

## organic agriculture better at controlling pests

In agriculture, it's better to let nature do its own thing, according to researchers at [Washington State University](#). A study being published this week in *Nature* shows that, when left alone, pests manage themselves, and numbers and species even out, leading to ecosystem renewal and bigger, better plants.

"In farmlands, agricultural pest-management practices often lead to altered food web structure and communities dominated by a few common species, which together contribute to pest outbreaks," said David Crowder, PhD, a post-doctorate research associate in entomology at Washington State University, in the *Nature* report. "[With this research], we show that organic farming methods mitigate this ecological damage by promoting evenness among natural enemies."

Organic farmers have known this anecdotally for years, said Bob Scowcroft, executive director of the Santa Cruz, Calif.-based Organic Farming Research Foundation.

"It's past time we have the peer review results to prove it," Scowcroft said. "Hopefully, this is just the beginning of an ongoing investment and more dynamic organic systems research."

This study gives Crowder and Scowcroft hope that more farmers will think organic when considering insect-control strategies. A balance among enemy species is critical to pest management, Crowder says.

"We hope our findings will show farmers that they should carefully consider the role of natural enemies on their fields, regardless of whether they are organic or conventional growers," Crowder said. "Broad-spectrum pesticides often kill many enemy species, disrupting evenness."



David Crowder, PhD, with the potato plants he used to test pest management.  
Photo courtesy of Shelly Hanks, Washington State University.