

## The Food Issue Survey: A Review of 'The Omnivore's Dilemma'

by The Editors

g-Think asked our panel of Awakening Consumers what they felt about various aspects of organic food, from whether or not they purchase it, to what they feel constitutes "organic" food. We also asked our panelists what foods they avoid, and presented them with some facts on the origins of shrimp.

Not surprisingly, food is an emotional issue – and a confusing one as this issue of g-Think attempts to explore. Our minds may say one thing, while our stomachs say another. No one can say there is a shortage of information out there about food – what's good, what's bad; what we should avoid and what the ethically correct thing to do is when it comes to purchasing food.

First let's see what our panelists feel about organic food:

### Purchasing Organic Food

For a start, 80 percent of our respondents purchase organic food – a slightly higher percentage than the national average. Organic food is now widely available and widely promoted – and the price differential with non-organic foods is narrowing.

### What IS Organic Food?

When asked what makes a food organic, the message was clear. Most people feel that it's the lack of pesticides, chemicals and other artificial additives. Only a couple of people feel "organic" means the "small farmer tradition." This may have positive implications for the acceptance of "big organic" (see the g-Think article 'The Mainstreaming of Organic').

In terms of what people associate with organic food, the picture is mixed:

- 22 percent associate organic food with better health
- 20 percent feel organic food means "better for the environment"
- 18 percent associate organic food with being more expensive (which it is)
- 14 percent feel it is better for animals
- 11 percent associate organic food with a better taste (a surprisingly low response considering that much of the advertising for organic food promotes it as tasting better)
- 9 percent feel organic food means "better for farmers"

### Wal-Mart and Organic Food

In the last few months there has been a lot of attention in the media as Wal-Mart rolls-out of a new line of organic foods. When asked if they had heard of this major move by the world's biggest retailer, only 37 percent said they had, while 63 percent said they hadn't. Only 20 percent said they would trust foods sold by Wal-Mart to be truly organic. Thirty percent said they would not, while a full 50 percent said they weren't sure. It seems that Wal-Mart has a lot of educating to do.

When it comes to avoiding certain foods the picture was very mixed. Obviously, a lot of this has to do with personal tastes such as avoiding

Brussel sprouts or alligator meat, or any meat for that matter. A lot of people mentioned they avoid fast foods or anything with transfat content or high fructose corn syrup.

### **And Then There's the Question of Shrimp**

Just when you thought shrimp was a healthy and environmentally-sound alternative to other sources of protein (79 percent of our responders eat shrimp), g-Think came along to dispel that myth. While shrimp may be somewhat healthy (apart from all that nasty cholesterol), it's certainly not environmentally sound, especially when it's wild-caught.

A large 80 percent of our responders didn't know that the one pound of shrimp you buy at the fish counter has actually involved catching, and often destroying, 10 pounds of "by-catch" – other seafood caught up in the process (see g-Think article To Eat or Not to Eat).

A better alternative is to buy farm-raised shrimp, but this often involves more chemicals and more intensive energy. However, 47 percent feel this

somewhat more environmentally sound alternative is attractive, and that they'd pay up to 25 percent more for the farm-raised product. Eighteen percent still want to eat the wild-caught variety, while 27 percent would eat the farm-raised variety only if it was the same price.

On the question of preferring farm-raised fish over the wild-caught variety, the responses were mixed:

- 12 percent prefer wild-caught
- 18 percent somewhat prefer wild-caught
- 12 percent strongly prefer farm-raised
- 7 percent somewhat prefer farm-raised
- 36 percent said it doesn't matter
- 15 percent don't purchase fish