Anti-organic: Why do some farmers resist profitable change?
11 November 2014

Why do some chemical farmers resist a profitable conversion to organic methods? A new study in the Journal of Marketing suggests it may be because making that change feels like switching belief systems.

"The ideological map of American agriculture reveals an unfolding drama between chemical and organic farming," write authors Melea Press (University of Bath), Eric Arnould (Southern Denmark University), Jeff Murray (University of Arkansas) and Katherine Strand (McGill University). "Chemical farmers argue that to make money, one must follow chemical traditions; when organic farmers make more money, it seems "wrong."

The authors looked at chemical and organic wheat farmers of the American plains to see which crop production strategies they used, and why. They found that, as predicted, both chemical and organic farmers often gave passionate, belief-based reasons for their choices, and clearly felt that their beliefs were in competition.

One chemical farmer stated that he felt organic farmers were unscientific and that they probably followed "an organic crop guru." An organic farmer, by contrast, stressed the joy of bringing the earth back to life: "I had thousands of seagulls, but my chemical neighbor did not have one. Why was this? Earthworms. My soil is getting healthier because I'm not putting all the herbicides and pesticides out there."

The authors conclude by stressing the vital importance to agricultural managers of recognizing how ideological beliefs influence farming methods, and of using this understanding to find new ways of inspiring farmers to adopt profitable changes.

"It is possible that when approaching strategic change, managers might have greater success if they recognize that potentially conflicting ideologies are in play. As we have illustrated, the preservation of the agricultural world is at stake."


Provided by American Marketing Association