

# Making America Organic...One Home At a Time!



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## Taking A Bite Out Of 'Organics'

By Stacie Stukin

For organic farmer Judith Redmond and others like her, Michael Pollan, who wrote "The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals," is more than a bestselling author. "In our world," she said, "he's a rock star."

That's why the balding, bespectacled Pollan cannot shop at his Berkeley farmers market without being approached by adoring fans who thank him for bringing debates about green living and the "sustainable food movement" into the mainstream.

They have all read his book, which calls Americans "the people of corn" and suggests that we are a hopelessly obese and diabetic nation because of the presence of corn in everything we ingest - from the feed our cattle eat to the high fructose corn syrup in our soda. These readers feel as if they intimately knew Rosie, the organic chicken Pollan tracked in the book only to discover that her free-range, pastoral life was more myth than reality. And when, in the New York Times magazine, Pollan weighed the pros and cons of Wal-Mart entering the organic food business, readers were riveted.

How best to live authentically green is the question Pollan keeps coming back to. It's a debate that's surfacing in architecture (Do we really need that wood from halfway across the world?), in fashion (Is there genetically engineered corn in my jeans?), in beauty (What are all these chemical ingredients?) and even in fitness (What about the plastics in my yoga mat?). But nothing is more visceral than the food we eat, as Pollan discovered in May when more than 300 people showed up to see him at a Seattle bookstore.

"I had never seen a crowd like that at a bookstore," Pollan said. "After I talked for a while I realized this wasn't about me. The energy in the room was political. Honestly, I think there are more important issues -- the health of the republic, whether we are going to lapse into tyranny, the war in Iraq -- so I began to ask myself: Why are people turning out in such big numbers to talk about food and grass-fed beef?"

Probably for the same reason that in June Pollan's friendly-yet-tense online exchange with John P. Mackey, the co-founder and chief executive of

Whole Foods, was eagerly read and e-mailed among the green intelligentsia, who were pleased Pollan took on the corporate titan. (It can be accessed on Mackey's blog on the Whole Foods website or at [michaelpollan.com](http://michaelpollan.com).)

"Other issues are hard to do something about," Pollan said. "Food is unique because we can all do something about it today. We get to decide three times a day what we take into our bodies, so we can vote with our forks and do our part to change the world."

The conflict between the author and the CEO started in the pages of Pollan's book, where he wrote that some "jet-setting" organic asparagus from Argentina he had bought at Whole Foods may have been pesticide free, but it tasted like "damp cardboard" -- and what's "organic" about all the fuel it took to get it to California? Then there was the organic milk he bought there -- the Holsteins that produced it ingested organic corn, but they were confined to inhumane feedlots and milked three times a day just like their conventional counterparts.

Mackey started the exchange with an open letter, posted on the Whole Foods website, that chastised Pollan for not interviewing him for the book. Mackey requested a meeting and offered Pollan a \$25 gift certificate to make up for the disappointing asparagus. Several e-mails and one face-to-face meeting later, the chain eased its distribution policies, making it easier for individual stores to work directly with small farmers. Whole Foods even allocated \$10 million for small loans to local farmers.

Pollan said his meeting with Mackey made him more sympathetic to the forces the executive has to deal with, but he pointed out that "organic is going through an identity crisis." Exchanges like this, he said, encourage people to ask, what does "organic" mean, anyway? And do those values get compromised when organic business reaches corporate, industrial proportions?

This kind of probing is why Doreen Stabinsky, who works on agriculture issues for Greenpeace in Latin America, emails most things Pollan writes to colleagues all over the world. "He keeps  
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### Harvest Blend Regular

- Cucumber
- Carrots
- Celery
- White Garlic
- Red Onions
- Zucchini
- Russet Potatoes
- Red Bell Peppers
- Hass Avocado
- Persian Limes
- Strawberries
- Red Pearl Nectarines
- Diamond Princess Peaches
- Green Wickson Plums
- Keitt Mango

See the web site for details on our other options. Produce bag contents are subject to change based on availability.

### OO Reminder

Now that warmer days are upon us, please remember it is your responsibility to leave a cooler outside your door if you are not home to receive the delivery.

This is especially important if you are receiving dairy with your produce.

While we have, in the past, left the thermal bags at your door, we would really prefer not to do so, as the return rate on these bags is often a problem for us.

A cooler is also better for you because ice packs in the cooler will do a better job of keeping your food fresh in the ambient temperature than our bags without any ice.

Thank you for your business, and let us know if you have any questions.

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issues on the table that wouldn't otherwise be there, especially if market forces forged ahead unchecked," she said.

