

Should We Air Freight Organic Food?

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Abstract

Given the urgency with which we need to address climate change, should we allow air freight under organic standards? The Soil Association has proposed that organic food is only air freighted if it delivers genuine benefits for farmers in developing countries. Less than one percent of organic and non-organic imports come to the UK by air. However, the amount is growing rapidly, increasing by 31% in 2006. Air freight generates as much as 177 times more greenhouse gases than shipping, and with the projected growth rate could be a much more significant contributor to climate change in the future. Air freight predominantly serves the fresh fruit and vegetables sector. The majority of organic air freight is grown in low or lower-middle income countries, providing unique economic, social, and local environmental benefits, often for farmers with otherwise very low carbon footprints. While it is wrong to exclude anyone from the organic market, it is equally irresponsible to encourage food supply systems that are ultimately unsustainable. We believe the Standards Board's proposal is the right response to the situation now, but there is an important debate to be had on how all organic organizations respond to air freight going forward.

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