

## FIERCELY PARTISAN INTELLIGENCE SQUARED U.S. DEBATE ON ORGANIC FOOD ENDS WITH BIG WIN FOR OPPOSITION TEAM

*69% of audience rejects the motion “Organic Food is Marketing Hype”*

NEW YORK – April 14, 2010 - Intelligence Squared U.S. (IQ2US), the Oxford-style debate series, an initiative of The Rosenkranz Foundation, hosted one of its most aggressively fought and partisan debates on the unlikely subject of organic food. The large crowd in New York last night was fully engaged in the debate and the mood in the Skirball auditorium at NYU was tense. As moderator John Donvan noted at the debate’s midpoint, “What strikes me about this debate is that the tone here is as bitterly partisan as anything that’s happening in Washington. And I’m curious about why that is? And it’s on both sides. It’s also from all of us here in the hall. There is a nasty feeling to this issue. And I’m curious about why -- we’re talking about food.”

When it was over, the side arguing against the motion *Organic Food is Marketing Hype* carried the day. At the debate’s conclusion, 21% of the audience supported the motion, 69% rejected it and 10% were undecided. This compared to the early vote, prior to the debate where 21% of the crowd voted in favor of the motion, 45% were against it and 34% were undecided.

The evening’s winning team argued against the motion and included Charles Benbrook, chief scientist at The Organic Center, Urvashi Rangan, director of technical policy, Consumers Union and Jeffrey Steingarten, the food critic at *Vogue* magazine.

Arguing for the motion was Lord John Krebs former chairman of the UK’s Food Standards Agency, Blake Hurst, family farmer from Missouri and Dennis Avery, director, Hudson Institute’s Center for Global Food Issues.

Among the debate’s highlights:

“...according to the surveys, six in ten Americans who buy organic food believe they’re getting a healthier option. And they are paying for it, because when you go shopping, if you buy organic food, you spend \$1.60 for every dollar you would have to spend buying exactly the equivalent food produced conventionally. So, is it worth paying the extra for health benefits? The answer is a plain, straightforward, simple NO.” – **Lord John Krebs**

“It turns out there are some inadvertent benefits about being healthier to the environment. And that’s what (organic production) was designed for. And it turns out when we’re better to the environment, and we’re better to the animals that we raise, and we don’t soak these animals and the ground they’re on with drugs and chemicals and heavy metals, it turns out that might be better for us too.” –**Urvashi Rangan**

“Organic food is fashionable, cool, an attitude, a chance to identify yourself with beautiful actresses instead of old farmers in overalls. But mostly, organic food is marketing hype.” –**Blake Hurst**

“To say that organic agriculture could never feed the world is sidestepping the fact that...conventional agriculture is not feeding the world.” –**Jeffrey Steingarten**

“Organic farmers...don't have access to these cheap commercial sources of readily available nitrogen fertilizers. They have to get their nitrogen the old fashioned way with cover crops and legumes and compost. It's dear to them and it's valuable. And they use it much more carefully. They don't need as much to support the same amount of growth. They don't pollute the water. They don't contribute as much to global warming. And they improve the quality of the soil and it's these sorts of win, win, wins that are why even the USDA acknowledges that organic farming is better for the environment.” – **Charles Benbrook**

“If your organic is fresher, it may taste better. But that's apart from it being organic.” –**Dennis Avery**

**John Donovan**, correspondent for ABC News *Nightline*, is moderator of Intelligence Squared U.S. debates. Dana Wolfe is the executive producer.

To view transcripts and videos, download audio or video clips or learn more about Intelligence Squared U.S. please visit: <http://www.intelligencesquaredus.org>.

*Launched in September 2006, the goal of Intelligence Squared U.S., an initiative of the Rosenkranz Foundation, is to raise the level of public discourse and promote a realization that, on contentious issues, those who challenge the conventional wisdom have intellectually respectable and often persuasive viewpoints. We encourage citizens to “Think Twice” about their opinions and participate in the conversation, and we provide a forum for balanced discussion that transcends emotion and ideology. Through an annual series of 10 live Oxford-style debates, IQ2US brings together experts and audience around public policy and cultural issues. In fact, the live audience participates in each debate by voting on the propositions at the top and bottom of the debate evening. IQ2US debates air on the Bloomberg Television network and are heard on more than 220 NPR stations nationwide.*

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