The Natural Farmer
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2006 NOFA Summer Conference:
Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis to Keynote

by Kathleen Litchfield, publicity coordinator

We are delighted to announce that Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis of the Dominican Sisters of Caldwell, N.J. will present the keynote address on August 11th, during the 2006 NOFA Summer Conference. Past conference keynote speakers have included Eliot Coleman, Vandana Shiva and Satish Kumar.

The 32nd Annual NOFA Summer Conference will be held Aug. 10-13, 2006 at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts. Featuring a pre-conference on “Organic Food and Farming Education” the conference is sure to offer something for every farmer, gardener, organic landscaper, consumer, homesteader and student alike!

The founder of Genesis Farm, a learning center where people gather to search for more authentic ways to live in harmony with the natural world and each other, Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis became coordinator of Peace and Justice Education for the Newark Archdiocese in 1973. She joined the staff of Global Education Associates as program coordinator and art editor of “The Whole Earth Papers” in 1976. In 1980, she founded Genesis Farm, where she lives and works. The farm, which practices biodynamic methods of agriculture, was one of the first to organize a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) venture, and now supports nearly 300 families.

Sister Miriam received a master’s degree in art from the University of Notre Dame and has taught art at the high school and college levels. Today she lectures extensively and has conducted workshops in the U.S., Canada, Europe, Asia and the Pacific. She also coordinates programs exploring the work of Thomas Berry, as he has interpreted the New Cosmology; and promotes Genesis Farm’s Earth Literacy program, which offers accreditation for graduate and undergraduate students.

Sister Miriam describes herself as having been formed by the three rivers that have shaped the regions of New Jersey where she has lived her life. She was born and lived her first 17 years in Bayonne, a small industrial city, separated from Manhattan by the Hudson River as it moves through its estuaries across the sweep of New York Harbor. When she was 7 years old, her family began to clear a home-site in a heavily wooded area along the Musconetcong River in what was then a rural and sparsely settled region of northwestern New Jersey. On weekends and throughout the summer, they worked together to build a small cabin, and Miriam’s childhood was deeply influenced by summers spent in the forests and fields of that watershed and the challenges of living for years with neither water nor electricity.

Since 1980, she has lived along the Paulinskill River as it flows through the same watershed on its way to the upper Delaware River. Genesis Farm takes its place within a community of people and organizations working to preserve the wildlife, farms and rural communities of this highly threatened region.

At the Summer Conference almost 200 workshops will be offered on topics including farming, gardening, innovative techniques, animal husbandry, spirituality, organic land care, and much, much more. Numerous workshops for children and teens will be offered through concurrently running conferences. The event will also feature its much-loved Local Meal, Saturday Country Fair, movies, swimming, off-site farm tours, camping, dancing, networking and endless fun for the whole family!

One very popular event is the Saturday Night Debate at which a hot issue in NOFA is debated by advocates. This year the topic will be “Health Benefits -- What is the Responsible Thing to do?” We are looking for members who feel passionately about this issue. On the one side would be one or two people who feel not having health benefits is irresponsible and for whom the presence of benefits is a top priority in taking a job. Perhaps such a person has even had a loved one at risk and feels the benefits might have saved a life. On the other side would be a person who feels health insurance is expensive and inefficient, who prefers to take direct charge of his or her family’s health care, and has focused on prevention, tried to put aside enough money to directly cover health bills, arranged a barter system, or otherwise dealt creatively with family health needs. The debate is videotaped, has a moderator who keeps things light and friendly, and goes for an hour and a half on Saturday night. Participants get free registration for the entire conference, a free meal and $25. If interested, contact Jack Kittredge at jack@nhof.net or 978-355-2853.

By now you have probably received ad/exhibit/sponsor flyers for the conference and a mini-poster suitable for hanging up in your locale. If you received two copies, our apologies, and please give one to a friend. If you got two, it is not because we have your name twice on a list, rather we collect many mailing lists in order to send out this mailing.

Additionally, you can expect to get the registration form in the mail sometime around the middle of May. Those will be available on line by April 30.

Visit the NOFA Summer Conference website - www.nofamass.org - or read upcoming issues of The Natural Farmer to learn more about the NOFA Summer Conference!
Who Owns Organic?  
by Jack Kittredge

The passage last October of an amendment to the Organic Foods Production Act has split the organic movement. Steve Gilman’s centerfold article in this issue conveys some of the anger which many felt at the way the amendment was pushed through Congress by the Organic Trade Association and a minority of “big food” companies.

This issue of The Natural Farmer was commissioned by the NOFA Interstate Council to take a broad look at where we, small scale organic farmers, gardeners and consumers, now stand relative to the industry we helped create. Besides Steve’s article on the amendment and what we can do about it, this issue contains several articles tracking consolidation in organic food. Phil Howard traces the forces driving such consolidation, Sam Fromartz looks at how they apply to organic specifically, Laura Sayre analyzes how to consolidate in a different face in Western Europe, and Amy Guptill and Rick Walsh show how at least some US farmers are responding to buyer consolidation by forming mega-cooperatives to maintain their bargaining power.

Two articles exemplify these forces. Cynthia Barstow puts a human face on “big food” executives trying to make sense in this strange marketplace, and George DeVault tells the tragic story of what happened to Walnut Acres, once a pioneer in organic food marketing.

Liz Henderson offers two articles – one comparing the lofty principles of organic agriculture as set forth by the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements to those more mundane ones enunciated by the United States Department of Agriculture. The other, with Mark Dunau, looks at the “Farmer’s Pledge” as an alternative for small farmers, disillusioned with organic certification, who are selling to local markets.

Lastly, several folks active in last fall’s events give their views about what happened and where we go from here. George Niemeyer (Organic Valley) supported the amendment as a way to increase the supply of organic food. Michael Sligh (RAFI-USA) opposed it as unnecessary and divisive. Both of them give their own take on how we should now proceed in a post-amendment world to avoid tearing ourselves apart. Grace Gershuny (NOFA-VT and NOF) writes about the history and significance of the various fights over organic standards during the last 20 years, and Emily Brown Rosen (NOFA-NJ and OMRI) responds with her thoughts on the same topics.

Even our book reviews feature a couple of relevant volumes. RAFI-USA’s 2003 Study “Who Owns Organic” in some ways prefigures this issue of The Natural Farmer. Julie Guthman’s “Agrarian Dreams” takes a hard look at the reality of organic farming as played out in the incredibly fertile (but expensive) farmland of California.

We hope that this issue serves to inform and ground you. The forces of consolidation and expansion in organic food are only going to continue. Whether and how we as farmers and consumers continue to relate to the National Organic Program will be threshed out on NOFA boards, in conferences, and at kitchen tables throughout the Northeast during this next year. It is an important discussion, and needs our full attention.

The Natural Farmer Needs You!

The Natural Farmer is the newspaper of the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA). Regular members receive a subscription as part of their dues, and others may subscribe for $10 (in the US or $18 outside the US). It is published four times a year at 411 Sheldon Rd., Barre, MA 01005. The editors are Jack Kittredge and Julie Rawson, but most of the material is either written by members or summarized by us from information people send us.

Upcoming Issue Topics - We plan a year in advance so that folks who want to write on a topic can have a lead of time. The next 3 issues will be: Summer 2006 - Organic Better? Fall 2006 - Organic Potatoes Winter 2006 - Agriculture & Globalization

Moving or missed an issue? The Natural Farmer will not be forwarded by the post office, so you need to make sure your address is up-to-date if you move. You get your subscription to this paper in one of two ways. Direct subscribers who send us $10 are put on our database here. These folks send address changes to us. Most of you, however, get this paper as a NOFA member benefit for paying your chapter dues. Each quarter every NOFA chapter sends us address labels for their paid members, which we use to mail out the issue. If you moved or didn’t get the paper, your beef is with your state chapter, not us. Every issue we print an updated list of “NOFA Contact People” on the last page, for a handy reference to all the chapter names and addresses.

As a membership paper, we count on you for articles, art and graphics, news and interviews, photos on rural or organic themes, ads, letters, etc. Almost everybody has a special talent or knows someone who does. If you can’t write, find someone who can to interview you. We’d like to keep the paper lively and interesting to members, and we need your help to do it.

We appreciate a submission in any form, but are less likely to make mistakes with something typed than hand-written. To be a real gem, send it via electronic mail (Jack@mhof.net). Also, any graphics, photos, charts, etc. you can provide will almost certainly make your submission more readable and informative. If you have any ideas or questions, one of us is usually near the phone - (978) 355-2853, fax: (978) 355-4046. The NOFA Interstate Council website is www.nofa.org.

ISSN 1077-2294 copyright 2006, Northeast Organic Farming Association
Letters to the Editor

Hi Erin,

Hi Jack,

Good Morning Jack,

Dear Jack and Julie,

Hi Jane,

Hi Jack,

Hi Jack,

Hi Sarah,

Dear Jack and Julie,

Hi Erin,

Dear Jack and Julie,

Dear Jack and Julie,

Dear Jack and Julie,

Hi Jane,

Dear Jack and Julie,

Hi Erin,

Hi Erin,

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Hi Erin,
Position in Amherst, NH for farmer and/or college or school interns 35-40 hours week. Pay range $8-12 per hour. The Soccer Farm, a sixty acre site with 4 acres of organic crops, serves a 60 member CSA and local markets. Work April-October with mini-breaks during Tuesday-Saturday (2pm) with two days off. Housing arranged locally. Soccer, hiking, dog training and fun activities on site. Members help in garden with supervision. Both positions allow for organizational and promotional work and hosting visitors for pickups and special events. Call Ben at 803-744-5067 or email ben@bsoccer.com.

3 Farm Acres for Lease - S. Acton, MA. Historically farmed acreage currently maintained as open mowed meadow - Bounded by perennial Ft Pond Brook for irrigation - Good Martin St. road frontage & neighborhood location - Located close to Stow Acton MRT train Station & Route 2 - Only experienced Farmer for long-term farming commitment - Very Generous lease terms. Contact: The Hadley Farm @ 973-262-7953, hadleyfarm@ mindspring.com

Since I have discontinued my organic greenhouse farming, I have some used and new greenhouse equipment for sale. Automatic watering system (timer and valves) for 8 rows. 1 inch floating styrofoam plug trays. 252 per tray as well as a few other sizes. Watering stakes for automatic watering system. Tomato clips 1 inch and 3/4 inch. Bobbins for hanging tomato plants from. 5 gallonails with drain holes for greenhouse plants. Contact Johan Van Achterberg @ 203-261-2156 or johanachterberg@sbcglobal.net

Linendetree Farm CSA in Lincoln, MA is looking for two workers or interns for our 2006 farm crew. The farm crew grows our 12 acre organic farm for our 200+ member CSA and a Farmers Market. Responsibilities include planting, weeding, harvesting, irrigation, pest control, and much more. Small equipment and some tractor use may be involved. Applicants should be energetic, in good physical condition, interested in learning about agriculture, and able to cheerfully work with a diverse group of CSA members in the field. Experience is helpful but not necessary. Contact Ari at (781) 259-1259 or arikkurtz@att.net for more info.

Farm Available This Year: The Benson Place in Heath, MA is now available for sale or long term lease. Includes farmhouse, barn, guest cabin, second house site, and organic wild blueberry business on 38 acres of internselved land. Located customer base. Contact Dave Gott and Ted Watt, 182 Flagg Hill Road, Heath, MA 01346. 413-337-5340, benplace@gis.net, www.gis.net/~benplace

Assistant grower sought: One position remaining. Heirloom Harvest in Westminster, MA, seeks skilled candidate to begin April 10th. This is a full time position available across the season to fulfill their obligation, and must make an effort to find a replacement on your own, before the end of October. The farmsite is open to the public, and employees are expected to work well with volunteers and children. Some management direction of volunteers is necessary. Pay: Hourly, $9.25. Some variance expected to work well with volunteers and children. Some management direction of volunteers is necessary. Pay: Hourly, $9.25. Some variance in workday length (long days and short days) is to be expected. Benefits: CSA share, weeknights off. No housing, but plenty of apartments around. Contact John at 508-963-7792. Check out heirloomharvestsca.com.

Seeking farmer to take over a one acre, hand- cultivated, raised-bed, (organic but uncertified) market garden in Grafton MA for 2006 season and beyond. This very fertile acre has been managed organically for four years. The current farmers operate a CSA serving between 30 and 40 shareholders and hope to pass land use on to a hard working, environmentally conscious grower who would plan to steward it in hand-worked, raised-bed fashion for multiple seasons. Contact Patrick McCabe: (508) 839-3185 pmccabe@chartner.com

Wayne’s Organic Garden is offering certified organic vegetable transplants for the 2006 season, including tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, parsley, basil, onions, shallots and more. Custom orders welcome. Pick-up at farm mid to late May, alliums in April. For list, prices, options, write or call Wayne’s Organic Garden, PO BOX 154, Oneco, CT 06373, (860) 564-7987.

