

# The Dallas Morning News

Texas' Leading Newspaper

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## Sunday



## GOD ON THE BALLOT

From Hamas' Palestinian victory to the expanded influence of U.S. evangelical conservatives, "prophetic politics" is on the rise. Today, religion often decides who gets elected.

POINTS, 1P

Mostly sunny



High: 102 Low: 79  
Metro, Back Page

## Israel batters Beirut, suburbs

### Attacks target seaports, Hezbollah strongholds; Iran denies involvement

BEIRUT, Lebanon — Waves of warplanes thundering through the darkness bombed Beirut's southern suburbs for hours early today, a day after Israel stepped up its airstrikes and tightened a noose around this reeling nation.

The Israeli air force on Saturday hit strongholds of the Shiite Muslim guerrilla group Hezbollah, bombed central Beirut for the first time, and pounded seaports and a key bridge. Then, during the night, about 18 powerful explosions rocked southern Beirut, where Hezbollah is headquartered and much of the air assault has been aimed since cross-border hostilities erupted Wednesday.

Israeli forces and Hezbollah

traded heavy blows for a fourth straight day Saturday. Israeli warplanes struck grain silos, ports and an iconic lighthouse close to the American University of Beirut. Massive clouds of smoke billowed into the sky over the coast; eerily quiet streets in the Lebanese capital grew even more deserted as night came.

Civilians on both sides bore the brunt of the violence.

See ISRAEL Page 14A

### KEY DEVELOPMENTS

**In Lebanon:** Prime Minister Fuad Saniora pledged Saturday to extend his government's control over all of Lebanon, signaling he wants to end Hezbollah's autonomy in the south — a top Israeli demand.

**In Washington:** The State Department was looking for a

way to evacuate Americans from Lebanon to the nearby island of Cyprus to connect with commercial flights home.

**In Israel:** The military said elite Iranian troops helped Hezbollah fire a sophisticated radar-guided missile at an Israeli warship Friday.

More coverage, analysis, 14A

### WORLD

#### Iraqi Olympic team members abducted

Gunmen in Baghdad staged a brazen kidnapping of the head of the Iraqi Olympic Committee and dozens of colleagues, including athletes and support staff. 21A

#### U.N. OKs sanctions against North Korea

The U.N. Security Council voted unanimously Saturday to impose sanctions targeting North Korea's missile and nuclear programs. 16A

### NATION

#### Bush seems poised for stem cell veto

If Congress, as expected, this week approves a measure loosening restrictions on stem cell research, President Bush could issue his first-ever veto. 6A

### TEXAS

#### Legend of the Rose Window gets face-lift

The Rose Window may be San Antonio's second-most-photographed landmark, after the Alamo. That doesn't mean the legend of the window, which just got a \$1 million restoration, is strictly true. 3A

### METRO

#### Slain woman had expensive lifestyle

"Everything she did was to the extreme," a longtime friend of Sarah Anne Walker says. The real estate saleswoman, found murdered in McKinney, embraced the good life. 1B

### TRAVEL

#### Storied sips

Some of New Orleans' most hallowed bars remain shuttered, but many more are overflowing with good spirits for this month's "Tales of the Cocktail Festival." 11

### SUNDAY LIFE

#### A writer begins

Fifty-three years ago, a raw novice was trying to make his way in a raucous newspaper business. The first of an eight-part serial.

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Is your organic milk really organic? The USDA has strict rules regulating who can use the label, but a Dallas Morning News analysis found those standards aren't always enforced.

## The real deal?

One of the problems plaguing the organic-food industry, critics say, is vague rules about the treatment of animals, including how much time they spend outside and how much time is devoted to leisurely munching.

By PAULA LAVIGNE  
Staff Writer

### A NATURAL QUESTION

First in an occasional series

More and more shoppers are forking out extra money for organic foods to avoid chemicals, eat healthy and support the environment.

But the USDA Organic label, stamped on foods as diverse as cookies, milk and mangos, may not be a mark the public can always trust.

Organic food is supposed to be free of most chemical pest killers, fertilizers, antibiotics, hormones and genetic engineering. Organic farmers and ranchers must enrich the soil and be kind to animals; chickens should strut outside and cows should regularly graze.

But a Dallas Morning News analysis has found that the United States Department of Agriculture does not know how often organic rules are broken and has not consistently taken action when potential violations were pointed out.

"The USDA has failed to enforce the regulations," said Jim Riddle, former chairman of the National Organics Standards Board and an appointed adviser to the USDA when the organic standards were enacted in 2002.

