



PACIFIC COAST  
FARMERS' MARKET  
ASSOCIATION

## DEAR DEB - JULY



**Dear Deb:** I'm wondering why we don't have more organic produce at the market. Lucy P., Alameda

**Answer:** We've received several questions this month on why there aren't more organic fruits and vegetables in the farmers' markets. To answer this question, we spoke with a Regional Manager of the Pacific Coast Farmers' Market Association (PCFMA).

The number of participating organic producers varies from market to market and is influenced by customer demand and spending. To be certified organic, farmers must have their farms All organic agricultural farms and their products must register with the [CDFA](#) or the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) before the first sale of a product. There are several USDA [Accredited Certifying Agents](#) (ACA) who are registered with the State Organic Program to certify organic operations in the State. Farms are inspected to determine if they are following mandated organic practices. Then they are certified by the state agents.

The Regional Manager explained that the cost of becoming organically certified is a major barrier for many California farmers. "The first thing that most people need to understand is that growing organic produce means that a farm must have its soil tested for any non-organic chemicals. It takes time to clean out the soil. And the naturally derived pesticides that they are allowed to use in organic farming cost, about 10 times what traditional pesticides cost," he states.

Many farmers cannot absorb the cost to change their farm to organic. In addition to the upfront costs, organic farmers also have to sell their produce at a higher price to make up for the lost yields and increased labor costs. This can make it difficult for them to compete

with conventional farmers, who can sell their produce for less.

As a result, only 15% of PCFMA's participating farmers are certified organic, about thirty of our 300+ farmers. Other participating farmers in our markets are not certified organic, but maintain a no-pesticide, no-chemical farm, without the cost of being organic. Ask your farmer about their farming practices before assuming they use chemicals.

The Regional Manager says, "We know that many customers prefer organic produce, and we try to get as many as we can to come to our markets, but there are not many farmers that are truly certified organic." He also states that certain farmers' markets do not have organic farmers because customers are not willing to pay the higher cost for it.

We do our utmost to provide a wide diversity of organic and conventional farmers in our farmers' markets to satisfy customers and will continue to seek out those who are certified by the state of California to uphold quality and freshness.