Gardening the Community, NOFA/Mass’s youth agriculture project in Springfield is looking for a part-time garden and program assistant for the 2006 season. Candidates should be working with youth (aged 12-17) to cultivate vegetable gardens, distribute and sell produce, do outreach to the neighborhood, and complete administrative duties. Living in Springfield is necessary in any of these areas and with a willingness to be flexible, open, and positive. Contingent on funding, the position begins in May 2006; 20 hours a week through early August and possible extension through October. $11.00/hour. Cover letters and resumes due by April 15th. Please send to Kristin Brennan at 127 Marlborough Street, Springfield, MA 01109 or to kristinbrennan@risuep.net

Exciting seasonal work exchange to provide experience for the NOFA Summer Conference in July. Win a trip to the Northeast—to demonstrate that it can be done! The Benson Place in S. Acton, MA, looking for two workers or interns for our 2006 farm crew. The farm crew grows our 12 acre organic farm for our 200+ member CSA and a Farmers Market. Responsibilities include planting, weeding, harvesting, irrigation, pest control, and much more. Small equipment and some tractor use may be involved. Applicants should be energetic, in good physical condition, interested in learning about agriculture, and able to cheerfully work with a diverse group of CSA members in the field. Experience is helpful but not necessary. Contact Ari at (781) 259-1259 or arikkurtz@att.net for more info.

Seeking certificed organic farmers to provide farm products for the NOFA Summer Conference local meal on Sat, Aug. 12, 2006. The local meal is made solely of certified organic food grown in the Northeast—to demonstrate that it can be done! Please contact us by April 1 if you are interested in selling vegetables, meat, eggs, dairy, vegetables, herbs, tea, oil, salt, etc. to NOFA for this event. Donations are also welcome. Participating farms and their products will be described in the Food Guide distributed at the meal. Contact: Dorothea Sotiros at (413) 773-5563 or dsotiros@yaho0.com

Exciting seasonal opportunity to work at a working organic farm in an urban neighborhood that does wholesale, CSA and retail farmstand with an email pre-order system. Many specialty, ethnic and heirloom crops. Central Connecticut location. $8 per hour plus great produce! Possibility that one full time position with health care will develop. Must enjoy farmwork and teamwork. Call Tony at 860-223-6200.

Three apprenticeships available on diversified farm in Huntington, VT for 2006 season (April-October preferred). Opportunity to learn skills involved in raising grass-fed and finished livestock, pastured and organic pork and poultry, and vegetables through a Community Supported Agriculture program. Compensation includes yurt lodging on farm and stipend (board is negotiable). To apply, please download an application: www.maplewindfarm.com or call (802) 434-7257.
Internship opportunities and CSA shares available for 2006 season. 90+ family CSA farm, located in the Monadnock region, in Sullivan, NH looking for intern/apprentice to work alongside farmer with all aspects of farming from planting, cultivation, harvesting, washing and packing to planning, organizing and management of working shares. Opportunities for extra income doing deliveries and farmers market. We are in our eighth year of diversified organic vegetable production and looking for hardworking enthusiastic individuals, who want to get hands on experience and knowledge of the flow of farm season. Working shares available as well. For more information contact Tracie, 603-847-9066.

Grassfed pork and lamb available! We raise our animals the old fashioned way: with gentle care and respect on lush rotating pastures. The pigs are supplemented with certified-organic grains. Available by the whole and half, our meats are custom butchered exactly to your specifications and vacuum-sealed for freshness. Reserve now for fall pickup. (518) 627-0476

Three Apprenticeships available on organic vegetable farm in western CT for 06 season, April 3 - mid Nov. 17. Help plant, cultivate, harvest, and market produce through a 250 share CSA and farmers markets. Opportunity to learn many of the agricultural and business skills you will need to run an organic farm. Compensation includes a private room in separate apprentice house, farm produce and eggs, $800 monthly stipend plus incentives. To apply, send a letter of intent and resume to Paul Bucaglia, Fort Hill Farm, 18 Fort Hill Rd., New Milford, CT 06776. Also see www.forthillfarm.com.

Many Hands Organic Farm
Julie Rawson, Jack, & Dan Kittredge
411 Sheldon Rd., Barre, MA 01005 (978) 355-2853
www.mhofnet.net, farm@mhof.net
CSA shares available
Organic, Free-range Poultry & Pork
Certified by Baystate Organic Certifiers

Manager Opportunity. The Open Field Foundation is looking for an infrastructure manager for Bramble Hill Farm. The farm consists of buildings and equipment as well as natural structures and sites which support a range of resident and visiting educational and agricultural programs. The manager should have experience with carpentry, plumbing, electrical, tool maintenance, agriculture, and general maintenance. Good communications skills a plus. To apply, send a letter and resume to: The Open Field Foundation, Att. Gordon Thorne, 150 Main Street, Northampton, MA 01060

Request for proposals: Bramble Hill Farm is a 120-acre farm located 1 mile from the center of Amherst, MA, with 80 acres of fenced pasture, 10 acres of cropland, and a 1-acre wood lot. There are also houses, barns, and greenhouses to lease. Open Field Foundation is looking for interested parties to lease all (or part) of the land and infrastructure of Bramble Hill Farm to create their own agricultural enterprises. If you are interested, please go to our website (www.bramblehill.org) or for more information, write to: The Open Field Foundation, Att. Gordon Thorne, 150 Main Street, Northampton, MA 01060

Farm Educator. Hildene, located in Manchester, VT, is seeking an enthusiastic farm educator for our eighth year of diversified organic vegetable enterprises. If you are interested, contact George Davis at the Open Field Foundation, Att. Gordon Thorne, 150 Main Street, Northampton, MA 01060. Hildene, located in Manchester, VT, is seeking an enthusiastic farm educator for our eighth year of diversified organic vegetable enterprises. If you are interested, contact George Davis at the Open Field Foundation, Att. Gordon Thorne, 150 Main Street, Northampton, MA 01060

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HEINZ TO SELL SHARES IN HAIN
After purchasing 6.1 million shares of Hail Ce-lestial Group since 1999, H. J. Heinz has decided to sell them in order to “redeploy” its assets and con- centrates on its core food categories of condiments and sauces, meals and snacks, and infant nutrition.
source: Whole Foods Magazine, January 2006

NOSB Mandates 120-Days on Pasture for Organic Cows
The National Organic Standards Board has voted to require that organic cows be on pasture at least 120 days per year as a condition for certification. The vote followed a meeting in February of more than 100 members of the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Association. Accredited certifiers can enforce the requirement once it goes through final rulemaking.
source: Organic Business News, December, 2005

OTA Predicts Petitions for 1500 Ingredients
The Organic Trade Association has estimated that as many as 1500 ingredients will be petitioned to be on the National List as a result of the OFPA amendment last October requiring manufacturers to prove that needed ingredients are not commercially available. The list is expected to include steam-distilled essential oils, CO2 extracts, alcohol-extracted botanicals and spices. According to Tom Hutchison, OTA’s associate policy director, “These represent materials for which a reliable supply of organically produced product may not be available, so the good news is that this also represents market opportuni- ties for organic farmers.” He added that the OTA would like the process to proceed quickly in order to “avoid problems in organic product formulation…”
source: Organic Business News, December, 2005

DENMARK TO COMPENSATE FOR GMO CONTAMINATION
Denmark has become the first country in Europe to compensate farmers who detect GMOs in crops. Payments will be made by the government to farm- ers who have suffered economic losses because GMO contamination exceeds 0.9%, and the money will be recovered from the farm which was the source of the contamination.
source: Elm Farm Research Center Bulletin, De- cember, 2005

GMO Contamination Lasts Over 15 Years
A study funded by the biotech industry as well as the Federal Government and that grew GE canola contaminated land for at least 15 years. Even if a farmer were to grow GE canola for just one year, the plants would continue to grow and contain GMOs for up to 10 years. Twelve of the two GE plants were found per square meter. After 15 years there was still one per square meter.

USDA Tries to Dismiss Country Hen Suit
The US Department of Agriculture has asked the Federal Court to dismiss a legal action brought on behalf of MICI (Massachusetts Independent Certifiers, Inc.) The action accuses the USDA of wrongfully interfering in its decision to deny certifi- cation for The Natural Farmer’s organic dairy farm in Woodbury County, IA. In arguing for dismissal, the USDA claimed that MICI was acting as a government agent and had a duty to transmit information from USDA. MICI’s attorney countered that the group is a private agent and cannot be ordered to take a position it has rejected.

GE Trees Coming Closer to a Forest Near You
The USDA has approved at least 124 open air field tests for genetically engineered trees. No known commercial plantings have been made in this country, but there have been some in China. The trees are engineered to resist Roundup herbicide, to produce Bt pesticide, and for decreased lignin content (easier to make paper), fast growth, and for starch.

Consumer Reports Helps Consumers Become Savvy Organic Shoppers
An investigation in the February 2006 issue of Consumer Reports has found that shoppers do not need to buy organic products in order to have added value. The report tells shoppers which organic products are worth seeking out—and which ones are not. Consumers can pass on organic sea- food and shampoo, for example, because their labels can be misleading. The complete report, including a list of organic products that are worth buying and which are not, is also available on www.Consumer-Reports.org

Organic products worth buying to avoid chemi- cals found in the conventionally produced versions: Fruits: apples, bananas, strawberries, pears, peaches, plums, avocados, plums, cantaloupe. Vegetables: potatoes, onions, carrots, celery, cherries, spinach, and strawberries. The US- DA’s own lab testing reveals that even after wash- ing some fruits and vegetables that are organically grown much higher levels of pesticide residue than others. Meats, poultry, eggs, and dairy products are also worth seeking out.

Organic products worth buying even if price is no object, include: processed foods and certain pro- duce items, such as: cauliflower, sweet corn, broc- coli, mangoes, and sweet peas. Multiple pesticide residues are in, ranging from one percent on convention- ally grown versions of these fruits and vegetables, according to research by the Environmental Work- ing Group (EWG).

Organically labeled items not worth buying in- clude seafood and cosmetics. Whether caught in the wild or farmed, fish can be labeled organic, despite the presence of contaminants such as mercury and PCBs. The USDA has not yet developed organic certification standards for seafood.
source: Consumers Union Press Release, February, 2006

California Prohibits Organic Label on Fish
The state of California has prohibited the use of the organic label on fish and seafood until either the state or the federal government establishes organic standards for the products. “The rogue use of the organic label on fish and seafood…is an inauthenic ing,” said Jules Hirsch, physician in chief emeritus at Rockefeller University.

UNH to Establish Organic Dairy Farm
The University of New Hampshire will be the first land-grant university to have an organic dairy farm. Located on a 200-acre parcel of certified land at the school’s Burley-Demerit farm, the project will cost an estimated $1.5 million and serve as an educational research center for organic dairy pro- duction as well as an education center for organic and transitional dairy farmers.
source: Organic Broadcaster, Jan/Feb 2006

Low-Fat Diet Does Not Cut Health Risks, Study Finds
The largest study ever to ask whether a low-fat diet reduces the risk of getting cancer or heart dis- ease has found that the diet has no effect. The $415 million federal study involved nearly 49,000 women ages 50 to 79 who were followed for eight years. In the end, those assigned to a low-fat diet had the same rates of breast cancer, colon cancer, heart at- tacks and strokes as those who ate whatever they pleased, researchers are reporting today.

These studies are revolutionary,” said Dr. Jules Hirsch, physician in chief emeritus at Rock- efeller University in New York City, who has spent his entire career at the New York Cancer Society. “They should put a stop to this era of thinking that we have all the information we need to change the whole national diet and make everybody healthy.

The study, published in The Journal of the American Medical Association, was not just another study, says Kenneth Warner, chair of the University of Michigan’s epidemiological research for the American Cancer Society. It was so large and so expensive, Dr. Thun said, that it was “the Rolls-Royce of studies. We usually have only one shot at a very large scale trial on a particular issue. As such,” he added, “it is likely to be the final word.”
source: February 8, 2006, New York Times

State Food Safety Laws in Danger
A bill is pending in the United States House of Representatives that would eliminate dozens of state food safety laws. If passed, this bill would void the 1890 Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, which established the Food and Drug Administration and the Federal Food and Drug Administra- tion. According to the bill, the FDA has not passed a regulation or a food safety law that is part of the state’s food safety laws. The bill was introduced by Rep. Katrinka Hult, MA. In arguing for dismissal, the USDA claimed that MICI was acting as a government agent and had a duty to transmit information from USDA. MICI’s attorney countered that the group is a private agent and cannot be ordered to take a position it has rejected.
source: Center for Food Safety at http://g31.org/ campaign/fooduniformity_national
Virginia Bill Would Ban Outdoor Poultry Production

A bill filed in Virginia, HB982, purports to control live bird markets by banning outdoor production of poultry. But there are no live bird markets in Virginia and opponents believe that its real purpose is to clamp down on independent poultry producers.

