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## An Open Letter to Michael Pollan

Michael Pollan's new book *The Omnivore's Dilemma* has been near the top of the best seller's list since it was published in April, and it deserves to be. This is mostly an excellent book which I strongly recommend people read, along with Peter Singer and Jim Mason's new book *The Way We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter*. Both books are real wakeup calls about how our food is being produced in the United States today, and how our food choices potentially can make a positive difference in the world. While Singer and Mason have many nice things to say about Whole Foods Market in their book (especially regarding our approach to improving farm animal welfare), Pollan is far more critical and skeptical about many of Whole Foods Market's practices, both in his book and in subsequent interviews about the book in the media. Unfortunately Pollan did not carefully research Whole Foods Market's actual practices while writing his book so many of his comments about us are either inaccurate or misinformed. The letter that follows is one I gave to Pollan in person on May 25th after I spent a delightful hour and a half in productive dialog with him. I found him to be highly intelligent, a good listener, open minded, thoughtful, and idealistic—all in all quite an interesting and impressive person. I came away from my dialog with him convinced that we will likely become proactive allies working together in our joint quest to reform "industrial agriculture." I only wish we had met and had this productive dialog before he wrote his book. Unfortunately we didn't and as result many misunderstandings are now circulating about Whole Foods Market as a result of his book and recent interviews. This letter is an attempt to address those misunderstandings.

*I want to acknowledge that the following letter was not written by me alone but was a joint product of several people, including valuable contributions from Margaret Wittenberg, A.C. Gallo, Edmund Lamacchia, Jim Speirs, Kate Lowery and Anna Madrona. Thanks to everyone who participated.*

May 25, 2006

Dear Michael,

I am deeply appreciative of your efforts to encourage your readers to take a closer look at where their food comes from. I especially like the way you lead your readers to understand that their everyday choices do make a difference both in the food supply chain and the environmental sustainability of the planet. As you point out in the "Big Organic" (Supermarket Pastoral) chapter of your book, credible information about the sources of our food in conventional foods stores is limited to non-existent.

As the co-founder and CEO of Whole Foods Market, I lead an innovative business that has offered customers numerous choices in natural and organic foods for more than 27 years. Yes, the business has grown in size — from one store to our current 184 — keeping pace with the increasing popularity of these products in the developed world. And, as a Fortune 500 company, we might be considered a big company by many people. However, Whole Foods Market has done more to advance the natural and organic foods movement in general and local organic growers and artisanal food producers specifically than any other business currently operating in North America. These points are not mentioned in your otherwise engaging examination of modern food systems. Quite the opposite, in fact, as you go out of

your way to criticize Whole Foods Market and associate us (unfairly and inaccurately) with what you call "Industrialized Organic" and "Big Organic."

Whole Foods Market's co-presidents, Walter Robb and A. C. Gallo, and I try to be available to the media, as you might have realized during your research on other pieces that have been written on our company in the last few years. I am not aware of any attempt on your part to contact company leadership in any way. I greatly enjoyed reading your book *Botany of Desire* and I certainly would have enjoyed speaking with you in person while you were conducting your research. I may have been able to clear up some misconceptions before they appeared in print.

Because of our success and growth, Whole Foods Market attracts a lot of praise, comparison and, sometimes, hostility — along with the occasional puzzling ethical or moral judgment. As a retail business that operates at a level of transparency far exceeding that of almost any other business of its size, I find this curious but figure that these judgments are a by-product of our success. Your book focuses on several points, either by implication or actual statement that I find troublesome in terms of their accuracy. I want to provide you with additional background on these points and provide you with the names of Whole Foods Market spokespersons who can assist with any research materials or clarification that you may need in the future.