See CAN Page 26A

**DigitalEXTRA** ■ Videos: Organic dairy farms draw criticism from activists for farming techniques. ■ A state inspector pays a visit to an organic vegetable farm. [DallasNews.com/extra](http://DallasNews.com/extra)

## Districts on TAKS cheat list in dark

State didn't seek data on why firm flagged schools, preventing investigation

By JOSHUA BENTON  
Staff Writer

When he saw that six Richardson schools were on the state's list of potential TAKS cheaters, Superintendent Jim Nelson wanted to investigate. But to do so, he needed to know how Caveon — the company that built the list — did its work.

He e-mailed state Education Commissioner Shirley Neeley, whose agency paid Caveon to do the analysis: "Commissioner, how do I get detailed information as to how Caveon reached their conclusions? All we got were the conclusions."

He added, according to documents obtained by *The Dallas Morning News*: "Anger and frustration aimed at the agency is palpable. I want to help, but we must have access to their analysis." Without those details, the Texas Education Agency is doing "nothing more than a hit and run," he said.

Mr. Nelson and other Texas educators have tried to get the information they think they need to clear their schools' names. But the TEA hasn't been able to give it to them. That's because agency officials never got the data themselves.

As a result, few, if any, thorough cheating investigations have begun — nearly two months after Caveon determined that 609 schools had suspicious test scores.

As Frisco Superintendent Rick Reedy wrote in a statement on the district's Web site: "We did take the report seriously, and we did try to investigate the findings ... without much luck."

TEA officials say they never wanted the findings from the \$500,000 Caveon analysis to lead to large-scale investigations. The agency expected the analysis to be the first part of a multiyear study that might improve test security down the line.

But faced with anxious superintendents and political leaders, the agency has been moved to action.

See LACK Page 2A

## Barber prison ministry spreads the gospel — and the wealth

### Charity pays for leader's top-tier salary, family jobs, high school football titles

By TIM MacMAHON  
and GARY JACOBSON  
Staff Writers

Mike Barber Ministries tells the IRS that it is devoted to spreading the gospel in prisons throughout the United States

and abroad. There's no question that it does a good deal of that.

But there also seems to be no question that Mike Barber Ministries has been good to Mr. Barber, who started the tax-exempt organization after a solid NFL career.

Two years ago, the high-profile charity paid its founder \$236,500 in salary and benefits, one of the highest pay packages in the nation among similar religious charities. His wife, who

worked part time, received \$118,000. The ministry also pays three other members of Mr. Barber's family. Mr. Barber declined to discuss their salaries.

In addition to saving souls, Mr. Barber's ministry is dedicated to winning high school football games. Over the years, Mr. Barber and his ministry lavishly supported athletic programs at Cedar Hill's Trinity Christian School and Arlington's Grace Prep Academy.

Both relationships ended when Mr.

Barber disagreed with administrators. "He gave a lot of money, and he wanted control over football," former Trinity Christian principal Ben Flores said.

Each school discovered that there is a downside to Mr. Barber's support. When he leaves, so does his money. After Grace Prep's headmaster dismissed him in May, Mr. Barber took back equipment and said his support would go elsewhere.

See SPREADING Page 12A



Mike Barber's pay package was \$236,500 in 2004.



# Can you trust organic food?



**Mark Kastel, co-founder of the Wisconsin-based Cornucopia Institute, which oversees farm policy and the organic industry, checks out Aurora's Dublin, Texas, farm. Mr. Kastel is among consumer advocates critical of big dairies' treatment of animals.**



Photos by LARA SOLT/Staff Photographer

**Cows roam at Aurora Organic's dairy farm in Dublin, Texas. Responding to critics, big dairies such as Aurora insist their cows do graze and say they welcome more precise grazing rules.**

## CERTIFICATION Q&A

### When can the USDA organic seal be used?

The label is allowed on raw food and packaged products that are "100 percent organic" or "organic" from certified producers. "Organic" products allow for up to 5 percent nonorganic ingredients. This is mainly involving materials used in processing packaged foods. If the product is at least 70 percent organic, it cannot use the USDA seal, but it can use the phrase "made with organic ingredients." If it is less than 70 percent, but still has some organic content, then it can only use the word "organic" to identify individual ingredients.

