

The 2nd Annual Harris Poll Organic Index

Recent news about the dangers of pesticides has had a "significant impact" on the typical American's food purchasing decisions, according to a nationwide Louis Harris Poll conducted for Rodale Press Publication's Organic Gardening magazine. Some 30 percent of Americans have changed their eating habits in some way as a result of pesticide reports, the survey found, while 28 % have sought out organic produce or produce grown with limited use of chemicals.

Conducted in late 1989, the poll also showed that America's "organic mandate" continued as 84 % indicated a preference for organically-grown fruit and vegetables, the same percentage as in the 1988 poll. Some 44% of Americans said they would pay more for organically grown produce (down slightly from 1988's 49%). According to the poll, nearly 65 % of those surveyed said the single most important reason for eating organic produce is the longterm health benefit, up from 56 percent the previous year.

The message of this poll is clear. Americans are not willing to wait as government and environmental groups debate exactly what is safe for consumption," said Organic Gardening executive editor Stevie Daniels. "They realize that the organic alternative is the answer, and they want government and conventional agriculture businesses to respond to their demands, " Daniels added.

The 1988 poll conducted for the magazine, Daniels explained was made before the reports of Alar and other pesticides in food generated national publicity. The results of that poll, Daniels said, were almost identical to the results of the current poll. "This shows that the organic mandate is not a passing fad fuelled by fear, but a clear preference fuelled by reason," Daniels stated.

The "Organic Index" poll, according to the magazine' further substantiates 1989 as a historic year for organic food. By year's end some 21 states had organic labelling laws, definitions, or certification programs, up from 12 states at the start of the year, Organic Gardening points out.

With organic food gaining better acceptance, the lack of federal organic standards is often cited as the reason why such foods are not more readily available, the magazine pointed out. It added that this fact, along with a perceived delay in revamping pesticide residue standards, may have accounted for the 48%of Americans who said that they think that the federal government is doing a poor job protecting consumers from potentially harmful pesticides and other chemical produce.

The results of the Organic Index survey are based on 1,250 telephone interviews, completed with randomly selected adults throughout the continental United States. The interviews were conducted by Louis Harris and Associates between November 6 and December 13, 1989.

Source: Whole Foods: June 1990

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