Pollan finds his newfound status as a kind of public conscience of the sustainable food movement both shocking and heartening. After all, debates about the nuances of green have been going on for decades, especially in Berkeley, where Pollan moved to from New York in 2003 to become a journalism professor at UC Berkeley. But if he has taken the discussion to a new level of public awareness, he won't characterize himself as an activist, because he said he wants to preserve his journalistic independence.

The danger, he said, is getting "swept up in the movement, especially when I agree with a lot of it." But Northern California farmer Redmond, co-owner of Full Belly Farm, said that whether Pollan likes it or not, he is an activist. Since the Mackey/Pollan exchange, she said, she has noticed "a sea change of difference" in the way Whole Foods is doing business in her region. (Whole Foods turned down requests for comment for this article.)

Now Wal-Mart is calling Pollan to discuss organics, and the public-speaking requests are "endless." While he hasn't endured the food industry's wrath, as did author Eric Schlosser ("Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal"), who has been met with protests and smear campaigns, Pollan's opinions are not always embraced.

George Kaligrdis, the president of Ojai-based George's Organic, who is also very active in the Organic Trade Assn. (which counts among its members big organic businesses like Whole Foods), called Pollan an unrealistic "flame thrower" who has the unfair advantage of a powerful platform. "No one thinks buying local and supporting local farmers is a bad idea, but it's easier said than done," he said. "There are already forums to have these conversations. So why does someone have to throw a bomb to get attention?"

Pollan said there's some truth to the charge that he is a provocateur. "I don't want to preach to the choir," he said. "I could have a career writing for people who already care about and are obsessed by food. But I want to talk to people who haven't thought about their food before."

## Recipes

### Grilled Swordfish with Cucumber Lime Salsa

- 1 tbsp fresh lime juice
- 1 tsp honey
- 1 tsp vegetable oil plus additional for brushing pan
- 1 tsp ground coriander
- 1 (1-inch-thick) swordfish steak (6 oz)
- 1 lime
- 1 cucumber, peeled, seeded, and cut into 1/4-inch dice
- 1 tbsp finely chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 tbsp finely chopped scallion greens
- 1 tsp finely chopped fresh jalapeño or serrano chile (including seeds)
- 1 tsp sugar, or to taste
- 1/4 tsp salt

Stir together lime juice, honey, oil, and coriander in a shallow dish. Add swordfish, turning to coat, and marinate at room temperature, turning over once, 15 minutes. (Do not marinate longer.)

While marinating, remove peel, including all white pith, from lime with a sharp paring knife. Cut segments free from membranes and finely chop segments, then combine with remaining salsa ingredients in a bowl.

After marinating, lightly brush grill pan with oil and heat over moderately high heat until just beginning to smoke.

Remove swordfish from marinade and season both sides with salt and pepper. Grill fish until just cooked through, 3 to 4 minutes per side. Serve topped with salsa.



### Zucchini with Toasted Garlic & Lime

- 3/4 pound zucchini
- 1 tsp salt or to taste
- 2 tbsp vegetable broth
- 5 cloves garlic, sliced thin
- 1 tbsp freshly squeezed lime juice

- 1/4 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tsp fresh chopped oregano
- 2 tbsp chopped flat leaf parsley

Put the zucchini in a colander and sprinkle with salt and toss. Let stand in the sink or over a plate for 30 minutes. Rinse and then dry with paper towels. Heat the broth and saute the garlic until lightly browned. Do Not Burn! Scoop out the garlic and set aside.

Add squash and sauté, stirring frequently, for about 10 minutes, until tender, but still crunchy. Remove from heat. Stir in the garlic and lime; toss thoroughly. Sprinkle with the pepper, oregano, and parsley. Mix. Taste for salt and serve warm.

### Thai Tofu With Zucchini, Red Bell Pepper and Lime

- 2 tbsp peanut oil, divided
- 1 14 oz. package extra-firm tofu, drained, patted dry, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
- 3/4 pound zucchini, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
- 1 large red bell pepper, diced
- 1 tbsp minced peeled fresh ginger
- 1 1/3 cups canned unsweetened coconut milk
- 3 tbsp fresh lime juice
- 1 1/2 tbsp soy sauce
- 3/4 tsp Thai red curry paste
- 1/2 cup sliced fresh basil, divided

Heat 1 tablespoon oil in large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add tofu; sauté until golden, about 4 minutes. Transfer tofu to bowl. Add remaining 1 tablespoon oil, then zucchini and bell pepper to skillet; sauté until beginning to soften, about 4 minutes.

Return tofu to skillet. Add ginger; stir 30 seconds. Add coconut milk, 3 tablespoons lime juice, soy sauce, and curry paste; stir to dissolve curry paste. Simmer until sauce thickens, about 6 minutes.

Season with salt and more lime juice, if desired. Stir in half of basil. Sprinkle with remaining basil. Serve with rice noodles or steamed rice.