### What is organic?

Organic food is grown without the use of most conventional pesticides, fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients, or sewage sludge. It is also not grown with bioengineering or ionizing radiation, USDA rules state. Animals are not given antibiotics or growth hormones and are supposed to have more access to the outdoors so that they can exhibit more of their natural feeding behavior. The complete rules are lengthy and vary depending on the type of operation.

### Who says it's organic?

Declarations are made by a USDA-accredited certifier, whose name should be on the product label or package.

### Who are the certifiers?

The USDA has accredited 96 certifying agencies, 56 in the United States and 40 in foreign countries. Some are state agencies, such as the Texas Department of Agriculture, but most are private companies.

### What do certifiers do?

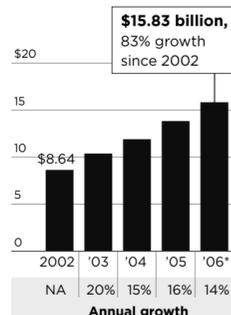
They hire inspectors, whether on staff or freelance, to visit organic farms, ranches and processing plants and review operations, records and workers. The inspectors report back to the certifying agent, which determines whether the operation complies with the USDA organic rules.

## GROWING NATURALLY

U.S. sales of organic foods and drinks have risen by 83 percent since 2002. The budget for the government program established to watch over the industry has not grown at the same pace.

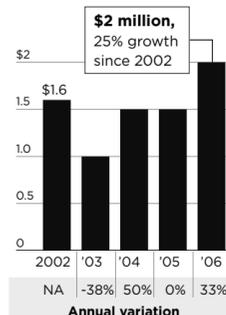
### SALES OF ORGANICS

In billions



### NATIONAL ORGANIC PROGRAM BUDGET

In millions



\*Estimate. \*\*U.S. sales of products labeled 100 percent organic, organic and made with organic ingredients. SOURCE: Organic Trade Association; U.S. Department of Agriculture

BETSY BOCK/Staff Artist

Continued from Page 1A

"There have been no prosecutions of violations for the organic law yet. ... They've failed to take action."

Though a small slice of the overall food market, organics is growing at 16 percent a year, while overall food sales are rising only 3 percent. They are forecast to continue that pace as big grocers, most recently Wal-Mart, expand their organic offerings.

Barbara Robinson, the USDA executive who oversees the National Organic Program, said her small staff struggles to keep up with the booming industry.

"When you have eight or nine people, and everybody wants something, you try to do a little bit of everything."

She said the label is as good as the people who are growing and monitoring the products.

"I don't think there are any absolutes in the world anywhere. I think that's kind of a ridiculous question," she said.

Ms. Robinson acknowledged that the agency hasn't fined anyone for misuse of the label, but she said certain products have been ordered to yank it.

Retailers say the label is their cue that products are authentic.

"If you buy an organic product at Wal-Mart, you can trust that it is USDA certified. But I would not be able to speak to whether those are the right standards or the wrong standards. We are retailers; we are not agronomists or scientists," said Wal-Mart spokeswoman Gail Laville.

The organic program monitors at least 20,000 organic growers, ranchers, processing plants and others worldwide.

Texas looms large in organics, with more organic land than any other state. It is also home to one of the nation's biggest organic companies, Dean Foods in Dallas, which distributes Horizon Organic dairy products and Silk soy milk. Whole Foods of Austin is the nation's largest organic retail chain. Representatives from both companies say they take measures to make sure their products are organic.

USDA officials say the organics label is a selling point rather than a mark of nutrition. The dietary benefit of organics is the subject of debate. However, shoppers often view organic food as an invest-

ment in their health.

About 66 percent of U.S. consumers buy organic products occasionally, according to a 2004 survey by the Hartman Group, a consumer research company. Almost half said they bought organic for their health and nutrition.

Those surveyed said having children was the most significant reason to go organic, and that's what prompted 28-year-old Megan Stewart of The Colony.

Her 1-year-old daughter was recently strapped into a shopping cart filled with organic baby food in an aisle at Whole Foods in Plano.

"I only get the USDA certified, rather than just packages that say all natural or organic," Mrs. Stewart said. "They are really under tight regulations."

But *The News* found the following reasons that organic shoppers may not be buying what they think they are:

- A review of 216 internal USDA audits shows several examples of violations at organic farms and production plants. However, reports about problems that are supposed to filter up to the agency from on-the-ground monitors are incomplete.

- Much organic food is produced overseas, where there is even less oversight. Inspectors in China, for example, describe obvious violations that are not well-tracked or known by the agency.