Mark Kastel, farm policy analyst at the Cornucopia Institute, noted that it was no coincidence that the bill was being pushed by the Del-Mar-Va Poultry industry, a giant industrial poultry cooperative, and by the state’s Agriculture and Farm Bureau. “Nothing would make the huge poultry confinement operators happier than to squelch an increasingly popular competitor that consumers are flocking to,” Kastel added. “Consumers have discovered that the purveyors of organic and direct-market eggs and poultry raised in healthy, outdoor conditions offer a superior-tasting product, and that scares the huge confinement operations.” Organic and sustainable farming advocates are concerned that this legislative initiative in Virginia is just the first in a battle that will spread to statehouses around the nation.

source: Cornucopia Institute press release, Feb. 10, 2006

Organic Industry Spotlight:

Jimmie Riddle Takes Job with University of Minnesota

Lamberton, Minn. – The University of Minnesota’s Southwest Research and Outreach Center (SWROC) has a new leader in the study of organic agriculture and ecology for over 15 years. Jim Riddle is joining the SWROC staff as organic agriculture coordinator.

Riddle’s experience in the field of organic agriculture extends over 25 years. He began farming organically in 1980 and conducting organic inspections in 1987. In the early 1990s, he became involved with various government agencies and private organizations that establish organic standards and policy, including the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement.

source: SWROC press release, January 9, 2006

John Cleary Joins Organic Valley/CROPP Cooperative

New England organic industry veteran John Cleary has joined Organic Valley Family of Farms’ CROPP as the cooperative’s New England Regional Pool Coordinator. In his new position, Cleary will provide outreach, education and support to current and prospective organic farmer members of the Organic Valley cooperative. In addition to holding regular educational workshops and organizing hands-on burn meetings, Cleary will participate in a wide range of dairy industry events and make personal farm visits to interested farmers who want to learn more about how they can participate in the growing organic dairy market.

source: Cornucopia Institute press release, Feb. 10, 2006
Organic Valley Launches “Generation Organic”

“Generation Organic,” a campaign to save the family farmer from extinction by bringing new farmers into organic agriculture, was announced by Organic Valley Family of Farms, America’s largest cooperative of organic farmers and one of the country’s leading national organic brands.

Organic Valley and itschairman, John Cleary, see Generation Organic as the “Endangered Species Protection Act” for the American family farmer. U.S. farmers have disappeared from the land at the rate of 195 per day for 70 years. We have worked to protect the bald eagle and the grizzly bear. Now it’s time to save the family farmer. The health of our food, our environment and our future generations is at stake,” said John Cleary, 32, the Organic Valley dairy farmer from Albarg, Vermont. Those concerns for the future of family farming gave rise to Generation Organic, or “Gen-O.”

Organic Valley has spearheaded a full program of Gen-O initiatives to nurture the next generation of organic farmers: 1. Save the family farmer, an endangered species. 2. Keep diversity in agriculture. 3. Preserve farmer wisdom and knowledge. 4. Unify rural and urban communities. 5. Offer hope for a safe and healthy future.

Organic Valley is looking to hire a General Coordinator to head a campaign to bring new farmers into organic agriculture and to strengthen the 10,000 family farms. The deadline for applications is April 1, 2006.
My friend Joe Smillie was the keynote speaker at a NOFA-VT Winter Conference sometime in the eighties, and opened his talk by saying “I’ve got good news and bad news. The good news is: Success! Organic is growing and spreading, more people are buying organic food, and more farms are converting. The bad news is: Success...The “big guys” are noticing us, and looking for ways to cash in on the organic image.”

We have come a lot farther down the road to success since then, and Joe’s words continue to ring true. The charge he gave us that day was to begin to take ourselves seriously, and to be willing to work with anyone who was ready to play by the rules. Joe and I were both heavily involved in setting those rules—at the time, I was running the NOFA-VT certification program, and we had worked together to develop the first set of comprehensive guidelines for organic certification on behalf of OFPANA (the Organic Foods Production Association of North America), which is now known as OTA (the Organic Trade Association).

It was a pivotal time in many ways—there was already talk of Federal regulation of the organic label, along with fear of that eventuality. It was the beginning of referring to an “organic industry,” and competition was growing among certifiers, sectors of the trade and regions of the country. There was also the classic clash between farmers and middlemen, recreating the same exploitive economic relationships that characterize the conventional food system.

Within OFPANA at this time a debate was raging over the basis for organic standards. Farmers generally (and NOFA in particular) supported the idea that an organic label refers to the process by which a product is produced. That process entails principles such as ecological harmony, soil health, and minimizing dependence on nonrenewable energy as well as external inputs—especially petrochemical ones. Meanwhile, the manufacturers and marketing people were pitching the organic label as meaning “food you can trust”—clean, pure, and chemical free. To them, consumers’ belief that organic meant “no synthetics” was sacrosanct.

This debate came to be known as “origin of materials versus agronomic responsibility.” One side thought that organic is a process based on proper care of the soil and other ecologically sound agronomic practices, and not a claim about product quality. The other side, while they acknowledged that “no synthetic chemicals” was not an accurate characterization of organic practices or products, believed that the basis for organic standards should clearly outlaw the use of synthetic substances, but make exceptions for those that were considered benign. Besides, consumers could never understand the nuances of “agronomic responsibility.”

Position papers were written, and the membership of the young trade association was polled. By a slim margin, the vote was for “origin of materials.” The guidelines that Joe and I had crafted to give central prominence to the principle of agronomic responsibility had to be reshaped so that the central question became whether or not a synthetic material was used. In my opinion, it is this decision that has come back to bite us all, and continues to limit the potential of organic agriculture to revolutionize the food system.

Today, we are strangling organic producers in a quagmire of red tape and picky questions about things like “food contact substances.” Crusaders are drumming up outrage over “weakening” the standards, sounding the alarm that nefarious agribusiness interests have taken over and want to make it so anything goes. The purity of organic food is their main concern, and the possibility that an organic product might be contaminated in some way their biggest fear. They also complain that the same interests are squeezing out small producers, and “stealing” the organic label that the pioneers of the movement worked so hard to establish.

As organic food (and fiber) continues to gain momentum in the mainstream, among the central questions are these: Should consumers dictate the standards that organic farmers must live with? Is “raising” the standards the solution to preventing agribusiness from taking over? And finally, what are the bigger goals of the organic agenda—to protect an elite niche market from too many new entrants, or to increase the number of acres, animals, farm workers and earthworms that are organically managed? I think you can tell, by the way I phrased that question, what my own opinion is.

Protecting Organic Integrity and the Myth of Higher Standards

When I came to work at the NOP in 1994, the first thing they asked me to do was to write a definition of organic. When I stopped laughing, this is what I put at the top of a page: “The only thing I know for sure is not organic is dogmatism.” That motto continues to guide my advocacy for an organic approach to just about everything.

There has been a lot of talk about keeping standards high, which is seen as the means to protect organic integrity. Although this seems to make sense, there
While they do have a consumer protection function, organic standards are an entirely different animal. Out of our air, water, and food. With their pollution of all kinds, with the goal of keeping toxic substances out of our air, water, and food. Their purpose is to protect us from environmental contamination and health hazards, which most certainly should be as strict and high as possible. Their purpose is to protect us, in the renewal of agriculture, health, and nutrition. To to the oldest non-chemical agricultural movement, seeks to actively work with health-giving forces of nature. Join with us in the renewal of agriculture, health, and nutrition. To support our efforts, consider an annual membership, which includes a subscription to the quarterly and discounts on our books and conferences. Membership cost is $45.00. To receive an information packet and a copy of their catalog, please call, write or e-mail us at: BioDynamic Farming and Gardening Association 25844 Butler Road, Junction City OR 97448 (541) 998-0105; fax: (541) 998-0106; biodynamic@aol.com; www.biodynamics.com

Massachusetts Congressman John Olver and OTA's Policy Associate Beth Fraser talk about organic agriculture and production over heirloom tomatoes. They are not interested in lower barriers to entry. They are not interested in lower barriers to entry for new entrants to the market, and mostly want to make sure the prices for their niche organic product remain high enough to cover the extra expense of ingredients and certification. In my experience in organic certification and on the NOP staff, it was usually the small, independent folks who felt they needed the rules bent to accommodate their needs. The mythical pressure from agribusiness to “dilute” or “weaken” organic standards is, in my experience, fictional (and often happened in reverse—the big players advocated for “stricter” standards).

The Way Forward

The attacks and smear campaign that characterized the debate surrounding the Harvey lawsuit and legislative amendments sponsored by OTA has violated the spirit of organic. It has probably also confused consumers, and engendered some unwarranted distrust of the organic label. I am not claiming that the process is always working, or that it can’t be improved. However, the politics of polarization, painting the world as “us” and “them,” and staging all-out attacks on “them” is a recipe for global catastrophe, and a poison that has infected the world of organic advocacy.

Here’s what I think you, as an informed organic producer or homesteader can do to keep organic moving in the right direction. First, be skeptical about pronouncements from self-proclaimed upholders of organic integrity, and learn the facts for yourself. Educate yourself and your customers about what organic really means, and promote its real benefits, not faith-based claims of purity and safety. There is no place on earth that is not contaminated in some way.

Support efforts to involve more people in food production, and to encourage local food systems. Food security, food sovereignty, and all similar movements to decentralize the food system are critically important, and should not be seen as in competition with an organic industry that many think has become too mass-production oriented. While I personally grow most of my own vegetables and chicken, I still want to buy organic coffee and bananas, which I know supports small farms and benefits the environment in tropical countries.

Don’t expect or demand that the organic label solve all the problems of a corporate dominated, globalized food system. Pursue social justice goals vigorously, through fair trade schemes and political action, but don’t pile them onto organic standards. All it will do is reduce the possibility that organic will become the dominant system of agriculture in our lifetime.

Grace Gershuny is widely known in the alternative agriculture movement as an organizer, educator, author and consultant. In the seventies and eighties she market gardened and worked for the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) in many capacities, including developing its first organic certification program, and was a founding member of the Organic Trade Association. She has written extensively on organic management and composting, including The Soul of Soil, coauthored with Joe Smillie, and edited Organic Farmer: The Digest of Sustainable Agriculture for its four year existence. From 1994-98 she served on the staff of USDA National Organic Program, and was a principal author of its first, much maligned proposed rule. She now consults for the organic industry (including OTA), does some inspections and a little teaching, and is working on a book about the real meaning of organic. She still grows most of her own veggies (organically of course) at her homestead in Burnet, VT.

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The Devil is in the Details: or Why Organic Standards Matter

It seems like there is always a new “crossroads” being encountered in the recent history of organic regulations and growth. Starting in 1989, the organic community struggled with the initial drafting and passage of the Organic Food Production Act, then through the early years of debates about standards with the NOSEP, then the various versions of proposed regulations (Save Organic Standards!). Accreditation of certifiers began in 2001, then implementation of the rules occurred with much anxiety in 2002, a rider to the law that was delayed in 2003 (the change in feed fiasco), and “directives” were issued by NOP and retracted in 2004. Now we have had to face a major change brought on by the Harvey lawsuit and suddenly, an industry generated change to the original law. Sometimes it seems like we must be turning in the same direction each time we come to the proverbial crossroad, and ending in the same place, as these same arguments are recycled. But despite all the turmoil, the organic industry is thriving and going strong, because organic food really is a good idea, consumers want to buy it, and because there is an active community that really cares about maintaining strong standards to provide a clear definition of what is organic.

We can all agree that the basic principles of organic agriculture, and the whole idea of “organic integrity” are much bigger than the laws and regulations that have been crafted to try and define organic systems. As a person who has been involved in efforts to help craft, interpret and enforce the details of the organic regulations over the last 15 years I can wholeheartedly agree that no regulation, no set of rules, or list of materials can really do justice to the vision of ecological agriculture that we all hold is such a high esteem. Grace Gershuny did an excellent job writing the definition of organic production that is now enshrined in the NOP rule: “A production system that is managed … to respond to site-specific conditions by integrating cultural, biological, and mechanical practices and the judicious use of resources, to promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity.”

It has always been a challenge to translate this holistic vision into a workable set of regulations without putting rigid limits around what should be based on a natural system, evolving and changing and adapting to the specific situations that each farm and microclimate demands. For this reason, many organic farmers do not wish to be certified. They prefer not to be constricted in decision-making or bound by rules that do not seem appropriate or that they can’t have control over – this is their choice to make. There is room for all different types of positive marketing claims, but for those working on organic rules, the charge has been to try to keep organic rules meaningful, and true to the vision.

Once the decision was made to set up a national system of organic standards, a workable method was needed. The suggestion that the whole basis of our system relies on an artificial distinction between what is “natural” and what is “synthetic” is overly simplistic. The wishful idea of “agronomic responsibility” as sole criterion for organic rules is lost, or organic food is a very real possibility, that if the confidence in the organic system relies on an artificial distinction between what is “natural” and what is “synthetic” but actually are the mortar and bricks needed to assure the consumer is in fact getting what they expect. Yes, consumers should be a huge part of the input on what the standards are. Disrespecting the voice of the consumer will mean loss of the consumer. More education is always needed, especially about the actual methods and environmental benefits provided by organic systems, but one must give the consumers credit for their choices and work to include them as stakeholders in the standards setting process.