I regret that you did not engage in any serious research about how Whole Foods Market actually does business or you would have discovered that we support local and small farm food production all over the United States as well as in other parts of the world. Whole Foods Market, despite its size, does not operate as a typical monolithic corporation such as Wal-Mart (with which you associate Whole Foods Market several times in your book). Our company continues to operate on a decentralized model wherein each of our 11 regions, as well as each store, has a high level of autonomy. Differences in product offerings, suppliers, and seasonal availability result in a significant variation of items on our shelves from region to region and even store to store within the same city. However, our strict quality standards, the highest in the industry, are observed with every supplier and retail outlet. In other words, you may find a variation in the types and kinds of products, but each has been screened by our rigorous quality standards.

Before I provide you with examples of how Whole Foods Market supports local growers of natural and organic products and artisan food producers, I want to emphasize an important point about our company. Whole Foods Market offers a range of food choices to our customers. We screen our offerings by the quality standards I mentioned earlier and try to offer as many natural and organic products as possible, but we don't try to channel our customers into adopting any particular dietary regime. Instead, we provide opportunities for each to make individual choices that satisfy their everyday demands and lifestyle needs.

Some customers prefer to eat primarily from their "foodshed" or they wish to support local growers. Individual Whole Foods Market stores attempt to meet the needs of these customers as far as is practical given the constraints of seasonality and availability of products meeting our quality standards. Other customers want to enjoy particular foods from throughout the world, either because of their ethnic background or because they appreciate expanded choices and novel cuisines. Most of our customers prefer a combination of local, national, and global food choices, and appreciate — even demand — the range of choices Whole Foods Market offers.

We understand the line of reasoning that champions eating locally and in season. Whole Foods Market stores offer as many local, seasonally available foods that meet our quality standards as are available in a

particular market area. Our customers, however, regularly desire products that may not be in season in many parts of the United States. Accordingly, due to such market demand, we offer the freshest, most sustainably grown products we can find on a year-round basis while also continuing to develop our relationships with local and regional producers in season. That may mean that a Whole Foods Market customer desiring fresh organic asparagus in January will find only spears with an Argentinean or Chilean origin in our produce department. Many of our customers want fresh asparagus and this is where we can reliably source organically grown produce at that time of year. In your book you report the following: "My jet-setting Argentine asparagus tasted like damp cardboard. After the first spear or two no one touched it." I want to apologize to you for your unpleasant experience with our Argentine asparagus and I've enclosed a \$25 gift certificate to help compensate you for your negative experience.

The following information provides key points about Whole Foods Market and its supporting role in the growth of organic and sustainable agriculture over the last 25 years. I will also include examples about how Whole Foods Market works with natural and organic food producers at the local and regional level. I am providing only highlights. Should you wish to follow up on any of this information, I encourage you to contact:

- Margaret Wittenberg, Vice President of Communications and Quality Standards
- Kate Lowery, National Public Relations Director
- Jim Speirs, Vice President of Global Non-Perishable Procurement
- Edmund Lamacchia, Vice President of Global Perishables Procurement

### **Organic: Whole Foods Market is a Big Part of the Story**

I find it perplexing that your book provided so little context for the history of the organic movement in the 20th century. The snapshot your book provides on the current state of the organic industry is just one stage in its evolution. The organization of the organic movement started in the 1960s in limited areas. As organic farming and foods were embraced by the counterculture in the 1960s and 70s, networks of co-ops developed and came together for purchasing and distribution purposes. These soon dissolved since members could not agree on ideals and because most of the co-op models were not economically sustainable. A few of these models still are working, including one I belonged to in Austin many years ago, however none of them have been able to offer a strong enough market presence to sustain local or even regional agriculture.

