

Organic, Inc.: Natural Foods and How They Grew

By Samuel Fromartz

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Organic food has become a juggernaut in an otherwise sluggish food industry, growing at 20 percent a year as products like organic ketchup and corn chips vie for shelf space with conventional comestibles. But what is organic food? Is it really better for you? Where did it come from, and why are so many of us buying it?

Business writer Samuel Fromartz set out to get the story behind this surprising success after he noticed that his own food choices were changing with the times. In *Organic, Inc.*, Fromartz traces organic food back to its anti-industrial origins more than a century ago. Then he follows it forward again, casting a spotlight on the innovators who created an alternative way of producing food that took root and grew beyond their wildest expectations. In the process he captures how the industry came to risk betraying the very ideals that drove its success in a classically complex case of free-market triumph.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
In recent decades, organic food—the idealistic, natural alternative to industrial agribusiness and processed packaged foods—has grown into a multibillion-dollar business. Fromartz's portrait of the adolescent industry reveals that that success has prompted an epic identity crisis. Big corporations like Kraft and General Mills own the bulk of the market, and half of all organic sales come from the largest 2% of farms, alienating those most committed to producing chemical-free fruits and vegetables on small family farms, and selling them locally. Business journalist Fromartz uncovers the trailblazers' tactics: how Whole Foods Market developed a religion of "moral hedonism," how Earthbound Farm launched a revolution with bagged salad mix and how Silk soy milk became "the number one brand in the dairy case, among all milk and soy milk brands." But if big business is now the muscle of the organic industry, Fromartz demonstrates that small growers remain at its heart. Fromartz's profiles—of pioneers who sell their produce at farmers' markets and foster cooperatively-owned, local distribution networks—deftly navigate the complexities of pesticide issues, organic production methods and the legal controversies surrounding organic certification. This is a pragmatic, wise assessment of the compromises the organic movement has struck to gain access to the mainstream. *(Apr.)*
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From Booklist
Although initially attracted to organic food from his encounters with it as a cook, business journalist Fromartz scrutinizes this ever--growing industry from an economic perspective. He focuses on the raising of strawberries, a fruit perpetually in high demand nationwide. Citing the example of a California grower who grew berries both conventionally and organically under virtually identical conditions, Fromartz declares organic farming to be indeed economically viable. Fromartz also examines the use of chemical pesticides, initially lauded as agriculture's great savior until the appearance of Rachel Carson made public their baneful long-term effects. Fromartz finds a different but similarly successful road to economic success in the story of Earthbound Farms, whose leafy mesclun mixes now appear in markets all over the country. Lest today's organic food producers become complacent, Fromartz recounts the tale of Kellogg, a company whose founders cherished lofty aims of spreading health and nutrition but who ironically ended up promoting mass-market, sugar-laden cereals quite contrary to what they had originally envisioned. *Mark Knoblauch*
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Review

PRAISE FOR ORGANIC, INC.

"Fromartz does an excellent job of investigating consumer behavior and the trends that have permanently changed the food landscape."?SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

"Revealing . . . Fromartz gives us a handy tool for educating ourselves."?FAST COMPANY MAGAZINE

"With one eye on organic food’s past and one eye cast on its future, Samuel Fromartz has a comprehensive vision of an industry at a crossroads. Here is a voice that reminds us of our power as consumers. Anyone reading *Organic, Inc.* will be inspired to put his money where his mouth is."

(Dan Barber, chef/owner of Blue Hill and Blue Hill at Stone Barns)

"Sam Fromartz has the ability to transform an important subject into an interesting one, as he does with this vivid, vital book, *Organic, Inc*. No, it's not a new wave or diet book. It's a book that will alter the way we think about what we eat and the business forces that shape what we eat.

(Ken Auletta)

"In *Organic, Inc.*, Samuel Fromartz gives us a uniquely American story—the emergence of Big Organics from humble origins in small, counterculture farms. Fromartz writes with the passion of an organic partisan but his account of the pros and cons of Organics, Big and Small, is unusually balanced, honest, and compelling.

(Marion Nestle, author of Food Politics)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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