There is a false choice being offered - that one must either be a “purist” obsessed with minute details of rules, and determined to protect an “elite” niche market, or that one is instead a big picture environmentalist, dedicated to vastly increasing the acreage of organic crops and livestock, and providing organic food for all. This overlooks a very real possibility, that if the confidence in meaningful organic rules is lost, or organic food is seen by consumers to represent no real difference or improvement from conventional food production, the opportunities for converting this vast acreage will be lost. Without careful vigilance and commitment to strong standards, everyone loses.

What was the Fight About? Should We Really Care?

Now that we have a “new” OFPA, what does it all mean? Were the changes really that damaging or is all the noise overblown? Why should anyone care about “picky subjects” like the mysterious ‘food contact substances’? Although one may consider the details fuzzy, insignificant, (or worse, incredibly boring), in the “organic spirit” of educating us all about what is in our organic food, here is a synopsis of the issues at stake.

Synthehtics Allowed in Food Processing

When OFPA was originally debated back in 1989, there was a lot of question about whether any synthetics should be allowed at all. Farmers insisted they needed some synthetic materials that were traditionally used, such as copper, sulfur, soaps, oils, vitamins and minerals for animal feed, etc. Environmental groups who were key partners in supporting this legislation did not want to create unlimited allowance for synthetic substances, so a list of categories was inserted to create some boundaries (see section 6517(c)(1)(B)). Despite some prodding, those representing the processing interests did not want to add a similar set of limited categories for use of synthetics and specifically excluded any synthetics from use in processed foods. This was back in the day of “natural foods”, remember, and the thinking at the time was that organic foods should in fact be completely natural, and there were relatively few organic processed products on the market. As time went on, and more organic processed food became popular, including breakfast cereals, beverages, snack foods and yes, frozen dinners, it became clear that the initial “no synthetics” stance meant it would be very difficult to manufacture any organic processed food. The NOP argued about this topic, but went ahead and voted to allow a specific list of synthetic materials, with the idea that USDA would advise them if this was not feasible. A significant minority of those paying attention at the time felt that the inclusion of synthetics was inconsistent with OFPA, but this view did not get much traction. The USDA included the list of synthetics for processing into the final regulations, which led to the inevitable lawsuit, with the ruling in favor of Arthur Harvey.

Now, there were many possibilities for how to deal with this problem faced by organic processors, but instead we now have to deal with a change to the law that was inserted quickly, with no opportunity for discussion or adjustment. Supposedly, the changes to section 6510 and 6517 will simply for discussion or adjustment. Supposedly, the changes to section 6510 and 6517 will simply
Changes to the Organic Food Production Act, November 2005.
(underlined words were added, deletions are struck out)

6504 NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR ORGANIC PRODUCTION
To be used or included as an organically produced agricultural product under this chapter, an agricultural product shall
(1) have been produced and handled without the use of synthetic chemicals, except as otherwise provided in this chapter; [no changes to this section]

6510 HANDLING
(a) In General. For a handling operation to be certified under this chapter, each person on such handling operation shall not, with respect to any agricultural product covered by this chapter.
(1) add any synthetic ingredient not appearing on the National List during the processing or any post harvest handling of the product;

6517 NATIONAL LIST
(a) In General. The Secretary shall establish a National List …..
(b) Content of List. The list established under subsection (a) of this section shall contain an itemization, by specific use or application, of each synthetic substance permitted under subsection (c)(1) of this section or each natural substance prohibited under subsection (c)(2) of this section.
(c) Guidelines for Prohibitions or Exemptions.
(1) EXEMPTION FOR PROHIBITED SUBSTANCES IN ORGANIC PRODUCTION AND HANDLING OPERATIONS. - The National List may provide for the use of substances in an organic farming or handling operation that are otherwise prohibited under this chapter only if
   (A) the Secretary determines, in consultation with the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, that the use of such substances
      (i) would not be harmful to human health or the environment;
      (ii) is necessary to the production or handling of the agricultural product because of unavailability of wholly natural substitute products; and
      (iii) is consistent with organic farming and handling;
   (B) the substance
(i) is used in production and contains an active synthetic ingredient in the following categories: copper and sulfur compounds; toxins derived from bacterial, fungal, plant, animal, and other organic sources; soaps, horticultural oils, fish emulsions, antibiotics, and other chemical substances that affect plant, animal, or soil life; treated feed, vitamins, minerals; livestock parasitcides and medicines; and production aids including netting, tree wraps and seals, insect traps, sticky barriers, row covers, and equipment cleaners; or
(ii) is used in production and contains synthetic inerit ingredients that are not classified by the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency as inert of toxicological concern; or
(iii) is used in handling and is non-synthetic but is not organically produced; and
(C) the specific exemption is developed using the procedures described in subsection (d) of this section.
(d) Procedure for Establishing National List. [(1)-(5) describes the role of the Secretary and NOSB in establishing the National List]
(e) EXPEDITED PETITIONS FOR COMMERCIALY UNAVAILABLE ORGANIC AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS CONSTITUTING LESS THAN 5 PERCENT OF AN ORGANIC PROCESSED PRODUCT. - The Secretary may develop emergency procedures for designating agricultural products that are commercially unavailable in organic form for placement on the National List for a period of time not to exceed 12 months.

6509 ANIMAL PRODUCTION PRACTICES AND MATERIALS.
(a) Additional Guidelines.
(2) Dairy Livestock.
(a) IN GENERAL. - Except as provided in subparagraph (b), dairy animal from which milk or milk products will be sold or labeled as organically produced shall be raised and handled in accordance with this chapter for not less than the 12-month period immediately prior to the sale of such milk and milk products.
(b) TRANSITION GUIDELINE. - Crops and forage from land included in the organic system plan of a dairy farm that is in the third year of organic management may be consumed by the dairy animals of the farm during the 12-month period immediately prior to the sale of organic milk and milk products.

Typical packed room at a NOSB meeting, this one in Feb 2005

The court ruled in January 2005 that this phrase specifically prohibited all synthetic ingredients and processing aids (substances used in handling that do not end up in the final product). The law has now gone from a total prohibition on synthetics in processing, to an unrestricted allowance that is not consistent with the way synthetics are restricted for crop and livestock production.

The court ruling could have been seen as an opportunity to improve and clearly define the limited allowance for synthetics that the NOSB has supported over the years, but in the rush to “fix” the problem, there was no thought for this. The criteria NOSB developed to restrict synthetics in processing could have been added to the OFPA, but this was not done. These criteria will likely remain in the regulations (205.600(b)) but as currently worded do not even apply to ingredients, just “processing aids and adjuvants.” This means ingredients that are used to create texture, convenience, or used as preservatives may be allowed. Some additives have already been proposed and are awaiting final rulemaking – for example tetrasodium pyrophosphate has been proposed to provide for texture in dough used for meat products, and for beef protein. Sodium acid pyrophosphate has been recommended as leavening for slow-rising refrigerated doughnuts. This raises a bigger picture question, what is the purpose for dextrin to be? Must we have organic doughnuts made from refrigerated dough that can be stored for weeks? Should organic food travel down this slippery slope toward allowing all FDA approved food additives? I am sure most in the industry would say no, but this amendment gives us very few tools to work with to prevent this from happening.

The “picky questions” about food contact substances arise from the fact that USDA has already chosen to endorse a policy statement that redefines the term “ingredient” for the purposes of organic food. The NOP stated in 2002 that “ingredients” only include limited classes of FDA approved food additives, that large numbers do not have to be reviewed and included on the National List, including those considered “food contact substances,” which also meet the definition of processing aids. The FDA publishes a huge list, continually adding, of chemicals considered food contact substance, which FDA claims do not have a technical effect in the food product. These include antimicrobials that may be added to juice, preservatives and slimicides added to packing, and many, many more. The fact that the OPFA is a specific amendment specifically allows synthetic ingredients in processed foods (section 6510), and no longer refers to synthetic “substances” that are prohibited, appears to open the door for USDA to continue this misguided interpretation of the definition of “ingredient.”

There are likely to be further legal debates about the actual results of this amendment. The amendment did not change a key provision in section 6504, which states that no synthetic chemicals, other than those permitted may be used, and this combined with the change in 6510 may have the unintended effect of prohibiting any processing aids. This kind of ambiguity, along with the fact that there was no public discussion or report of Congressional intent issued, will likely cause further disagreements down the road, surely an outcome that could have been avoided, given a more public vetting of the language.

Commercial Availability. The Court ruled in the Harvey suit that all non-organic ingredients must appear on the National List, including the agricultural ingredients not commercially available used in 5% of a product labeled organic. The amendment language now states that the Secretary of Agriculture “may develop emergency procedures for designating agricultural products that are commercially unavailable in organic form for placement on the National List for a period of time not to exceed 12 months.” Previously this decision was made
by certification agents, so many farm groups were particularly upset about this provision as it hands the decision over to the Secretary, without even NOSB review.

There has been little discussion or details provided as to how this will work, and seems at best to be a poor solution to the problem. This is an idea that needed much more development before a rash change to the Act was made that gives unrestricted authority to the Secretary. The original OFPA carefully limited the Secretary’s authority, especially regarding materials used in food production, and this addition certainly breaks with that precedent.

Big Problem Looms for Dairy Transition
The new amendment allows third year transitional feed produced on farm to be fed as organic to a herd of animals converting with the farm, avoiding a four-year transition (crops and then livestock). This provision is non-controversial, and is the current practice under the existing regulation.

The USDA remains under Court order to issue revised rules by June 9, 2006 that eliminate the allowance of 20% non-organic feed in the conversion year. This limited change will result in a huge problem, however if NOP decides to drop the requirement for organic management of young dairy stock once the herd is converted, which is linked to the 20% feed allowance section in the regulation. According to some who have discussed this with NOP staff, the USDA is planning to do exactly that. Some dairy processors are telling farmers now that, after June 9, anyone can buy non-organic heifers and transition them for 12 months into an organic herd.

This will allow non-organic animals as replacement stock on a continuing basis; thus allowing confinement, the use of non-organic feed – including GMOs and slaughter products, as well as antibiotics and other drugs for young animals. In the Northeast, certifiers have been requiring organic management of young stock, once the herd is converted, which is linked to the 20% feed allowance section in the regulation. According to some who have discussed this with NOP staff, the USDA is planning to do exactly that. Some dairy processors are telling farmers now that, after June 9, anyone can buy non-organic heifers and transition them for 12 months into an organic herd.

The biggest lesson learned in the last year, is that we all need to pay attention. We can’t assume that the Organic Trade Association represents all interests of the organic community, although of course we can work together when interests of farmers, trade, and consumers do coincide. As the organic industry has grown, it is time for the various sectors to step forward and speak up. This will strengthen the support for organic dairy transition, and more diverse stakeholders are consulted and included. We can’t assume that the work on standards is done, or is not important. The public outcry over harmful proposals has been incredibly effective in the past 5 years, and this attention must be maintained. Despite the noise and sometimes dissonance created, organic production continues to grow and thrive, in what must be considered an organic manner!

Here is a short list of critical actions at USDA and in Congress to plan for in the coming year:
- Pasture rules will be proposed shortly, after many years of farmer and NOSB demands for clarification. A summit in State College PA on April 18 will provide NOP and NOSB with more “expert” input, to be used in crafting the final rule.
- New rules will be issued by June on organic dairy transition and replacement animals, and may allow problematic loopholes for non-organic dairy replacement animals.
- Synthetic materials will continue to be added to the rules for organic processing: insist that careful criteria and limits are applied, that all synthetics used in direct food contact are reviewed by the NOSB, and that the USDA policy on food contact substances be withdrawn.
- Farm bill discussions are underway by many groups working to include organic programs and incentives. Strengthening of OFPA may be needed, if USDA is unresponsive to public input on regulation changes regarding pasture, dairy stock, and synthetics in processing.

All NOFA members can help, by staying in touch and providing input to their chapter leadership on organic policy issues in the coming year.

Emily Brown Rosen is currently Secretary of the NOFA NJ Board of Directors, member of the NOFA Interstate policy committee, works as Materials Manager for Pennsylvania Certified Organic (a USDA accredited certifier), and also operates Organic Research Associates, a consulting company that provides technical services on organic issues.

At this October, 2004 NOSB meeting CNN had a camera rolling the whole time. This is the meeting at which the NOP announced all directives from April were “rescinded”.

The Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA)
Join NODPA and support NODPA’s work in keeping organic dairy farms in business, maximizing the integrity of the organic market and ensuring that accurate information is available to everyone. NODPA is the largest organization of organic dairy farmers, run by farmers to protect the interests of farmers.

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NOSB chair Jim Riddle with A.J Yates, October 21, 2002, in Whole Foods Market in Washington DC
A NOFA DREAMER
Young widower seeks organic land west of Quabbin Reservoir in Massachusetts

Areas of Interest

- New Salem
- North New Salem
- Wendell
- Lake Pleasant
- Montague
- North Leverett
- Moores Corner
- Locks Village
- Shutesbury
- Leverett
- East Leverett
- Pratt Corner
- Pelham
- West Pelham
- Dwight
- Belchertown

Proposed Land Use

- Orchard: diverse as possible, either established or I will establish
- Nursery: organic practices only, low volume, high quality, non-invasive, specimen plants
- Green House: propagation of trees and shrubs, year round salad greens
- Composting Site: small scale, compost tea brewing center
- Tree and Landscape Business: small scale, organic practices only
- Log Home: environmentally conscious, composting toilets, solar panels, etc.