In the days when organic co-ops were plentiful, very little product actually came from small-scale, local, progressive farms. The cornerstones of the income statement in the early co-ops were rice, apple cider, peanut butter, cheese, tofu, eggs, some seasonal fresh products, and membership fees. In the 1960s and 70s, agriculture at the local and regional level was already in decline, having been decimated by low producer prices, lack of concern about diet by the American consumer, increasing desire for fast foods, decline in food quality, and an increasing, government-supported focus on chemical practices. Local agriculture hit rock bottom in the mid-1980s. The Greenbelt Alliance along with developing marketplace forces driven by the increasing numbers of "California Cuisine" restaurants and the for-profit natural foods sector supported many of the young growers who created the next generation of family farms. Without that effort in the 1980s, the snapshot that you capture in "Big Organic" would not have the

same appearance. The focus on integrated marketing (including direct-to-consumer sales), crop diversification, product differentiation, and the general move toward agricultural sustainability through Integrated Pest Management (including organic) practices preserved and created the current resources that exist in local and regional agriculture. By offering multiple outlets for their products and working tirelessly to educate consumers, Whole Foods Market stores, along with many regional independent stores, are an integral part of saving and supporting regional and local agriculture.

As one regional example, in the 1960s and 70s, very little organic produce was actually available in New England. During our limited local season, Bread & Circus (which started in 1975 and became part of Whole Foods Market in 1992) bought vegetables from a few local small farms that were just outside of Boston. The farmers claimed that their produce was organic but without any national or local law defining the term, the organic label was used loosely. Still, our customers loved the freshness of the local product after a winter of week-old organic produce from California, much of which arrived by air in the early days (imagine the relative cost of that produce!). By the early 1980s, we had a few more stores in the area, therefore more buying power, and we started to buy, through brokers, from legitimate organic farms. Our selection was still very limited, maybe 20 percent local organic in winter, but at least at this point we had real, local, organically grown produce from trusted sources.

The local organic farm scene grew in the 1980s as young farmers experimented with vegetable growing and delivered directly to our stores. As the number of stores in the region grew, we opened a small distribution center. These farms appreciated the convenience of sending a produce-filled truck to a central distribution point from which we could deliver to our stores. This development allowed the farmers to maximize their efforts on the farm, rather than spend so much time on the delivery, and allowed us to receive more frequent produce shipments in the stores. We still buy from the farmers that we originally worked with in the 1980s, if they are still in business. As part of Whole Foods Market, we have grown to more than 30 stores in the New England and New York area, and our local growers have a much larger market for their products.

But the limited growing season and the dense population in New England force any food business to make choices in meeting consumer demand. Whole Foods Market customers are going to eat fresh fruits and vegetables in the winter. We have the choice of either offering them conventionally-produced vegetables or organically-produced vegetables that will have a lot of transportation miles on them. The organic fruits and vegetables at this time of year are going to be from large farms to insure quality and supply, and some of them may be from organic producers in another hemisphere.

## **Local Procurement**

In other parts of the country, we sell a tremendous amount of locally-grown food, working with thousands of local producers. For example, in 2005 in the produce category alone, 45% of our suppliers were considered to be local (within 200 miles) and 34% were regional (within 400 miles) —only 21% would fall into your category of "Big Organic" national producers. Of our top 150 suppliers/brokers in the produce category, 22% of our purchases are from large corporate farms and 78% are from independent and family farms (some of these smaller farms pool together under one brand name to help improve marketing and distribution). 60% of these 150 suppliers grow organically, and/or represent growers who do so. Economies of scale are important at all levels of the organic food chain in order to lower costs and improve distribution.

As a decentralized company with 11 operational regions and 8 distribution centers, Whole Foods Market is highly unusual when compared to the average "industrial" operation. Regional distribution helps suppliers gain access to all stores within the region, a benefit to their bottom line that otherwise would not occur in a conventional grocery operation. Whole Foods Market continues to build distribution centers, which increases our ability to support regional and local production. Our individual stores are not prohibited from purchasing from local farmers, and, in fact, all of our 184 stores purchase regularly from local growers. Many growers, likely the ones you profiled as "missing in action" at the Berkeley store, are probably using our distribution center on their own volition to take advantage of distribution economies of scale. As a result, the growers spend less time on the road, and place their product in front of a much larger customer base.