- Vague rules leave much to interpretation, especially when it comes to treatment of animals.

### Organic cheaters

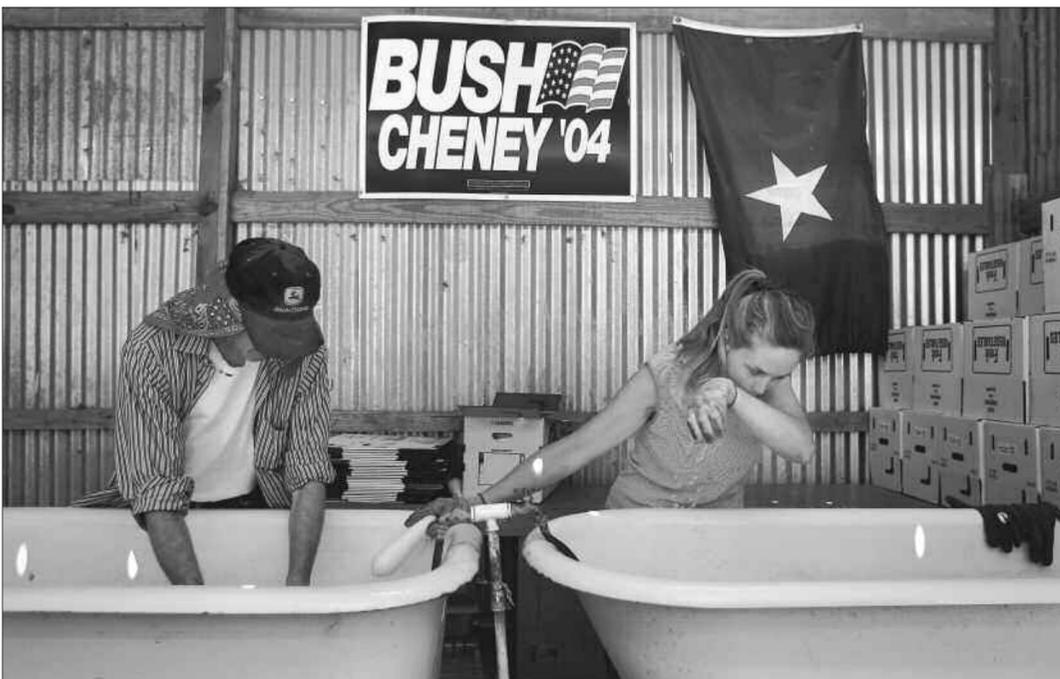
Organics is full of true believers, farmers and food processors who go above and beyond what they're required to do. But they worry about organic scofflaws making a bad name for the whole industry.

"There's definitely people who don't follow the rules," said Conner Updike, who grows organic beans and squash in central Florida. He uses chicken manure to fertilize his crops, but he's heard that some people cut corners and use ammonium nitrate — a banned fertilizer — that costs half as much and is hard to detect.

"It's not fair to me," he said. "I'm trying to obey all the rules, and then someone else cheats."

The Washington State Department of Agriculture, for example, discovered a fruit farmer who ap-

See VAGUE Page 27A



**Jacky (left) and Cindy Morrison washed yellow squash last month at Morrison Organic Farm in Cleburne. The Morrisons distribute their crops to retailers such as Whole Foods and Central Market, doing much of the prep work themselves.**





LARA SOLT/Staff Photographer

From left: Jacky Morrison, DeMarcus Lashley, 13, and Travis Jordan, 16, pick squash at the Cleburne farm. With about 313,000 acres, Texas has more certified organic cropland and pasture than any other state.

**COST COMPARISON**

Consumers will sometimes pay twice as much for an organic product. Below are comparisons taken from local stores, including Tom Thumb, Whole Foods and Wal-Mart.

Product	Organic price	Regular price
Raisin bran	29.3 cents per ounce	16 cents per ounce
Chicken breast	\$8.99 per pound	\$4.99 per pound
Strawberries	\$4.99 per pound	\$2.99 per pound
Baby food	21 cents per ounce	14 cents per ounce
Milk	\$3.50 per half gallon	\$2.47 per half gallon

**THE INDUSTRY IN TEXAS**

- Texas leads the nation in certified organic cropland and pasture, with about 313,000 acres, about the combined size of Dallas and Arlington. About 82 percent of that is pasture and rangeland.
- More than 300 organic certificates have been issued to farms, ranches, processing plants and retail stores in Texas.
- Whole Foods, the nation's largest organic retail store, is headquartered in Austin.
- Texas is home to one of the nation's biggest organic companies, Dean Foods in Dallas. The company's WhiteWave Foods subsidiary includes the best-selling organic milk brands Horizon Organic and Silk soy milk. Its competitor Aurora Organic Dairy of Boulder, Colo., operates a 4,400-cow dairy farm in Dublin, Texas.
- Texas Department of Agriculture is the state's largest certifier, granting certificates to about 70 percent of the state's organic operations.
- Texas adopted organics in 1988 when it established its own organic standards. Other states, including California and Washington, did the same before the federal regulations that went into effect in 2002.

