

Mega-grocers cashing in on organics

By Ari LeVaux, Outdoor

Walmart, already one of the country's largest distributors of organic foods, will gobble up additional market share this summer, thanks to a deal it struck with Wild Oats to carry more than 100 of the natural-food chain's house-branded products.

The agreement, coming on the heels of Target's Simply Balanced line, which is 40 percent organic, marks a new era. One obvious benefit is that prices for organic foods should drop nationwide as production increases and competitors are forced to match big-box discounts.

But the supersizing of organic comes at a cost. When the term first gained traction, in the 1980s, it was mainly used by small farms supplying local markets. In 2000, when the Department of Agriculture created the USDA Organic label, its standards included a list of roughly 100 substances, including some synthetic chemicals, that would be allowed in the farming process. The list is picked over incessantly, but in September of last year, the USDA made it more difficult to remove pesticides and herbicides it had already approved.

All of which means that, for consumers, shopping is more complex than ever.

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