Recently at the MA OLC Program, I mentioned to Julie Rawson about my strong desire to acquire some organic land. She laughed and said it sounds like a “NOFA Dream”. Thank you, Julie, for suggesting the Natural Farmer.

As an Arborist, I am used to going out on a limb to get done what needs done and I understand that entertaining the public is a natural part of it. So, once you have had your little chuckle about my ad, would you please consider that I have invested some hard earned money to get your attention. I am serious about relocating to the West Quabbin Area and marrying someone in the area.

Bottom line; I deeply appreciate all who are willing to assist me in making this dream a reality.

A trustworthy soul,

Kevin Stitt
10 Cross Street
Woburn, MA 01801

Home: 781-932-3828
Cell: 781-983-4086
Email: info@organicsoilcare.com

Web Site: www.organicsoilcare.com
The corporate takeover of organics? Or an opening of the organic door to corporate? Either way you look at it, there is little question that corporate America is beginning to embrace the organic standards. Most would agree with this statement because it omits the principles and values of organic agriculture. Big business now provides a considerable percentage of the certified organic products now stocked on supermarket—and many natural groceries—shelves.

According to the 2003 Whole Foods Market Organic Trend Tracker, “65% of Americans have tried organic foods and beverages, jumping from just over half (54%) in both 2003 and 2004.” Although my heart will always be with small-scale local production, two-thirds of Americans simply are not exposed to that farming universe. Most of our population is witnessing the organics influx on the shelves of their super-sized supermarkets.

The “more exposure” argument has been the consistent message I have heard from Gary Hirshberg over the years, far before his own company moved under the rubric (but maybe not so much control) of international corporation, Danone. More exposure means more sales means more organic acres. This has been my stance too. And yet, like many others, the atrophy of organic principles under the organic seal continues to be a concern of mine.

The green advocate website Treehugger recently (January 26, 2006) held an instant survey: How do you feel about companies like Kraft and Starbucks getting in on the organic biz? Sixty-two agreed with the statement, “I sucks; just another way to keep small business down.” Eighty-two agreed with “It is okay, you know, a necessary evil. And far ahead of both, at three hundred and seventy: “It is a great way to bring organic products and sustainable living to the broader public.” Interestingly, one of the comments posted by a man named Sid suggests the internal turmoil most of us go through when considering the issue: “I agree with other respondents that this kind of issue is just too hard to respond to when considering the issue: “I agree with other respondents that this kind of issue is just too hard to respond to when considering the issue:

I’m learning that behind many of these corporate America facades are real people–nice people who have a value set not that dissimilar to our own. They are happy, albeit skeptical to be considering the venture into organics, and most seem eager to learn. Some of the big brands that have most recently emerged with an organic version of their traditional product—like ConAgra’s Hunts ketchup or Campbell’s Prego spaghetti sauce—have actually taken quite a leap to source organic ingredients and rearrange or build anew processing facilities to meet the standards. I was impressed with the presentation from Campbell’s Soup’s Steve DeMuri as he detailed the rather arduous venture to bring us Campbell’s organic V8 and Swanson’s broth. “You’ll pay from 15 to 300% more for your ingredients,” he said. “And finding enough supply, such as organic basil, for us, can be quite difficult.” Is that virtuous?

In the winter of 2002/2003, I spent an extended period of my life on the road with The Eco-Foods Guide: What’s Good for the Earth is Good for You. The motivation behind writing and touring with the book was simple: increase public awareness of the need for a sustainable food system. I now know that my little effort was a blip on the screen compared to what one multi-national corporation can do with one little can of tomatoes labeled with the organic seal.

Since that time, I have redirected my efforts to teaching food marketing and natural products marketing at the university in order to instill the principles while simultaneously providing the tools to launch new sustainable businesses. I also work with small start-ups interested in breaking into the natural and organic industry through my consulting company, Seed to Shelf: Marketing for Sustainability. Recently, however, I was asked to speak at a national conference in San Diego to mainstream food companies transitioning to natural and organic products.

After spending a few days with representatives from these big businesses, I believe there is both good news and not-so-good news about the organic seal being brought into the product mix of conventional brands.

I’m learning that behind many of these corporate America facades are real people–nice people who have a value set not that dissimilar to our own. They are happy, albeit skeptical to be considering the venture into organics, and most seem eager to learn. Some of the big brands that have most recently emerged with an organic version of their traditional product—like ConAgra’s Hunts ketchup or Campbell’s Prego spaghetti sauce—have actually taken quite a leap to source organic ingredients and rearrange or build anew processing facilities to meet the standards. I was impressed with the presentation from Campbell’s Soup’s Steve DeMuri as he detailed the rather arduous venture to bring us Campbell’s organic V8 and Swanson’s broth. “You’ll pay from 15 to 300% more for your ingredients,” he said. “And finding enough supply, such as organic basil, for us, can be quite difficult.” Is that virtuous?

It does seem that the individuals charged with the task of bringing organics into the company go out on a limb in a very personal way. When you pitch higher management numbers that will cause them to keel over, and can still convince them it is worth it, it does seem rather virtuous. The company may not be considering carrying organic products for altruistic reasons, but the individuals undertaking the task seem dedicated.

These companies did not start with a passion to protect our soils, hold dear our family farms, entrust our children with a healthy food system instead of burdening them with one in total disrepair. Thus, they often do not get it. The mindset is different. Some of the individuals, as convinced as they seemed, were also perplexed. One couldn’t understand why a strategic alliance with Monsanto might be a negative thing. Another was curious why I thought his wife wanted to “buy this stuff”?

There was little question that the motivating factor behind the companies’ organic certification considerations was fear of losing a customer base that they either already have or could have down the road. Nonetheless, it was one of the most gratifying moments I’ve known in my work, when one very large food manufacturer said clearly, “this is neither a fad nor a trend – this is the way it will be in the future.” This attitude permeated the conference.

This is good news, in my opinion. It means a pressure on the supply side, certainly. That will be the challenge to our organic growers. But, in its most simple expression, it means more acres on Mother Earth grown using organic practices. Ultimately, it means less toxicity–for our children, for our community.

And what has happened to the philosophy, the spirit and reverence true organic farmers have brought to their practice? Consumers don’t yet really understand the organic seal, (Natural Marketing Institute) although they recognize it more each year (40% are noticing the logo and labeling, according to the 2005 Whole Trends Tracker.) Will it become something we never see again? And what is the future? This attitude permeated the conference.

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My guess is that the seal will be but a beginning for other qualifiers to emerge. An interesting NMI survey result was that in 2005, 48% of the general population sample said they were interested in products grown using “sustainable agriculture.” That these consumers know the term at all was a surprise, since they still struggle with organic. Yet, the terms sustainable and socially responsible have emerged in reference to a variety of non-food activities. This may have helped create the very large awareness of sustainability.

So, it is quite possible that other words will be necessary to describe a commitment to the original and deeper meaning of organic. It means doing a better job expressing the philosophy. Will another eco-label emerge to trump the federal label? There is more interest these days in whether or not biodynamic and its Demeter certification will take its place. A quick call to Jim Fuller of Demeter-USA last week confirmed that the number of companies looking for certification has grown substantially as have requests for his presence at events to describe biodynamic agriculture.

Does this mean deep organic growers need to start again, developing standards that include a philosophical component? More seals may be more confusing to consumers. One of the most important elements of marketing I teach my students is the development of a brand personality: defining a shared vision, developing values and missions and communicating those through everything they do. All companies need to express their value set consistently and authentically. Of course, given the Enrons of the world, not every one does.

Social responsibility and sustainability are moving in, however. An interesting study done by market research firm, Datamonitor, in December 2005, indicates that 86% of European and U.S. consumers agree that they have become more skeptical about corporations in the last five years. Nearly three-quarters considered a “good track record in business” to be influential in (re)gaining consumer trust. This may be an indicator of future media reports and consumer advocacy around corporate responsibility.

For this reason, those with line extensions such as Heinz Organic Ketchup or Gold Medal Organic Flour feel more authentic, even though their identity is not what most would consider “principled.” It does feel more transparent than Muir Glen or Seeds of Change, who are often perceived with a value set which may not be in line with their corporate owners, primarily because most consumers don’t know their new parents.

Authenticity, transparency, trustworthiness, consistency: these are the attributes consumers will seek. If the organic seal means simply that certain production standards have been met, it may be that companies will need to share their own philosophical component additionally. This happens already. Certainly the perception of Organic Valley is extremely different than that of Horizon although they both bear the organic label on their milk cartons.

While it may be true that the original principles of organic agriculture may not be lived by the corporations carrying the organic seal, the increased presence of the seal introduces more consumers to organic production standards. As consumers approve the practices and buy more of these products, the number of acres under organic agriculture will increase. Consumers will question conventional and become more aware of a food system in need of recovery. Their demands for authenticity and trustworthiness will increase. A positive feedback loop encouraging a set of principles very similar to the original may just emerge.

So, the questions remain, but I am a little less quick to judge. A little naïve, maybe, but in the end, I wonder whether this corporate America takeover of organics may just be the organic takeover of corporate America. Let’s hope.

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ORGANIC & UNTREATED SEED CATALOG
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Consolidation in Food and Agriculture: Implications for Farmers & Consumers

by Phil Howard

While grocery store shelves appear to provide abundant choices, most of these products are marketed by a small and decreasing number of firms. Gigantic multinational corporations are consolidating their control over our food system, including the organic sector. The trend raises concerns about how this power is exercised, as most of these corporations are accountable to their shareholders, not to the communities in which they operate. While the situation may currently appear bleak, corporate dominance is being challenged by groups that have been adversely affected, such as farmers, workers and consumers.

The Dynamics Of Consolidation

The food system can be thought of as a long chain, with food passing through a number of steps or links in the chain on the way from farmers to consumers, such as food storage and processing. In 1999, Dr. William Heffernan and his colleagues at the University of Missouri identified a worrying trend, the emergence of clusters of firms that are working to put a padlock on this chain and control it from "the gene to the supermarket shelf." There are three processes by which this is occurring:

1) horizontal integration, 2) vertical integration, and 3) global expansion.

Horizontal integration refers to consolidation of ownership and control within one stage of the food system, such as processing, for one particular commodity. Heffernan and colleagues have been documenting the ratio of the market share of the top four firms in a specific industry compared to the total market, called the concentration ratio (CR4), since the mid-1980s. The CR4 is important because economists suggest that when four firms control 40% of the market, it is no longer competitive. This means that the largest firms will have a disproportionate influence on not just the price of a commodity, but also the quantity and location of production. The table above shows the CR4 ratios for a number of food commodities, indicating the current extent of horizontal integration. All of these ratios exceed the 40% threshold, and have been increasing over the last few decades.

The second process, vertical integration, involves linking firms at more than one stage of the food chain, such as upstream suppliers or downstream buyers. An example would be Smithfield's involvement in both pork production and pork packing, as shown in the table above. Another is ConAgra, which distributes seed, fertilizer and pesticides; owns and operates grain elevators, barges and railroad cars; manufactures animal feed; produces chickens, processes chickens for sale in meat cases; and further processes chickens for frozen dinners.

The third process, global expansion, is the attempt by agribusiness firms to increase their market share worldwide. This is most apparent on the retail end of the food chain, as some analysts have predicted there may soon be only 6 global food retailers2. A massive wave of mergers has been occurring in this industry recently, spurred by the recent entry of Wal-Mart into food retailing and its expansion to other continents (such as South America and Europe). In fact, Wal-Mart may be the only US based company big enough to compete with European firms like Carrefour, Ahold and Metro (each of which has stores in more than 20 countries). Before Wal-Mart became a major player in food sales the top 5 retail chains in the US controlled less than a quarter of the market (1997 data). Current estimates suggest that the top 5 now share more than half the market.

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Food chain clusters are formed when groups of firms join together to control every step in the food chain through these processes of horizontal
effects by methods such as automation and centralized supply chains. The top 4 supermarkets, Wal-Mart, Kroger, Safeway and Albertson’s, are increasing the amount of shelf space devoted to organic products. Kroger, for example, has a natural and organic section in 43% of its 2400 stores2. Fast growing natural foods chains such as Whole Foods (currently the 21st largest supermarket by sales)1, Wild Oats and Trader Joe’s have had success with their own brands of organic products, prompting mainstream retailers such as Kroger, Safeway, Piggly Wiggly and Harris-Teeter to introduce organic brands as well. Such growth is unlikely to benefit small farms because many supermarkets no longer allow managers to buy directly from local farmers or food processors. Instead, these corporations prefer to deal with food processors not shown in this figure. Slightly smaller global food chains such as Philip Morris, as the accompanying illustration indicates. Slightly smaller global food processors not shown in this figure are also establishing their own organic product lines (such as Dole, Chiquita, and McCormick & Co.) or acquiring existing organic brands (J.M. Smucker bought R.W. Knudsen, After the Fall and Santa Cruz Organic; Novartis subsidiary Gerber’s bought Tender Harvest). The market share for some of these brands is extremely high – Horizon, White Wave and Earthbound Farms control over 60% of the market for organic milk, organic soy milk, and organic bagged salad mix respectively. Earthbound Farms is a brand of National Selection Foods and a vertically integrated “seed to salad” operation – it contracts with over 200 growers. It is one of just five farms that market half of the organic produce sold in California1.