Continuing on the theme of seasonality and distribution, the local grass-fed beef sold in the Union Square Farmers Market that you have publicly championed is fresh for a very limited time during the year and would need to be sold frozen for the majority of the year, if sufficient supplies were actually available to meet demand. Whole Foods Market does sell locally-raised meat whenever possible, however most of our customers want their grass-fed meat fresh, rather than frozen, and they want it year round. We can source an abundance of fresh meat from New Zealand, which, with its moderate climate, has an abundance of good pasture throughout the year. Although Whole Foods Market would like to sell local grass-fed beef regularly, another challenge is that a small producer typically needs to sell the whole animal, which leaves Whole Foods Market with the cuts our customers will not buy. Our farmers in New Zealand have different markets around the world that absorb the cuts our customers will not purchase. The farmers in New Zealand can move the beef more quickly, selling Whole Foods Market the cuts that our customers prefer and selling the other cuts to customers elsewhere. We do try to make it work whenever we can, such as with a local organic beef farmer from Southern Vermont who sells to our three stores in New York City. With a great deal of effort, Whole Foods has figured out how to market this producer's entire animal. The popular cuts like rib eyes and strip loins get sold as premium product, while the end cuts get made into hamburger and stew meat for our prepared foods section.

Whether local, national, or global, any meat producer we buy from must adhere to our strict vendor standards and criteria. Whole Foods Market has the highest natural meat standards in the industry, and we are spearheading the development of national Animal Compassionate Standards (which several European countries have in place, but which are lacking in the U.S.). In addition, Whole Foods Market provides educational support for producers through our non-profit Animal Compassion Foundation. As a side note, you may be interested to know that many of our meat producers do not finish off their animals with corn. They are grass-fed until the end.

Here are additional examples of how Whole Foods Market supports local growers and producers:

- In our South Region, consisting of Georgia and the Carolinas, we set up a mini co-op to consolidate product from local vendors. Whole Foods Market also provided a market for the row crops produced by former tobacco growers (who were part of a government project to grow alternative crops instead of tobacco).
- In the still-recovering New Orleans market, local shrimpers rely heavily on the two Whole Foods Markets to buy their catch.
- In New England, Whole Foods Market works with many small farms that supply a single store, several stores, or many stores through our distribution center. Some specific examples are:

- Our Hadley store in western Massachusetts sits in the Connecticut River Valley amid many small farms, and has authority to buy from local producers. During the season, Hadley buys local produce from over 25 small local farms.
- Whole Foods Market stores in eastern Massachusetts are encouraged to source from local growers; this results in many stores having their own individual growers from the local community.
- In the Tri-State area of New York, customers define "local" in a very narrow geographical area. Customers in northern New Jersey do not consider product from Connecticut or Long Island "local," even though the farms might be geographically closer to them than farms in southern New Jersey. Our customers in Jersey want Jersey produce in season. Whole Foods Market developed a complicated system that distributes Jersey produce to the Jersey stores, Long Island produce to our two Long Island stores, upstate New York produce to our NYC stores and Connecticut produce to our Connecticut stores.
- Our flagship store in Austin supports local growers and encourages in-store product demonstrations and samplings. Our local Texas growers, like the Goodwins from Buda, Carol Ann and Larry from Boggy Creek Farm in Austin, and the folks from Bella Verdi farms in Dripping Springs, are frequent guests at the store. Whole Foods Market and these growers see our businesses as a part of each other's on-going success.

In addition, Whole Foods Market works with local food artisans on a market by market basis. Scratch bakers and dessert makers, tortilla producers and fresh salsa crafters, hummus experts and falafel sandwich purveyors, gourmet dog biscuit peddlers and handmade jewelry artists all have shelf-space. Products offered at Whole Foods Market vary store by store, thus supporting the local producers in each market. We most decidedly do not have a cookie cutter model for our stores, other than our model for celebrating local foods and producers.

