

WHY ARE SO MANY ORGANIC FRUITS AND VEGETABLES PLASTIC-WRAPPED?

BY BOB SCHILDGEN | JUL 1, 2016, FOR SIERRACLUB.ORG

Hey Mr. Green,

Our nearest farmers' market is a 25-mile trek. In the store, the only organic green beans I can find come in microwavable plastic bags. Organic tomatoes are sold in clamshell containers. Bell peppers are shrink-wrapped individually. Most of the nonorganic produce is not packaged this way. Why all the plastic?

—Joe in Paw Paw, Michigan

It appears that, like many organophiles, you have an aversion to plastic packaging, which we've been denouncing since its invention. But there is some justification (mostly economic) for the use of plastic, because organic produce usually costs a lot more to grow than its industrial cousins. Spoilage, known as "shrink" in retail lingo, is a bigger concern with organic fruits and vegetables than with ordinary produce, because shrink drives up prices, which are already the biggest barrier to organics. Since one rotten apple spoils the barrel, it helps to isolate some types of produce.



Packaging also reduces dehydration, while enabling the use of UPC codes for accurate pricing. Even that individual wrapping is about price, in that folks don't want to pay for more than one item if they don't need it. Finally, organic produce in storage is not allowed to be in contact with nonorganic produce, so those pesky plastics serve a prophylactic purpose.

If you can't grow your own food or hoof it to a farmers' market, plastic may be a necessary evil. But it can't hurt to let your grocer know that you don't like it, as some stores manage to sell unwrapped organic produce. And of course, recycle packaging whenever possible.

Information provided for you by ~

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