In the rapidly consolidating food retailing industry, the top 4 supermarkets, Wal-Mart, Kroger, Safeway and Albertson’s, are increasing the amount of shelf space devoted to organic products. Kroger, for example, has a natural and organic section in 43% of its 2400 stores2. Fast growing natural foods chains such as Whole Foods (currently the 21st largest supermarket by sales)1, Wild Oats and Trader Joe’s have had success with their own brands of organic products, prompting mainstream retailers such as Kroger, Safeway, Piggly Wiggly and Harris-Teeter to introduce organic brands as well. Such growth is unlikely to benefit small farms because many supermarkets no longer allow managers to buy directly from local farmers or food processors. Instead, these corporations prefer to deal with operations that can supply huge volumes for their increasingly centralized supply chains.
Organic Industry Structure

June 2005

Challenges To Consolidation: Alternative Futures

Despite the predictions of some economists, this global industrial food system is not inevitable. Dr. Mary Hendrickson and Dr. Heffernan believe that although the current system appears very powerful, it also has potential weaknesses. They state, "To succeed (alternative agriculture movements) must organize where the dominant system is vulnerable – by making ecologically sound decisions, by relying on time and management rather than capital, and by building authentic trusting relationships that are embedded in community." Examples of this approach can include CSAs (Community-Supported Agriculture), roadside stands and farmers markets that connect consumers directly with local farms. Other emerging alternatives include farmer marketing cooperatives with retail brands (such as Organic Valley), and ‘eco-labels’ that represent ecological and social criteria that go ‘beyond’ organic. These eco-labels include: ‘fair trade’, which guarantees a fair price to the farmer and a fair wage to farmworkers; ‘humane’, which assures consumers that livestock have not been treated cruelly; and region-specific labels.

The power of food conglomerates is also being challenged in the political arena:

In 1998 South Dakota voters passed by a constitutional amendment that placed restrictions on corporate involvement in agriculture (although it was overturned by an appellate court in August, 2003). In 2000, a similar bill was passed with factory hog farms and the application of toxic sewage sludge to farms, two townships in Pennsylvania went further and passed ordinances that declare corporations are not ‘persons’ under the US Constitution.

“Checkoffs,” or mandatory payments to commodity promotion boards have been ruled unconstitutional for pork, beef, grape and mushroom farmers (the pork and beef decisions are currently still being fought in the court system, but are widely expected to be upheld). Many independent farmers feel these funds help agribusiness at their expense, and courts have agreed that they violate producers First Amendment right to free speech and association.

The 2002 Farm Bill included provisions that require labeling the country of origin for perishable agricultural commodities, which will become mandatory by September 30, 2004. Surveys have consistently found that more than two-thirds of consumers are willing to pay more for meat and produce from their own country.

Regulations that ban Wal-Mart Supercenters and other “big box” grocery stores have been enacted in Oakland, Martinez, San Luis Obispo and Arroyo Grande in California, and in at least 18 other cities in the US.

Finally, many efforts are underway to create a more decentralized food system, involving both the creation of alternative structures and addressing the political power of oligopolies. In Chicago, for example, an initiative to create a regional organic food system advocates new consumer food cooperatives, farmers markets and community gardens, as well as increasing farmland protection, reducing subsidies to agribusiness and increasing public funding for sustainable food systems.

Consolidation in food and agriculture has many negative consequences for the majority of those who grow, harvest, process and eat food. These include lowering incomes and purchasing power, limiting choices, and harming human, animal and ecosystem health. However the importance of food makes it likely that as more people become aware of these consequences, the power of corporate agribusiness will be more effectively confronted.


Phil Howard is a postdoctoral researcher at the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems at UC Santa Cruz where his research addresses the role of consumers in fostering sustainable agriculture. He is a co-author of the “Consolidation in Food Retailing and Dairy” study conducted for the National Farmers Union.


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In the EU, corporate inroads into the organic world are following different paths than in the U.S., but debates about potential consequences for farmers and consumers sound familiar.

by Laura Sayre

Pop quiz: Where’s the world’s most valuable organic market?

The United States? Japan? Australia? Guess again. It’s Western Europe. Thanks to a series of nightmarish food scares, a strong euro and what one politico calls “a favorable policy environment,” the European Union has outpaced the U.S. in organic sales as well as in organic acreage and number of organic farms. Retail sales of organic products in the EU-15 (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom) for 2003 totaled €9.966 million, according to a recent report from the USDA Economic Research Service, compared to €8.019 million for the United States.

The recent admission of ten new member states—Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovak Republic and Slovenia—and the possible future admission of Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia and Turkey promise to make the EU an even more formidable presence in the global organic marketplace in coming years, both for production and consumption. (Estonia, Poland and Slovenia in particular have shown spectacular growth in organic acreage in the past few years). Unconfirmed reports peg the 2004 European organic market at a whopping €20.7 billion, with projected continued expansion in the double digits.

Those are not the kind of numbers that escape the eyes of the world’s biggest food companies. It should come as no surprise, then, that in a stroll down the aisles of an average supermarket across the pond, you may encounter such items as Lipton’s organic tea, brought to you by Unilever, Kenco organic instant coffee, brought to you by Kraft, and Billington’s organic sugar, brought to you by Associated British Foods, a multinational processor and supplier of sweeteners and oils.

While here in the U.S. a series of acquisitions of successful organic startups over the past decade has focused attention on the increasingly powerful role of corporate food giants in the global marketplace, allied trends at work overseas have received relatively little notice from U.S. organic food and farming advocates. In many cases—again not surprisingly—the same corporations are involved. Some companies have used their international reach to introduce organic product lines originally developed in the U.S. into European markets. In Britain you can now buy pasta sauces and other packaged organic foods under the Seeds of Change label (owned by M&M Mars, the ninth-largest food and beverage company in the world). Hain Celestial Group has brought its organic Rice Dream brand to Europe. Heinz, which owns a stake in Hain and ranks 25th on Food Engineering magazine’s list of the 100 largest food and beverage companies in the world, markets Heinz Organic kettle mash, canned tomato soup and other products in the U.K. and elsewhere.

In other cases, as in the United States, large food corporations are acquiring successful independent organic brands or launching new organic products within select markets. To complement its repertoire of organic brands in the U.S., Hain holds a number of European brands that are either all organic or have organic lines, including Biomarché, the leading distributor of organic fruits, vegetables, and prepared salads and other convenience foods in Belgium, and Grains Noirs, a Belgian catering outfit supplying meals on the region’s high-speed rail networks. Switzerland-based Nestlé, currently the largest food and beverage corporation in the world, has entered the European organic market with its line of organic juices and teas aimed specifically at pregnant and nursing mothers. Another brand in the Unilever stable is Bertolli, the world’s leading olive oil label, which now offers Bertolli Organic in some countries.

One of the highest profile European organic buy-ups was that of Rachel’s Organics, a phenomenally successful organic yogurt company founded at Britain’s first certified organic dairy, Brynllys Farm in west-central Wales. Brynllys has been farmed by Rachel Rowlands’ family since 1942, but in 1999 they sold the brand to Horizon. Two years later Horizon partnered with Dairy Crest, the U.K.’s leading conventional dairy company, to create Rachel’s Organics milk. (As most Natural Farmer readers probably know, Horizon was acquired by Dean Foods in 2003.) Daisy Crest seems to be taking a cue from the success of its organic venture with its announcement of St. Ivel Advance, a non-organic milk enriched with omega-3, expected on supermarket shelves by early summer of this year.

Another overseas acquisition Americans may have heard about was Cadbury Schweppes’ purchase of Green & Black’s, the leading European organic chocolate brand and one that is also available in the U.S. Green & Black’s was originally a division of U.K.-based Whole Earth Foods, a pioneer in organic foods processing and distribution in Europe.

Supermarket heavies

Examples like these make one wonder if it even makes sense to talk about agribusiness industry structure on a country-by-country or continent-by-continent basis. Patterns of consolidation do vary broadly across global regions, however, thanks to a variety of historical, cultural and economic factors. A basic difference between food sector consolidation on either side of the Atlantic is that in Europe the most dramatic market concentrations exist at the retail level. Consider this: As of 2005, just six of the world’s top 25 food retailers were U.S.-based, and only two of those were exclusively U.S. operations (Kroger, #6, and Albertsons, which was #12 but in January of 2006 was broken up and sold to a fistful of buyers including SuperValu and CVS). According to figures from M+M Planet Retail, the top five global food retailers—Walmart (U.S.), Carrefour (France), Metro Group (Germany), Ahold (Netherlands), and Tesco (U.K.)—operate a total of 28,871 stores in 68 countries. Now that’s globalization.

Mary Hendrickson, a professor in the Department of Rural Sociology at the University of Missouri who has tracked agribusiness consolidation for many years, points out that although multinational corporations like ADM and Cargill are well represented in the European feed and seed sectors, “you still don’t get the kind of market control from the processors and traders that you have over here.” This is partly due to the power of large farmer cooperatives, which have traditionally played a major role in European agriculture. Farmers were less able to flex their collective muscle farther along the food chain, however, so “consolidation developed in supermarkets instead.”

(Interestingly, these two patterns of consolidation are being replicated in other parts of the world as well: Brazil and Australia mirror the U.S. situation, with processors and traders wielding a great deal of power in the food economy; other Eastern European and Latin American countries, agricultural economists point out, seem to be following the European model with a handful of supermarket chains grabbing large chunks of the retail food dollar within a few years of their initial arrival.)

Hendrickson is affiliated with the Agribusiness Accountability Initiative (AAI), an advocacy and research collaborative supported by the Center of Concern and the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. According to data assembled by Bill Vorley, a senior researcher with the International Institute on Environment and Development and another AAI collaborator, four supermarket chains in the U.K.—Tesco, Asda (a division of Wal-Mart), Sainsbury’s, and Safeway/Morrisons—accounted for 76.5 percent of retail grocery sales in 2005. The top four supermarket chains in France—Carrefour, ITM, Leclerc, and Casino—represented 63.2 percent of retail foods sales in that country in 2003. Similar levels of concentration exist in Germany.

This situation has caused concern among European farmer and consumer groups for some time and has presented special dilemmas for organic food advocates. On the one hand, the supermarkets’ dominance gives them enormous power to dictate...
prices, influence supply and set quality standards. As Hendrickson puts it, “Supermarkets are the main players, [and so] they are driving the quality issues, particularly for fresh fruits and vegetables.” On the other hand, in most of the European countries (as in the United States), decisions on the part of mainstream supermarkets to carry organic foods have been critical to the overall expansion of organics.

To take just a few examples:

In Denmark—the first European country to create a national organic standard, in 1987—a retail supermarket chain called FDB began a major marketing campaign for organic products in 1993, which helped stimulate consumer demand. Two years later, a number of the country’s large dairy companies started purchasing organic milk at a substantial, guaranteed premium, which stimulated supply. Denmark’s jump on conversions to organic enabled it to target export markets in other European countries as early as 1999. Denmark now boasts the highest per capita spending on organic food in

France was an organic pioneer in the 1970s and in 1980 could boast 40 percent of Europe’s total organic acreage. Further expansion of organics remained modest, however, until 1997, when the French Ministry of Agriculture began actively promoting organics, including a declared goal of 1 million hectares and 25,000 organic farms by the end of 2005. (National totals had reached 550,000 ha and 11,377 farms by 2003, as reported by Agence Bio, the French agency charged with promoting organic agriculture.) Also in the mid-1990s France’s major supermarket chains, including Carrefour and Monoprix, created their own Bio product lines, and even conventional processors like Danone (the 10th largest global food company) and Besnier entered the organic market. Although France is known for its large number of small-scale artisan organic processors, Agence Bio recently reported a reduction in number and increase in average size of certified organic food processors, suggesting that some consolidation has taken place.

Luca Rossetto, a lecturer at the University of Padua in Italy, credits the what he calls the “LSRs,” or large-scale retailers, with helping to improve quality and consistency and expand domestic markets for Italy’s considerable organic output. All of the major Italian supermarkets (including Coop, Esselunga, Giese, and Pami) had launched their own organic product lines by 2002; most of these, Rossetto notes, were preceded by ‘low-input’ or ‘integrated pest management’ labels. Thanks to strong governmental support in the 1990s, Italy’s organic acreage expanded to 1.2 million hectares in 2001, but it has since contracted to less than 1 million ha; organic advocates are striving to bring consumer demand in line with farm output before more organic farms re-convert.

Britain’s organic marketplace changed radically in early 2002 when seven supermarket chains got behind a national objective to make 30 percent

Not all foods are processed at an industrial scale. These bottles are in the on-farm shop of Celestino Benetazzo, a farmer in the Veneto who has a CSA and also does some value-added products.