### **On-going Support for Organic Agriculture:**

Whole Foods Market was a pioneer in the organic arena, we did not wait to "get on board" with organic until its health and environmental benefits were corroborated by science and economic analysis. Whole Foods Market has supported organic agriculture from our earliest days in Austin, Texas. We actively sought out sources of organic produce and food since 1978 and continued this practice as we grew. Did you realize that Whole Foods Market was the sole retailer representative on the federal National Organic Standards Board for five years? And that we continue attending National Organic Standards Board meetings and maintain a close watch on the issues to ensure the ongoing integrity of organic standards. Whole Foods Market led the consumer response against the USDA's draft National Organic Standards that included provisions for genetically modified food crops, the use of human sludge as fertilizer, and irradiation of food products.

Whole Foods Market chaired the Organic Aquaculture Feasibility Task Force in 2001 to explore whether organic standards could be created for aquaculture while still maintaining organic livestock standards and principles. The task force suggested it was possible but would take a lot of work to achieve. Unlike many other retailers, Whole Foods Market will not allow either wild or farmed fish sold in our stores to be labeled as organic since neither has a national organic standard currently in place.

Whole Foods also led the citizen outcry at the potential diminishment of organic livestock feeding standards. The Congressional newspaper *Roll Call* noted that Whole Foods Market's efforts alerted legislators and consumers, resulting in an overwhelming amount of direct consumer feedback to individual legislators. Whole Foods Market took the lead on this issue rather than waiting for the organic community to develop an action plan because of an extremely short timeline.

Whole Foods Market was the first national grocery retail chain to be certified as organic. While not required by law, we felt this certification would underscore our commitment to organic and would provide assurance to our customers that even as the company expands, our commitment to organic is as strong as ever.

### **Helping Convert More Agricultural Land to Organic**

The most important story about the rise of organic agriculture is the reduction of the use of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, many of them petroleum based, and/or produced and distributed with huge energy inputs. Beyond this impressive reduction in the use of pesticides, many of the agricultural practices developed within the organic community have spread out into conventional agriculture with tremendous beneficial impacts. Some of the more significant impacts include:

- The use of *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) in the strawberry industry, the use of border plantings and cover crops to protect water ways and improve soil tilth, and the development of insectaries for producing beneficial insects improve the quality of the food we eat while protecting the environment.
- Acres of land in California treated with cancer causing synthetic materials: 1989 = 5.2 million, 2004 = 3.8 million – 28.8% reduction, with similar acres in production
- Pounds of pesticides known to cause cancer applied in California: 1989 = 181 million, 2004 = 175 million - 3.3% reduction (unfortunately the positive story is in specific counties and on specific commodities)
- Acres of land in California treated with reproductive disrupting synthetic materials: 1989 = 4.5 million, 2004 = 2.3 million – 49% reduction
- Pounds of pesticides known to cause reproductive disruption applied in California: 1989 = 36 million, 2004 = 24.12 million – 33% reduction
- Pounds of registered pesticides applied to Strawberries in Monterey County: 1985 = 10.5 million, 2004 = 3 million – 71% reduction
- Pounds of registered pesticides applied to Artichokes in Monterey County: 1985 = 162,908, 2004 = 62,567 – 61.5% reduction
- Pounds of bio-pesticides with little environmental toxicity applied in Monterey County: 1984 = 1,037, 2004 = 7,000 – 575% increase

Your book implies that some large-scale organic farming is harmful to the soil and environment. Your farm visit to Greenways may have misled you into making gross assumptions about other organic operations. The implication that some large-scale organic farming practices release harmful nitrogen

into the atmosphere is curious when it is not even clear that Greenway's practices produce harmful nitrogen emissions.

