

Organic Consumers Political Candidate Survey 2006



The survey below consists of 17 yes-or-no questions. You may answer “yes,” “no,” “undecided,” or you may choose to skip a question and your response will be recorded as “unanswered.” In any instance, you may check the comment box and add a comment (on a separate page if necessary) to clarify your response. Your survey responses will be posted automatically on the appropriate state page on the Organic Consumers Fund website: www.organicconsumersfund.org. We will validate your response by independently confirming your campaign contact information (please add contact info at end of survey) and you will receive an e-mail confirmation.

1 Organic products make up a 2.5 percent share of all grocery store sales.

Q: Do you think organic agriculture should receive a fair share (at least 2.5%) of government resources spent on agriculture?

YES NO UNDECIDED SEE COMMENT

2 As the consumer demand for, and profitability of, organic products grows, there is increasing pressure to lower organic standards. Recently, this has taken the form of increased allowances for synthetic substances in processed food products labeled “organic” and the certification of “organic” dairies where the cows have little or no access to pasture. In the body care industry, shampoos and other products whose ingredients are mostly synthetic often misuse the word “organic” while regulators do little to discourage the practice. These policies and practices could have disastrous effects on confidence among organic consumers.

Q: Do you support strict standards for processed foods, dairy, and body care products that are labeled or marketed as organic?

YES NO UNDECIDED SEE COMMENT

3 Many of the commonly used pesticides in agriculture today are associated with decreasing male fertility, fetal abnormalities, chronic fatigue syndrome in children, and Parkinson’s disease. Pesticides are ranked among the top three environmental cancer risks.

Q: Do you support more aggressive government action to assess the harms of pesticides, take harmful pesticides off the market, and hold companies responsible for diseases and environmental damage caused by pesticides?

YES NO UNDECIDED SEE COMMENT

4 This year, the US House of Representatives passed a controversial “national food uniformity” law, that would nullify 200 state and local food safety and food labeling laws. State laws eliminated would include those in California and other states that identify ingredients likely to cause cancer, birth defects, allergic reactions, or mercury poisoning.

Q: Should people have the right to pass consumer safety laws at the state or local level that require food labels to include information on dangerous ingredients?

YES NO UNDECIDED SEE COMMENT

5 Food sold in US supermarkets averages 1,500 - 3,500 miles from farm to plate—more than a 25 percent increase from 1980. Last year 10 percent of all certified organic food was imported from overseas. Twenty-five percent of US global greenhouse gasses come from industrial food production and long-distance food transportation. In the US there is a growing movement of consumers to buy local foods to reduce food miles and greenhouse gas pollution.

Qa: Do you support Country of Origin labels and other labeling that helps consumers choose Made in the USA and local products?

YES NO UNDECIDED SEE COMMENT

Qb: Do you support government action to help US farmers develop local and regional markets and to reduce non-renewable energy use on their farms?

YES NO UNDECIDED SEE COMMENT

6 The use of genetically engineered organisms in agriculture has proven to be a controversial and hazardous experiment. In a recent USDA poll, 80% of Americans stated that they want genetically engineered foods to be labeled, as they are in Europe and many other countries.

Qa: Do you support mandatory labeling of foods containing genetically engineered ingredients?

YES NO UNDECIDED SEE COMMENT

Qb: Do you support mandatory pre-market safety testing for all genetically modified foods and crops?

YES NO UNDECIDED SEE COMMENT

7 Mad Cow disease has spread to the United States. Livestock are exposed when they are fed blood, manure, and slaughterhouse waste, a common practice in industrial beef production (prohibited under organic standards). Humans are exposed when they eat the meat of a diseased animal. Testing all cattle at slaughter is the only way to prevent meat eaters from being exposed to the human form of the disease, a fatal, brain-wasting illness. Nevertheless, the USDA tests only 40,000 of the 35 million cattle slaughtered annually. The US's inadequate precautions are closing markets for US beef around the world. Making things worse, the USDA has prevented independent beef producers from initiating their own comprehensive testing regimens.

Q: Do you support universal testing for Mad Cow disease and a ban on feeding slaughterhouse waste to farm animals?

YES NO UNDECIDED SEE COMMENT

8 US farm subsidies were meant to protect the US food supply and make food affordable to US residents, but they've turned into a trade-distorting mechanism that allows US exporters to "dump" (sell at prices below the cost of production) overproduced commodities on developing nations. The result is millions of Third World farmers who can't compete with dumped commodities being forced from their land and US farmers being precariously dependent on unsustainable subsidies.

Q: Do you support a restructuring of trade-distorting US farm subsidies?

YES NO UNDECIDED SEE COMMENT

9 Industrial agriculture, the number-one source of water pollution in America, is cheaper than organic, but only because the true costs are passed on to the consumer in the form of toxicity and environmental destruction. Sewage sludge and chemical fertilizers cost less than compost and animal manure. Spraying herbicides is less expensive than hand weeding. Conventional grain and animal by-products are less expensive livestock feeds than organic grains and grass. Farmers making the transition to organic often experience a temporary reduction in yields.

