of the more common questions include: Are organic foods really healthier? Should I be buying organics for my children? Are organics worth the higher price? The body of knowledge around organics continues to emerge, as scientists and nutritional experts conduct studies to answer these kinds of questions.

Although more studies are needed, some of the emerging information on organics is showing that organic fruits and vegetables have significantly higher levels of certain phytonutrients, helpful in fighting disease. Other studies are showing that children who eat organic fruits and vegetables have significantly lower concentrations of pesticide metabolites in urine samples.

Canada's organic food industry, growing quickly, is still in its infancy. It's more important than ever to present emerging information to consumers to help them make informed choices about the food they eat.

Janine Gibson is President of Canadian Organic Growers