# Vague rules, lax oversight plague organic foods

Continued from Page 26A

plied banned chemicals to his orchard and a mint grower selling regular mint under the organic label.

A Canadian certifier cried foul when inspectors found chickens at a Manitoba poultry producer that had no access to the outdoors, as required in organic laws.

Among 268 complaints released by the USDA, about 50 were products erroneously claiming to be organic or falsely using the label. The USDA ordered them to stop.

Problems continue to crop up, but there's no way for the public to know how many cheaters there are.

In April, *The Dallas Morning News* requested records of all violations regarding individual farms, ranches and handlers. USDA officials said they could not provide the documents for at least six months.

Officials said it would take that long to collect and organize the information, though organic program rules require the USDA to make violation information available to the public on the program's Web site. But after four years, Ms. Robinson said her staff hasn't had time to make that happen.

**Missing information**

The USDA does not know how many violations there are because it is missing information from those who are supposed to be policing the industry at the ground level.

The agency collects information from 56 certifiers in the United States and 40 in foreign countries, usually state-run agencies or private companies. Farms and processing plants can choose any USDA-approved certifier.

A banana from Ecuador or rice from southeast Texas can carry the USDA label only if a certifier has given approval. Certifiers hire inspectors to walk through fields, interview plant workers and comb through records. The certifiers are then supposed to notify the USDA when there are problems.

However, *The Dallas Morning News* reviewed hundreds of audits of certifiers that show many violations. Yet the USDA has never yanked or suspended a certifier's accreditation, despite auditors' recommendations to do so.

Auditors, from a separate USDA branch, wrote that certifiers approved food producers despite evidence that banned chemicals were used. Some gave approval without conducting inspections.

USDA officials would not discuss the individual audits. It's unclear whether officials addressed problems auditors pointed out. But several audits note the same problems with the same certifiers year

**POTENTIAL VIOLATORS**

Here are a few examples of potential violations taken from hundreds of certifier audits and complaints provided by the USDA. The agency has not been able to provide records of confirmed violations.

- A company in Italy that produces butter and cheese where dairy cows are described eating organic feed not certified by the USDA
- A certifier in Idaho that sent inspectors with little to no experience certifying farms, where they overlooked potential violations
- A California seed company listed using synthetic fungicide — not allowed under USDA rules — in processing seeds
- A brewery in Berkeley, Calif., distributing organic beer made without organic hops
- Beef from a Michigan farm sold as organic though it was processed at a facility that was not organic
- A Georgia company selling boxes of pecans labeled organic that contained a mix of organic and nonorganic nuts
- A company in Florida selling shrimp and fish labeled as USDA-certified organic. No seafood is allowed to carry the organic label
- A Michigan farm advertising beef and buffalo meat as organic, though the farm was never certified

after year.

Inspectors, organic farmers and certifiers themselves say they know some cut corners.

Sam Welsch, owner of OneCert, a certification agency in Lincoln, Neb., said some companies hire the cheapest inspectors, not the most qualified.

"Even if one organization is doing a bad job, and a fraud issue would come up, that's bad for the whole industry," he said.

Big companies, such as Dean Foods, say they protect their consumers by going with reliable, trusted certifiers.

"A lot of certification agencies have been doing this for decades. I see a lot of integrity in the certifiers and think they really have been working hard in hand with the USDA," said Kelly Shea, vice president of organic stewardship for WhiteWave Foods, a Dean Foods subsidiary.

Ms. Shea said the industry

would benefit if the USDA spent more money on enforcement.

Whole Foods took another route to assure customers and is a certified organic retailer. This special status requires the chain to make sure labeled products have documents to back them up. Whole Foods also tracks food back to its producers, said Joe Dickson, the company's organic programs coordinator.

**The China connection**

About 40 percent of organic farms and handlers are in foreign countries, including 300 farms and processing plants in China.