The Organic Certification Cost Share Program, part of the 2002 Farm Bill, was allocated \$5 million to make one-time direct incentive payments of \$500 each to farmers to assist with the costs of initial organic certification. This is the only subsidy ever given to organic farmers. Industrial agriculture, by contrast, received over \$23 billion in subsidies in 2005 alone.

Q: Do you support a significant shift in US farm subsidies to help family farmers and ranchers make the transition to organic?

YES NO UNDECIDED SEE COMMENT

10 Industrial agriculture is a major source of pollution in the US—leaching the soil, poisoning the water, generating 25 percent of greenhouse gasses, and consuming 17 percent of all fossil fuels used. The Conservation Security Program (CSP) was designed to encourage farmers to adopt land, watershed and wildlife conservation practices on their farms. CSP subsidies reward farmers for protecting watersheds and reducing tillage in erosion-prone areas to stop excess nitrogen fertilizer from washing into streams. Unfortunately, because of congressional budget cuts, fewer than 20,000 out of 2 million farms nationwide are signed up for the program. Lawmakers have placed a funding cap on the CSP while robbing it to pay for disaster relief, deficit reduction and to finance other areas of USDA's budget.

Q: Do you support a significant shift in subsidies to help us farmers adopt conservation and renewable energy practices on farms?

YES NO UNDECIDED SEE COMMENT

11 Until we shift government resources from industrial agriculture to organic agriculture, organic foods will remain unaffordable to many. Sadly, children and the elderly, the people who need healthy foods most, are also the most likely to live in poverty.

Q: Do you support increases for Food Stamps, the WIC (Women, Infant and Children) Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, and other programs to help low-income Americans buy organic food?

YES NO UNDECIDED SEE COMMENT

12 Preventive health care and proper nutrition have been linked to a range of health and social benefits including disease reduction, increased academic performance and lower health care costs. Unfortunately, a large percentage of our population lacks access to health care and healthy foods. In the United States today, eight million people are jobless, 40 million are without health insurance, 35 million are living below the poverty line, and much of the population consumes an inordinate amount of cheap junk food.

Q: Do you support universal health care with a preventive focus and a major emphasis on better nutrition?

YES NO UNDECIDED SEE COMMENT

13 Science tells us that we face a grave risk of irreversible and devastating global warming if global temperatures increase by more than 3.6°F. We can keep temperatures below the danger zone by freezing emissions in 2010 and gradually reducing them each year with the goal of achieving an 80% reduction by 2050.

Q: Do you support an 80% reduction (by 2050) in climate destabilizing greenhouse gas pollution?

YES NO UNDECIDED SEE COMMENT

14 The Organic Consumers Association believes that increased market shares for organic and Fair Trade products will provide very little consolation in an era of permanent war, energy crisis and climate chaos.

Q: Do you support ending the Iraq war and redirecting funds from the \$500 billion annual military spending in the US toward greening the US economy, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and converting US agriculture to organic practices?

YES NO UNDECIDED SEE COMMENT

16 In 95 percent of 2004 House races and 91 percent of 2004 Senate races, the candidate who spent the most money won. It costs more than \$1 million to win a House seat and over \$7 million to be a Senator—roughly \$1,500 and \$3,000, respectively, for every day in office.

Q: Do you support eliminating the distorting effect of special interest money on our elections and politicians by requiring full public funding for all federal, state, and local elections?

YES NO UNDECIDED SEE COMMENT

15 Electronic voting machines with voter-verifiable paper records enable voters to verify that their votes have been accurately recorded and election officials to conduct meaningful manual recounts and audits of election results. Voter-verifiable paper ballots also make it possible to recover from e-voting machine malfunctions, such as those experienced in recent elections in Ohio, Iowa, California, Georgia, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Florida and elsewhere, without having to re-run a costly election from scratch. Without hard-copy records of voter intent, neither election officials nor voters or candidates can be sure of the accuracy of the outcome.

Q: Do you support requiring electronic voting machines to produce voter-verified paper records and election officials to use these records to conduct mandatory audits of election results?

YES NO UNDECIDED SEE COMMENT

17 The internet principle of “net neutrality” requires service providers to give all users of this public commons equal access. AT&T, Verizon, Comcast and other large companies want to turn the information super-highway into a private toll road. These companies have spent an estimated \$100 million to manipulate public opinion and influence elected officials. The loss of net neutrality would mean that telecom and cable companies could slow down or even cut off access to websites and email in order to increase their profits or eliminate content that was objectionable to them.

Q: Do you support legislation to prevent internet companies from rigging the system to serve only the highest-paying users and discriminate against users they don't like?

YES NO UNDECIDED SEE COMMENT