

Farmers Seek to Raise Standards for Berries

Organic-produce buyers who think they are striking a blow against a chemical-heavy industrial food system may be surprised when it comes to one of California's signature fruits: those "organic" strawberries that overflow from baskets at local farmers' markets are not nearly as organic as they may think.

In a letter sent to the United States Department of Agriculture last month, an advocacy group in San Francisco and a triad of local growers demanded an end to what they say are vague federal regulations that allow millions of pounds of toxic chemicals to be used to grow plants that eventually produce strawberries labeled as organic.

Signed by three growers and the Pesticide Action Network, it added that officials with the National Organic Program at the department "must act with some urgency" to support production of a berry that is sustainable from start to finish.

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