Wal-Mart used some Chinese organic soybeans in its private-label soy milk. They've also been in Silk, the popular soy milk brand from WhiteWave.

The United States has 2.2 million organic acres; China has 8.6 million. Almost 90 percent was certified in 2004, which raises a red flag with Mr. Riddle, who said it's questionable that China could have transitioned farmland that quickly.

China has a history of dousing fields with chemicals, researchers say.

Fred Gale, a senior USDA economist who has researched Chinese agriculture, said it was "almost impossible to grow truly organic food in China."

"The water everywhere is polluted, and the soil is contaminated from industry and mining, and the air is bad."

Despite concerns about China, Ms. Robinson said the USDA is only responsible for approving the certifiers, whose job it is to check on Chinese farms or handlers.

The Organic Crop Improvement Association, a certifying agent in Lincoln, Neb., has given USDA Organic certificates to about 200 operations in China. Executive director Jeff See said his company has built trust with its producers since it started in China more than 12 years ago.

At Rizhao Huasai Foodstuffs Co., in China's Shandong province, sales official Cui Min said workers sometimes use a fertilizer mix that includes human waste on their crops. It's a common practice in China but a clear violation of the USDA rules.

Mr. See, whose company certified Rizhao Huasai, said workers there signed an affidavit stating they follow the rules, including those regarding fertilizers.

Simply trusting the word of a farmer might not be an adequate failsafe, said Mr. Gale, of the USDA.

In China, "there have always been laws and regulations on the books, but you find a way around them," he said.

Mutsumi Sakyuyoshi, a Japanese inspector who has checked Chinese soybean fields for many of the world's largest certifiers, said she confronted one farm's workers after finding an empty plastic bag of herbicide.

Workers told her wind must have blown it from a neighbor's field.

Another farmer gave her an affidavit stating the land under inspection hadn't been used for at least three years. Ms. Sakyuyoshi found the government official who stamped it and questioned its accuracy.

"He said, 'No. I don't know. I don't care. They just asked me to stamp it, so I stamped it,'" she said.

Mr. See said American farmers are more skeptical of Chinese organics because they're a competitive threat to domestic producers.

"I wouldn't say there's probably never any problem with what OCLA

has going on in China, but we find problems all around the world, even in the U.S.," he said.

**Vague rules**

Even when standards are upheld, there are concerns throughout the industry that rules are unclear.

One of many examples is a rule that livestock must have "access to pasture." It doesn't say how much, for how long, or how much of a cow's meal has to come from leisurely munching.

Big dairies, such as Aurora Organic Dairy and Horizon Organic, were criticized by activist groups for running "industrial-scale" feedlots, where they said cows rarely roamed on acres of dry, stubby grass. Both companies insist their cows do graze and meet the requirements. Both have already added pasture.

The debate triggered boycotts and led to a lengthy discussion dur-

ing the Dean Foods shareholders meeting in Dallas in May.

The National Organic Standards Board stepped in and offered more detail, including a provision that cows must be on pasture for at least 120 days each year. It's now up to the USDA whether to make the recommendation law.

Representatives of both dairies said they support the rule's precision.

Chris Grotegut is a farmer in the Texas Panhandle who grows corn, wheat, soybeans and other organic crops used in products distributed nationally. He said enforcing clear rules is the only way to make consumers trust the organic label.

"That is a concern ... that credibility is maintained and people don't look at [organics] as a way to turn a conventional product into a fast buck to cheat the system."

E-mail plavigne@dallasnews.com

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Register by phone to reserve a provisional spot for your child. To complete this enrollment parents must visit a registration center in New Orleans before August 12, 2006 to complete the process.



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July 10: 8am – 7pm  
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 Saturdays: 11am – 3pm  
 \* Open until 7pm on Tuesdays, closed on Sundays and on Labor Day (Sept. 4th)



LARA SOLT/Staff Photographer

Fueled by buyers like Natasha Knapton of Plano, with son Gavin, the market for organic foods is small but thriving.

**DigitalEXTRA**

- **Videos:**
    - Organic dairy farms draw criticism from activists for farming techniques.
    - A state inspector pays a visit to an organic vegetable farm.
  - ☑ **Quiz:** What do you know about organics?
  - 🗉 **Tell us:** Answer survey questions about your shopping practices.
  - 📋 **List:** Review all organic operations in Texas.
  - 🔗 **Links:** Connect to online organic resources.
- DallasNews.com/extra



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