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Organic Farmers Should Be Allowed to Grow Organic Produce in Containers, Consumers Overwhelmingly Agree

SAN DIEGO, Calif., September 23, 2016 – More than 91 percent of consumers that purchase organic produce favor the current U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) policy that allows organic farmers to grow organic produce in containers, according to a survey conducted on behalf of The Coalition for Sustainable Organics.

This November, the National Organic Standards Board, the body that recommends changes to the USDA National Organic Program, is scheduled to consider proposals that will restrict or prohibit container-production methods from organic certification. These survey results demonstrate the negative impact that a program ban on organic container-grown food could have on consumer perceptions of the USDA.

Container Growing As a Sustainable Approach

Container growing is a controlled growing system in which plants derive nutrients from approved organic substances in water and/or growing material. A 2015 study¹ showed water savings of more than 90 percent for container systems versus open-field production systems. These growing methods promote sustainability in many ways:

- They generally require fewer resources per pound of fruits, vegetable or herbs produced compared to food grown outdoors in the soil
- In most cases, container growing uses less water, needs less land, significantly reduces soil erosion and extends the growing season of plants
- It also reduces runoff of nutrients or other chemicals into streams, lakes and water aquifers

“The Coalition believes that everyone deserves access to organic produce,” stated Lee Frankel, executive director of The Coalition for Sustainable Organics. “By restricting the organic label only to plants grown in the ground, the USDA would be choosing to supply fewer consumers with the quality organic produce they want and expect.”

¹ Lages Barbosa, Guilherme et al. “Comparison of Land, Water, and Energy Requirements of Lettuce Grown Using Hydroponic vs. Conventional Agricultural Methods.” Ed. Rao Bhamidimarri and Kiran Tota-Maharaj. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 12.6 (2015): 6879–6891. PMC. Web. 22 Sept. 2016.

“The Coalition believes that everyone deserves organics. By continuing to define organic growing by how the plants are nourished and protected from pests and disease, we can continue to increase the diversity and number of producers supplying consumers with what they want and expect.”

Additional Survey Findings

The survey also revealed other facets of organic growing that are important to consumers. 93 percent of respondents indicated that further reductions in pesticide use are extremely or very important, and 89 percent stated that the organic industry should focus on improved affordability. “Banning container systems would severely restrict existing supplies and raise the prices of items like tomatoes, berries, herbs, living lettuce and sprouts, just as consumers are demanding more of them,” stated Colin Archipley, owner of Archi’s Acres. Archi’s Acres is a farming enterprise that utilizes hydro-organic technology to grow organic produce. Headquartered in Escondido, California, Archi’s Acres is a certified organic greenhouse operation, which grows living basil, kale, and other herbs and produce.

“Maintaining current standards for certifying organic containerized growing simply makes sense. These production methods have brought new growers and more local production into the supply chain to serve the growing organic market. Changing the rules now would unfairly and unnecessarily limit the amount of organic produce available to the public,” said Colin Archipley.

Speak Up for Sustainable Organics

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has opened a formal comment period where everyone, including consumers, producers, restaurants and supermarkets can express their view on the matter. “The future of a diverse and sustainable organic supply is at risk,” said Lee Frankel. “People need to share their opinion with the US Department of Agriculture and the National Organics Standards Board to keep that supply as part of the organic family. They can do so over the internet by going to <https://www.regulations.gov/comment?D=AMS-NOP-16-0049-0001> .”

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About the Survey

In late August and early September, 2016, Insight & Measurement, LLC conducted a survey of consumers of organic produce from the general population of the United States to assess attitudes toward container growing. The survey screened people into the survey who were:

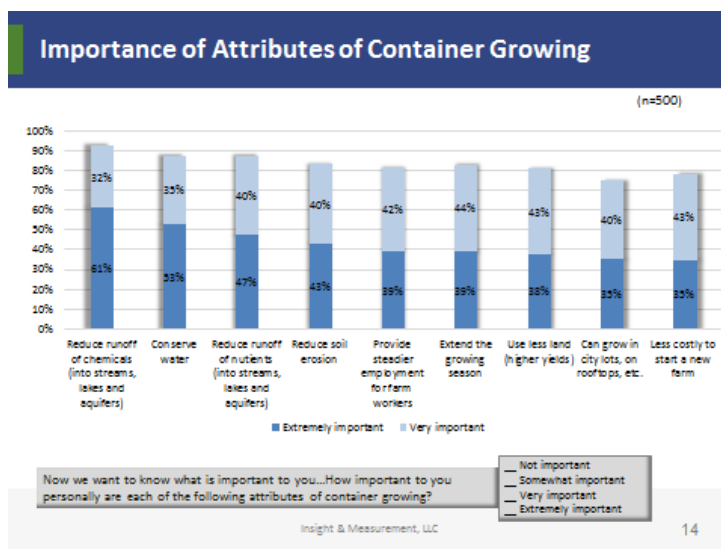
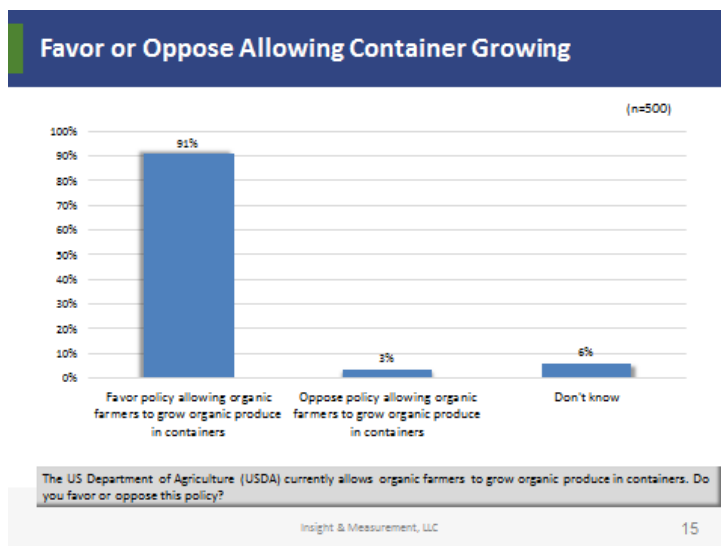
- Ages 25 through 64 (quota-sampled for half older than 45, half younger than 45)
- Had total 2015 household income before taxes of at least \$25,000
- For employment, must have been either employed full or part-time, self-employed, full-time homemaker or retired (excluded students and not employed)
- Must do at least half of the grocery shopping for the household
- Overall, must purchase at least some organic produce
- Must plan to purchase at least some organic produce in next 30 days

The data was collected from 8/30/16 through 9/2/16.

About the Coalition for Sustainable Organics

The Coalition for Sustainable Organics is a group of environmentally and socially responsible growers of all sizes committed to maintaining the USDA's current high standards for certifying organic produce. Through the Coalition, containerized growers large and small have united to ensure everyone who wants organic produce can have it. For more information, visit

<http://coalitionforsustainableorganics.org/> .



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