

Organic Farms Provide Jobs, High Yields

A [study](#) released in May by Britain's Soil Association concludes that organic farming provides 32 percent more jobs per farm in the United Kingdom than conventional agriculture does. According to the study, 93,000 new jobs could be created if all of Britain's farms were to switch to organic practices, which include avoiding the use of toxic chemical inputs and genetically altered seeds. Such job creation could not be replicated in non-organic farming, the report notes, because "it is the system of organic farming itself that demands more labour and creates more jobs."



Critics argue, however, that the labor intensity of organic farming leads to higher food costs and would likely make a large-scale shift to organic in the U.K. unfeasible (currently only about 4 percent of British farms are organic). "The most expensive cost for farmers is labour, and that is why organic food as a rule of thumb costs half as much again (50 percent more)" than conventional food, [notes](#) economist Sean Rickard of the Cranfield School of Management.

But while this may be true for many industrialized countries, in most [developing countries](#) labor tends to be cheaper than chemical inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides, says Worldwatch Senior Researcher Brian Halweil. This is one reason why a switch to organic farming in developing countries is typically a profitable option and can lead to [20–90 percent](#) increases in production, according to Halweil.

Even in industrialized countries, studies suggest that organic farms generate nearly as high yields (80–97 percent) as conventional farms, while some crops show no yield difference at all. According to [Catherine Badgley](#), a research scientist at the University of Michigan, a global shift to organic farming could produce enough calories to feed the entire human population and potentially 75 percent more calories than are produced now.

Organic farming is currently the only major segment of the world food system that is expanding. From 2003 to 2004, the area of farmland under organic management increased by [9 percent](#). And organic farmers are not just growing food. Between 2001 and 2005, annual [sales](#) of organic cotton grew by 35 percent worldwide and 55 percent in the United States. Manufacturer demand for organic cotton alone jumped 93 percent from 2005 to 2006.