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of the country’s agricultural land organic by 2010. (This now looks pretty ambitious: the U.K. Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs reports that in 2005 organic and in-conversion land had reached four percent of total agricultural land.) Still, retail organic sales in Britain totaled €1.78 billion in 2004, with a staggering 75 percent of organic product purchases made in supermarkets. As in other countries the major supermarkets feature a wide range of private-label organic foods: Of 241 organic items called up in a search of Sainsbury’s online supermarket, for instance, around three-quarters carried the store’s “Sainsbury’s Organic” label, including everything from bananas and ground beef to rolled oats and Chardonnay.

Overall, the percentage of organic sales flowing through different retail sectors varies across the continent: in the Scandinavian countries, Britain, Hungary and the Czech Republic, over 60 percent of organic sales were made in supermarkets; in Belgium, Germany, France, Greece, Luxembourg, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain, the majority of organic sales were made via direct marketing channels or in specialized shops (including bakeries and butchers’ shops as well as smaller natural foods stores). But as a recent European Commission report on organics emphasized, ‘Specialists are convinced that where organic products are mainly sold through supermarkets, growth and market shares are (and will remain) higher than in other Member States.’

Setting a higher standard

So if the success of organics is inextricably tied to market concentration, what is to be done? One approach being explored by the Soil Association, Britain’s leading non-profit group supporting organic farming, emphasizes consumer education—encouraging the public to buy local and organic, to shop at farm stands and producer-only farmers’ markets, to subscribe to “box schemes” (similar to CSAs) and to demand country-of-origin-labeling on organic products sold in supermarkets. The Soil Association has also launched a name-and-shame campaign against the supermarkets to encourage them to source as much of their organic products domestically as possible, gathering data on the percentage of organic potatoes sold at Tesco’s that were imported, for instance, and publicizing the results.

In a recently released market study for 2005, the group reported that these efforts appear to be working. Organic sales at supermarkets are still increasing, their rate of growth has slowed relative to organic sales directly from farmers or through independent retailers. Of course other factors may be at work as well: the London-based market-research firm Organic Monitor says that a shaking-out process is going on at the big supermarkets, with chains reducing the number of organic items they offer by eliminating the less profitable products.

Another, complementary strategy is to link organic certification with fair trade standards. David Boselie of AgroFair Europe Ltd, a Fair Trade and organic produce trader selling primarily to supermarkets in 11 European countries, says that his company is trying to do this both as a way of distinguishing themselves in the market and as a way of averting the damage that big supermarkets can do to small farmers. “The organic and fair trade standards enable us to plug smallholder producer groups [in Central America, Latin America and Africa] into[its] the high-end supermarket segment in Europe,” he wrote by email. Ultimately, the fair trade approach could also help European farmers who have converted to organic relatively recently and are now struggling to adjust to reductions in subsidies combined with eroding organic price premiums caused by the availability of cheaper organic foods from countries with lower production costs.

Complicating factors

As other analysts of the agribusiness world have pointed out, consolidation characterizes almost every stage of the food chain from field to fork. More often than not, those corporate linkages are international in scope. Increasingly, they include both organic and non-organic elements. Tree of Life, which divides the national U.S. natural foods distribution business with United Natural Foods, is owned by Koninklijke Wessanen, a Dutch conglomerate and one of Europe’s largest food companies. Koninklijke Wessanen also owns Distriiborg, the leading distributor of organic and specialty foods in Europe, which also runs a chain of natural foods stores in France. Trader Joe’s, which many U.S. shoppers think of as a small-scale maverick compared to its larger rival, Whole Foods, in fact belongs to Germany-based ALDI, #11 on the worldwide food retailer list. In 2004, Whole Foods acquired a small chain of organic markets in London called Fresh & Wild as a first step toward moving into the British natural and organic retail sector. Now the U.K.’s first Whole Foods Market is under construction in London’s fashionable Kensington district.

Meanwhile, the Soil Association touts the expansion of box schemes, but many box schemes in the U.K. have found a successful strategy in supplementing their own on-farm production with exotic organic produce—bananas, oranges, figs—purchased from wholesalers. According to an independent report study conducted by the Organic Trade Association in 2000, a Welsh distributor called Organic Farm Food has been serving this market while also selling to mega-retailers like Tesco’s.

As these examples begin to suggest, figuring out how to contend with global market forces for the benefit of small- and medium-scale farmers—and consumers—is a tricky business. First-world subsidies harm third-world farmers, but (for reasons that are not well understood), yields on organic farms in Europe are typically significantly lower than yields on conventional farms, so organic farmers need price premiums (or subsidies) to remain viable. This situation may be related to another little-known feature of the European organic farming scene: the average organic farm size (40 ha) is significantly larger than the average size of non-organic farms (15 ha). Is that a type of “consolidation” organic advocates should be concerned about?

One thing appears certain: as trade agreements are worked out and harmonization and equivalency agreements are established for international organic standards, the interdependence of global and local organic farming is probably only going to increase.

To read more about global and European organic markets...


Laura Sayre is an independent food and agriculture writer based in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. She’s currently working on a book about the student farm movement.
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**Holding On to Organic!!**

A Grassroots Perspective Concerning Big Food’s Threat to Organic Standards

by Steve Gilman

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**Back-Door Deal Weakens Organic Standards**

Last October, Republican leadership tucked a tiny rider loaded with big repercussions onto the massive 2006 Agricultural Appropriations bill. Inserted at the behest of lobbyists working for the Organic Trade Association (OTA), the rider benefits large food processors -- altering provisions of the 15-year-old Organic Food Production Act (OFPA) and weakening organic standards in a single stroke. The secretive deal also pulled an end-run around the democratic process -- excluding the minority Democrats on the conference committee and attaching the rider without debate or vote after the meeting was adjourned.

Written in obscure legal language, the rider effectively nullifies a 2005 Court decision affirming OFPA’s ban on “synthetic ingredients” in processed organic foods while reinforcing a loophole allowing the use of hundreds of synthetic processing substances without review. It also allows dairies to use non-organic replacement animals and gives the USDA unprecedented power to grant “emergency exemptions” to allow non-organic organic foods while reinforcing a loophole on “synthetic ingredients” in processed food manufacturers regularly use thousands of unlabeled synthetic processing substances in everyday foods. Buy Organic, but read organic labels carefully. Choose “100% Organic” products and select fresh, local, whole foods over processed ones. Support “Fair Trade’ items in the marketplace.

• Remember – we vote with our wallet on a daily basis. Conventional food manufacturers regularly use thousands of unlabeled synthetic processing substances in everyday foods. Buy Organic, but read organic labels carefully. Choose “100% Organic” products and select fresh, local, whole foods over processed ones. Support “Fair Trade’ items in the marketplace.

• The Interstate Council is planning to expand the NOFA website (www.nofa.org) to present more information and talking points.

• Strategies are still being considered by organic groups on how best to address the OTA action, including: repealing the rider; modifying it in the upcoming rulemaking process; and initiating new legislation. Bookmark the “Organic Allies” websites for updates and stay tuned for Action Alerts.

• Contact your representatives in Congress to protest the corporate attack on Organic standards. Urge House members to join the Organic Caucus (sample letter and talking points will be on NOFA website). Protest the undemocratic rider action. Demand real ethics reform in Congress.

• Write to food manufacturing companies: protest the OTA processors’ action and hold them to the spirit and substance of higher organic standards.

• Support your local Food Coops, Farmers Market, CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) Farm, and restaurants sourcing local produce.

• Encourage school and college food programs to purchase local and organic produce and products.

• Encourage consumers to join and support your local NOFA

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Who’s What --Acronyms used in this Article

GMOs – Genetically Modified Organisms
NOP – National Organic Program
NOSB – National Organic Standards Board
OFPA – Organic Food Production Act of 1990
OTA – Organic Trade Association
USDA – United States Department of Agriculture
Organic Label At Risk

The big food companies clearly understand how much consumers have come to trust the organic label. The Court rulings would have required them to use the lesser “Made with Organic” designation, which OTA claims does not command the higher premiums they are seeing in the marketplace. To qualify for the full “USDA Organic” label they would be required to replace all synthetic or non-organic ingredients like pectin (used in making organic jams and jellies) with naturally occurring versions such as those derived from fruit waste by-products.

Even though the Court decision gave manufacturers until July, 2007 to comply, OTA argues they would find it too difficult to re-formulate their ingredients - hurting farmers, putting companies out of business and limiting the availability of organic food in the marketplace. Heavily influenced by their newer Big Food community input that went into the organic law.

The Background

This legislative intrigue is just the latest round in a continuing struggle over defining the practice of organic.
A Small Victory

Another contentious issue arose in early 2006 concerning USDA’s latest appointment to the NOSB. Even though the selection process is open to public input, the procedure is secretive and USDA has the final say over who is placed on the Board. The panel consists of 4 organic farmers, 3 consumer/public interest advocates, 3 environmentalists, 2 handlers/processors, 1 retailer, 1 scientist, and 1 certifying agent whose positions are filled for three-year terms on a rotating basis.

In January, USDA-watchers were startled to find that the new NOSB appointees included a bureaucrat from General Mills (a Big Food rider supporter) in the consumer advocate category and an OTA founder/rider supporter in the certifier slot. Created by the 1990 Organic Act, the NOSB was clearly intended as an independent citizen review board. USDA’s ability to potentially pack its ranks with industry insiders represents a threat to legitimate decision-making and organic standards.

This time USDA’s action was thwarted, however, but by a circular route. Consumers Union, in league with other national consumer groups, sent letters to both USDA and General Mills, fearing that chocolate bars in the marketplace soon would end up with the OTA label. While there was no response from USDA, General Mills, faced with the backlash in the marketplace, ended up withdrawing its candidate.

The process demonstrates that consumer pressures sometimes have a better chance of challenging governmental actions when they are directed at business entities instead.

Overall, the organic community has been well-represented by the NOSB appointees. There have always been some outstanding consumer public interest at heart serving on the board. However, only organic policies that are approved and adopted by USDA are official. Currently, over 30 NOFA recommendations based on extensive public comment, molder away unacknowledged by the NOP.

Organic Allies

A number of consumer and public-interest groups are long-time supporters of organic standards:

-- National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture
www.sustainableagriculture.net

sign up for Action Alerts in the “Get Involved” pages.

-- Consumers Union
www.consumersunion.org Publishers of Consumers Reports; information on Eco-Labels; sign up for Action Alerts

-- Center for Food Safety
www.centerforfoodsafety.org Action alerts and legal action

-- Organic Consumers Association
www.organicconsumers.org Action alerts; mail campaigns; position papers

-- Cornucopia Institute
www.cornucopia.org Support for family-style farming; dairy ratings for organic milk – factory farms or family farms?

-- Arthur Harvey’s website
www.restoreorganiclaw.org

Who Done It?

To maneuver their secret legislation through the back halls of Congress, OTA retained a well-connected litigator, William “Jay” Friedman, of Covington & Burling, a major law firm that has already argued in front of the U.S. Supreme Court. Friedman was one of the key litigators in the Abramoff lobbying scandal. Now, with a new firm for litigation and lobbying, Friedman is back with a new bill. The rider was attached surreptitiously and without debate by Rep. Nathan Deal, R-GA with backing from Georgia’s Deal for the grassroots community the sneaky attack on organic standards by the OTA rider was just the latest in a series of efforts by Secretary of Agriculture to expand the rules and regulations for organic food processors.

Fueled by a consumer demand instead of pricey food industry advertising campaigns, organic food sales have exploded – from $3.5 billion in 1997 to $9 billion in 2005. Food corporations that the organic market’s prospects are the brightest light on the horizon: sales are projected to more than double by 2009.

The covert rider action was devised and executed by lobbyists working through the Organic Trade Association and carried out by corporate lobbyists with insider connections. Although the OTA Board gave broad go-ahead to fix the law, the OTA membership, including NOFA-NY and NOFA-VT) who was never consulted. Over 200 OTA members signed a letter protesting OTA’s executive action. Executives at Earthbound Farm, the leading supplier of organic lettuce and greens in the U.S., publicly announced their dismay at finding their name on an OTA letter supporting the rider.(1)

OTA was founded by a handfull of fledging small-scale organic food companies and farm groups twenty years ago and currently represents over 1600 business and farmer organizations. OTA’s ranks have grown substantially over the past decade and the association recently restructured to better accommodate the higher membership level of giant food processors that are relative newcomers to the organic world. The association’s dues schedule is based on gross food and non-food revenue with members making under $50,000 paying $100 and ranging to a $20,000 fee for companies with $5 million in production and over.

For corporations looking to be first among equals, there’s a special “Leadership Circle” category with membership dues set at $100,000 a year.

