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Why is locally grown and organic food so expensive?

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When shopping for organic food, consumers often report sticker shock and turn away, dismayed at the notion of paying $4 a pound for tomatoes. They're used to the lower prices at the local megasupermarket down the road.

The popular notion of someone who eats a local, organic diet is a food nut with an income sufficient to afford organic and who can afford to deliberate about food choices because the more expensive option will not break them.

Yet unless a significant number of people of all income levels have access to locally grown and organic ingredients, sustainable agriculture will never take hold and have a decisive impact on our health and on the environment to make a difference.

Why is the cost of local and organic foods often higher than prices at the big supermarket? Because it is based on the true price of producing food, unaided by government subsidies of commodity crops, cheap oil, and underpaid (and under-benefited) workers. We pay more for our food than we realize because at tax time we pay for those subsidies. Small family and organic farms rarely get the subsidies, and they often pay their workers a living wage.

If the farm is operated organically, then the solutions to problems like pests, diseases and weeds are more costly than the pesticides and herbicides used in conventional farming. Industrial agriculture has not only had a bad effect on the environment, it has skewed our perception of what food should cost.

The tide is turning on costs. There are an increasing number of programs working to make locally raised food affordable to low-income neighborhoods while still paying the farmer a fair price.

Ways can also be found to make eating local and organic affordable. One good way is to join a food buying club or food coop. Find information on this at Coop Directory Service [1].

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Links:
[1] http://www.coopdirectory.org/