Soil with healthy organic matter converts excess nitrates into dinitron (N<sub>2</sub>). N<sub>2</sub> is an inert nitrogen gas that does not add to the Greenhouse Effect, and generally perpetrates much less environmental harm than nitrates. Stanford University's Department of Biological Sciences released a paper in March of this year entitled "Reduced Nitrate Leaching and Enhanced Denitrifier Activity and Efficiency in Organically Fertilized Soils," that reported organic and integrated fertilization practices support more active and efficient denitrifier microbial communities, which may shift some of the potential nitrate leaching losses in the soil into harmless dinitrogen gas losses in the atmosphere." Granted you did not have access to this information while you were writing, however, similar research findings are available.

### **Walking Our Talk with Organic Dairy:**

Whole Foods Market's private label milk is from the nation's largest cooperative of organic family farmers, CROPP. CROPP was founded in 1988 by seven Wisconsin-based farmers who were attempting to meet the crisis of the loss of family farms. The 533 small to mid-size member dairy farms feature a herd-size average of 66 cows. The certified organic, traditionally pasteurized milk (not ultra-pasteurized) is produced and bottled in California, the northeast, northwest, and midwest, and is distributed nationwide by Whole Foods Market. The farmers who belong to CROPP are dedicated to humane animal practices such as pasturing and allowing animals to express natural behaviors.

Other organic milk suppliers who sell to Whole Foods Market are audited (by Whole Foods Market team members with backgrounds in animal husbandry) for humane raising practices, including commitment to a pasture-based production system. I personally went to visit two of the largest organic dairy farms last week that have been highly criticized for their animal welfare practices (particularly their inadequate access to pasture). One of these farms has made very substantial changes to their pasture access and has been unfairly attacked, in my opinion. The other dairy is definitely a CAFO (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation) using organic feed and is violating the spirit of the current organic dairy standards. Tougher organic pasture standards will be necessary to force this dairy to upgrade their practices. Whole Foods Market does not buy any milk from this company. Whole Foods Market has strongly urged the USDA and the National Organic Standards Board through the public comment process, as well as through a detailed, public presentation at the April 2006 USDA Organic Pasture Symposium, to tighten up humane animal care standards for organic dairy cattle, specifically focusing on pasture as a requirement for raising and feeding these animals. The organic pasture requirement for dairy cows was not well specified in the original regulations, and this has led to some abuses. However, I am hopeful that this flaw can and will be corrected within the organic regulations in the coming year.

### **CAFOs & Whole Foods Animal Compassionate Standards**

Whole Foods Market shares the concerns you expressed in your book about large scale CAFOs, whether these be conventional or organic. These "factory farm" operations need to be eventually outlawed, in my opinion, and this is an area where major change is necessary in the organic regulations. Whole Foods Market is so concerned about the way livestock animals are being raised for food in the United States that we are in the process of creating Animal Compassionate Standards, which we are hopeful will eventually have a revolutionary impact. Creating these standards has been a multi-stakeholder process

with many dozens of animal farmers participating along with representatives from several animal welfare groups — Humane Society of the United States, PETA, Animal Welfare Institute, VIVA, Animal Rights International, and Compassion Over Killing — plus a number of internationally renowned animal scientists. We have been working with these stakeholders for over 2 1/2 years now and have created final standards for ducks, pigs, sheep, and beef cattle. The Compassionate Standards for turkeys, lobsters, and broiler chickens are very near completion, while laying chickens and dairy cows will be completed before the end of 2006. I urge you to review the standards that we have already completed, which are available on-line at:

<http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/issues/animalwelfare/index.html#standards>

### **Animal Compassion Foundation**

To help facilitate both research and the conversion of conventional animal farm over to more compassionate livestock operations, Whole Foods Market created the Animal Compassion Foundation. So far Whole Foods Market has donated more than \$1.3 million to fund the foundation over the past two years. I urge you to take a look at the important work this foundation is doing to better the lives of farm animals. [Animal Compassion Foundation](#)

