Almost everyone has heard of the supposed benefits of organic foods. However, recent problems surfacing in the organic food industry suggest that consumers may not always be getting what they pay for.

a common source of synthetic nitrogen. Additionally, an investigation by The Sacramento Bee discovered that the Department of Food and Agriculture discovered the company California Liquid Fertilizer adding synthetic nitrogen to its fertilizer. This particular company sold its product to organic food leaders Earthbound Farm and Driscoll's, as well as other organic farming leaders.

While synthetic fertilizers do not necessarily present health risks to consumers, they are disfavored by organic farmers because of the negative environmental impacts they can cause. These fertilizers utilize increased energy in production, lower the natural fertility of soil and increase water pollution. Furthermore, consumers of organic produce are willing to pay a higher price for the goods because of the promise that they were grown without these types of chemicals.

Despite the controversy caused by these dishonest business practices, the only penalty handed down to California Liquid Fertilizer was to stop selling the product on the market. Reacting to this situation, the state of California, which leads the nation in the organic farming, also plans to be the leader in combating fraud in the industry. Assembly Bill 856, which was authored by Assemblywoman Anna Caballero, addresses these problems in the area of organic fertilizer. A copy of the bill in its current state can be found on Caballero's website: http://democrats.assembly.ca.gov/members/a28/Legislation/default.aspx. The bill, which should arrive on the desk of California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger soon, increases penalties for violations of organic fertilizer standards. In addition, it increases the authority that state regulators have over inspections and raises approximately $416,000 per year for enforcement due to new fees imposed on fertilizer makers.