### **The Future Evolution of Organic Foods**

Industrial agriculture grew tremendously throughout the 20th century. Synthetic fertilizers, synthetic pesticides, and synthetic herbicides were not in widespread use 65 years ago. There were no such things as CAFOs more than 40 years ago. GMOs are less than 20 years old. The organic movement has largely grown in response to the industrialization of agriculture. It is a reform movement that has been growing and evolving for less than 60 years, and didn't gain any serious traction until about 20 years ago. The first stage in the "Organic Reformation" has concentrated primarily on getting the synthetic chemicals off our farms and out of our food. We have made great progress in achieving this goal considering where we started from. However, we now know that getting the synthetic chemicals off our farms and out of our food is only the first stage in the Organic Reformation. Much, much more is needed — especially with improving the soil, dismantling CAFOs, improving local organic production and availability, and improving animal welfare. Rather than despair that the Organic Reformation has been corrupted by the industrialization of agriculture, I believe that we simply need to evolve to the next level. Your book is an important contribution for raising consciousness for the need for further evolution of the Organic Reformation. Joel Salatin's farm is a valuable example and model for what is possible and is an inspiration to many of us. Many organic farmers are beginning to work with similar methods that Salatin has pioneered. You are probably already familiar with Holistic Management International. This non-profit organization is helping to spread effective pasture management systems similar to what Salatin has done. It was founded by one of Salatin's mentors, Allan Savory. You can find their website at <http://www.holisticmanagement.org/index.html> in case you aren't familiar with their work.

### **Offering the First Lower Priced All-Organic Line in the U.S.**

Finally, with our private label 365 Organic product line, Whole Foods Market offers our customers every day, affordable organic choices from "soup to nuts." Well aware of our moniker "Whole Paycheck," through initiatives like our organic store brands and the purchasing discounts we can now enjoy because of our size, our food prices have decreased in many categories over the last few years. Our prices for the same products are actually lower for many staples than those in conventional grocery stores or competitor natural foods retailers, while our selection continues to include a range of items from staples to higher quality or more exotic choices.

In summation, Whole Foods Market has supported the growth of, and driven significant demand for, organic agriculture for more than 27 years. Throughout this time Whole Foods Market stores have supported local growers and food producers in store market areas. Because of our unique, mission-driven business model, our success has allowed expansion throughout the hemisphere and into Europe, where we can offer healthy and environmentally sustainable food options to an ever increasing customer base in store environments that celebrate good food and an abundance of choice. I am not sure if merely because of our size and success Whole Foods Market deserves the pejorative label "Big Organic" or "Industrial Organic," or even to be linked to those categories. I would argue instead that organic agriculture owes much of its growth and success over the past 20 years to Whole Foods Market's successful growth and commitment to organic. As an organization we continually challenge ourselves to be responsible and ethical tenants of the planet. Through our stores, large and small organic farmers, both local and international, can offer their products to an increasingly educated population that is more interested in organics every day.

Again, I value the wake up call provided to such a wide audience by *The Omnivore's Dilemma* with its overview of the social, ethical, and environmental impacts of modern food production. Whole Foods Market is extremely excited about the possibility of a more educated and informed consumer base. However, I feel that the book misrepresented key points about Whole Foods Market, and this leads me to question some of your objectivity as a journalist. Much of the organizational, economic, and social and agricultural activism leadership information about Whole Foods Market is readily available from a variety of public sources. In addition, our leadership team members, many of whom have been with the company for more than 15 years, are readily available to speak with the media. Going forward, I trust that the information I've provided will find its way into your making a more accurate portrayal of Whole Foods Market. Michael, Whole Foods Market is one of the "good guys" in this story about the "industrialization of agriculture." We want to transform our food procurement pathways into more holistic, ecological, and sustainable systems. We should be working together as allies to accomplish this essential mission.

Sincerely,

John Mackey, Co-founder and CEO

Whole Foods Market

Posted by John Mackey on May 26, 2006

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