According to OTA’s own research, the Big Food companies’ share of packaged food, snack food and sauces/condiments represent less than 20% of overall organic industry activity. Further, the Big Food corporations have an existing minority within OTA’s membership. This is therefore a case of a small special-interest “tail” trying to wag a very large “dog”, which includes a wide range of organic farmers, big and small farmers, farming organizations, environmentalists, social justice advocates, health practitioners, consumer support organizations, food distributors, campus food purveyors, health food stores and health practitioners, congressional support organizations as well as “most of the major biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies in the United States and Europe” with “a large team of high-powered lawyers and lobbyists who spend substantially all their time engaged in life sciences transactions throughout the world.”(2) Jay Friedman also had previous insider experience as an appointee to the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) in the mid-1990’s and has proposed by Republicans and Democrats alike are laden with loopholes and are designed to mollify public opinion and get congressional corruption out of the lime-light, back to politics-as-usual. As further revelations of campaign contributions and influence peddling organic regulatory issues brought to light, back to politics-as-usual. As further revelations of campaign contributions and influence peddling organic regulatory issues brought to light, back to politics-as-usual.

Thanks to recent plea deals in the Abramoff lobbying scandal, Congressional political machinations are finally being exposed and ethics have become a major issue in this year’s congressional elections. Many of the proposed “reforms” proposed by Republicans and Democrats alike are laden with loopholes and are designed to mollify public opinion and get congressional corruption out of the lime-light, back to politics-as-usual. As further revelations of campaign contributions and influence peddling organic regulatory issues brought to light, back to politics-as-usual.

Sleazy is as Sleazy Does

For the grassroots community the sneaky attack on organic standards by the OTA rider was just the latest in a series of efforts by Secretary of Agriculture to expand the rules and regulations for organic food processors.

When discovered, there was a huge outcry from the organic community, OTA included. Advocates mustered a barrage of over 20,000 communications to Sena-tors and Representatives. Since the deal had already gone through, it took an act of Congress to repeal the loophole. The Organic Restoration Act, introduced by Sena-tors Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Jay Rockefeller (R-WV) put together a bi-partisan coalition and defeated the back-door provision. The price of this repeal, however, is high.
Growing Organic

As veterans of many battles upholding organic standards, members of the organic community sporadically question the wisdom of being involved with the agribusiness-influenced NOP and USDA bureaucracy in the first place. The issue comes back to verification of practices and prevention of fraud to protect consumers. For years, farming organizations and some state governments ran independent certification programs that verified farmer practices for consumer certainty without federal government involvement.

Although NOFA supported the concept of a National Organic Program early on to promote organic agriculture and provide research, statistical and extension services, we warned against placing USDA in the certification- accreditation role. Indeed, USDA has primarily promoted the interests of the big industrial players. Its accreditation is uneven, the NOP has never conducted on any of the off-shore certifiers.

While organic certification is mandatory for interstate sales, a number of farmers who market locally (including some original grassroots pioneers) have decided to opt out of the certification system all together, relying instead on their local reputation in the community. The Farmers Pledge ™ is an alternative approach where farmers promise to follow bona fide organic practices and open their farms to community verification. The NOP governs the legal use of the organic label, however, and only certified farmers are allowed to sell their produce as “organic”. Very small-scale producers are protected by a provision allowing them to market as organic without being certified if their sales are under $5,000 a year.

Despite recent growing pains, the grass- roots NOFAs would like to see the entire agricultural system transition to organic and welcomes new farmers and businesses into the organic community. Farmers are finding expanding markets supplying the new organic product lines of previously conventional food companies. Faced with going out of business, a number of grain and dairy operations have found a new organic lease on life. Newly arrived practitioners attracted solely by the prospect of higher prices are cautioned, however, that organic does not just mean substituting some organic inputs for chemical ones. Organic agriculture represents a complete paradigm shift to non-toxic, holistic, ecological practices, requiring substantial soil fertility enhancements as well as considerable farmer-between-the-ears adjustments.

Further, the transition to organic doesn’t stop at the farm. Consumers understand the spirit as well as the substance of organic. It is not just a marketing label -- it stands for a broader “green” food system with social justice, environmental protection, fair trade, ethical behavior and healthy nutritional food free of pesticides and other toxic synthetics. The hallmark of the grassroots organic community has always been open and transparent dealings between farmers, businesses and consumers. Big Companies who are just looking for a slice of the organic pie are put on notice; they are being held to higher standards all around, not only for food quality but also of ethics, in the way they do business.

Sources: (hot links available on NOFA website)
(2) SourceWatch, a project of the Center for Media and Democracy
What Became Of Walnut Acres?

by George DeVault

Today's $15 billion a year organic foods industry -- the darling of both profit hungry multi-national food conglomerates and well-heeled though aging baby boomers in search of greater health and longevity -- was born humbly enough in an old iron kettle hung over an open wood fire more than half a century ago. The scene was a rundown farm in rural central Pennsylvania, a place called Walnut Acres by the previous owners. Taking turns over the steaming kettle with a large wooden ladle were Paul and Betty Keene, young, idealistic homesteaders who were struggling to care for two babies and pay off a whopping big mortgage by bringing 100 worm-out acres back to life with a team of horses and unconventional organic farming methods.

It was a time of great change in America. World War II had ended the year before. The Baby Boom was just beginning. Bogie and Bacall sizzled on the silver screen as suburbs, hastily built to house returning vets, greedily gobbled up farms from Long Island to Los Angeles. TV had yet to invade the American living room.

Yet a growing number of disaffected young Americans weren't buying the new American Dream. They longed for a simpler, more meaningful life. They'd had their fill of big cities, cookie cutter cottages in the suburbs, traffic jams and commuter trains. Like generations of pioneers before them, they yearned to go back to the land. They didn't have to look for someone or something to show them the way home.

Helen and Scott Nearing were already "living the good life" in their first hand-built stone home in Pennsylvania. Ed and Carolyn Robinson, recent refugees from Manhattan, had just written the suburban homesteader's manifesto, The "Have-More" Plan, the blueprint for "a little land -- a lot of living" from distant corners of the cavernous warehouse to the conduct and mood of the growing crowd milling around inside the maze-like building.

The Keene's first harvest from their six old apple trees wasn't much, maybe 10 to 15 bushels of fruit. But Paul and Betty weren't about to let it go to waste. By blending tart and sweet apples instead of adding sugar, they cooked the apples down to 100 quarts of apple butter -- worth $1 each -- that helped their young family survive their first winter at Walnut Acres. In the process, they quietly revolutionized our food system, eventually forcing less a power than the Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to change its regulations. Change did not come easy, though. Federal standards stipulated that blanched peanuts must be used to make peanut butter. The contrary Keenes used whole, unblanched peanuts, complete with the vitamin-rich red skin and the nutritious heart or germ of the peanut. Federal regulations allowed up to 15 percent of non-peanut products such as sugar and saturated fats in peanut butter. The Keenes used only their unblanched peanuts, no added fat and just a pinch of salt. The result was that, in the beginning, Walnut Acres had to label its peanut product "imitation peanut butter." Why? Because it did not meet FDA's minimum standards. Simply put, Walnut Acres' peanut butter was too good. The Keenes urged their thousands of loyal customers to go to waste. By the time he finishes explaining the legal fine print and promoting nine upcoming Michael Fox International auctions -- including a box company (Lot 235), an office building proclaims is "America's Original Organic Farm.

This is the end of the farm known as Walnut Acres, which a big red sign on the side of the faded red building proclaims is "America's Original Organic Farm."

“BUSINESS CLOSED” reads the auction notice in the Feb. 3 edition of Lancaster Farming. "Canning, baking and mill equip. Also to be sold: 12 +/- acres with approximately 100,000 +/- square foot food processing facility with buildings, including grain processing facility, (8) silos and refrigerated warehousing. Real estate to be sold at 10:00 a.m.

"You can’t be back here. That’s where they’re handing the money," the guard says, nodding his head toward the uniformed auction workers hovering around tables set just behind the two custom-built oak checkout lanes that recently rang up the purchases of organic granola, flour and other health foods at Walnut Acres' retail store.

There is no money to handle yet. It’s early, only about 8:30 a.m. Yet money seems to be the word of the day.

"If you bid $100, we charge you $110," says Bob Sherman, opening auctioneer for Michael Fox International, Worldwide Asset Services Since 1946.

"That’s how the auction company gets paid. If you spend more than $2,500 today we need a cash deposit. How much do you plan to spend today?"

"There will be no abandonment. Take it all. Don’t cherry-pick. Bid-rigging is a felony," Sherman warns.

By the time he finishes explaining the legal fine print and promoting nine upcoming Michael Fox International auctions -- including a box company in New Jersey, a bakery in Indianapolis, a printing plant in Ohio and a Michigan paper mill -- it is nearly 10:30 a.m.

Sherman begins by offering the entire business -- grounds, buildings and contents -- for one money. He asks for $1.5 million. There is no bid. Asking price finally drops to $200,000. Still no bid.

Sherman moves on to the real estate in its entirety. Asking price finally drops to $100,000. Again, there is no bid.

Sherman shifts to the entire contents of the warehouse, retail store and offices. Again, no bid.
Paul and Betty Keene around 1940

No one says a word. The crowd of several hundred stands dead silent in Walnut Acres’ large garage, stirring slightly to ward off the cold that freezes fingers and makes noses run.

Sherman takes it all in stride. While an auction worker snaps digital pictures of the action, a helper holding a large red arrow on a long stick to identify the item now up for bid steps up to Lot 1, the first of 25 fans on stands. “By the piece and take your choice,” Sherman says. The fans sell for $40, then $30, then $20 and finally $10 apiece.

By noon, Sherman is only on Lot 157 “1 3-ton long ram jack engine hoist.” It’s going to be a long day.

* * * * *

**Mussorie, INDIA, 1939 -- “How can a young person best serve humanity and his world?” was my question.**

“Ah, my friend,” came the answer, “when you return to your home in America, you must give away everything you have. Don’t own anything. Then you will be free to talk and to act. Doors will open for you.” Mohandas K. Gandhi was suggesting a recipe for my future.

“Mr. Gandhi, shining eyes peering over his old-fashioned glasses, had not answered my question, but he had lifted it and me to a higher plane. He had stated a principle, set a direction that I have tried ever since, sometimes in faltering ways, to follow. I have certainly not adopted his counsel completely, but it has set a lifetime pattern for me.”

So explained Walnut Acres founder and organic farming pioneer Paul Keene in the prelude of his 1988 book “Fear Not to Sow Because of the Birds.” The book is a collection of essays written by Keene from 1949 through 1986. Published first in the popular Walnut Acres catalog sent to mail-order customers throughout North America, Keene’s homey columns trace the history, philosophy and evolution of Walnut Acres and the organic farming movement over the last half century. (The book’s title comes from an inscription Keene found on an old tombstone. He adopted it as the motto for Walnut Acres, saying that he always “tried to sow enough for birds and people, and then to move through our days trustingly.”)

At the time of his soulful stroll with Gandhi along a dusty road in India, Keene was on holiday from the Woodstock School in the Himalayan foothills where he was teaching on contract for two years. During that time he met J.I. Rodale, a former IRS accountant and industrialist with dreams of farming and what he envisioned would be a “new agriculture.” Rodale had recently bought a rundown farm outside of Emmaus, PA. He was trying to restore it to productivity using organic methods. Rodale came to attend a lecture on natural farming methods around 1942.

“J.I. told me he was thinking about starting up a little magazine called Organic Farming and Gardening. He asked me if I wanted to become the assistant editor. I laughed and said, ‘No sir, I think I’d rather farm.’” Keene is quoted as saying in a history of organic farming found on the Natural Foods Merchandiser’s web site.

(Rodale’s first effort to launch that magazine failed miserably. He sent subscription offers to 10,000 rural boxholders, asking them to send him $1 for a year’s subscription of 12 issues. They sent back a grand total of $12. Rodale quickly changed the name of his magazine to Organic Gardening and Farming. At its peak in the 1980s, Organic Gardening had more than 1 million subscribers.)

Meanwhile, the Keenes continued to farm. “Only when we felt we had learned what we needed to know to go on our own as full-fledged farmers did we decide to leave,” Keene writes. Shortly after they moved to a rented farm in Easton, PA, the Kimberton school closed. The Keenes were practically wiped out by heavy hail and rain. In 1945 they began looking to buy a place of their own. They finally found 100 acres near the center of Pennsylvania, borrowed $5,000 and bought it.

“In March (1946) we moved there -- two children, two parents, Betty’s elderly missionary father, a cow, a team of horses, our dog Lassie, and an old car.”

“Never was a new-born babe more beautiful to a mother than was Walnut Acres to us as we rattled proudly up the winding lane on that bright March moving day so long ago. Glory was everywhere. The tin roofs are rusted through in spots? Set buckets under their drips until we find time to patch the holes. The house and barn haven’t been painted for 20 years, the windows are falling out? Ah, but there is something splendid beneath the pastel paper over the holes for now. The place has no plumbing, no bathroom, no telephone, no furnace -- we must heat with a wood-burning stove! That’s all right. Isn’t it great to pioneer? We must pay off the mortgage with that one team of horses, plus an old plow and an old harrow -- and live besides? Tut, tut -- we’ve lived on nothing before; we couldn’t know how to live otherwise. Oh, the wonder of it all. We had a house and barn and outbuildings and a hundred acres. Did you hear? One hundred acres!”

* * * * *
A little after noon, the auction crowd moves into Walnut Acres’ cannery. Lot 191 (1 Panama 303 closing machine), the huge, aged gray device that for at least 9,522 hours, according to its hour meter, closed countless cans of Walnut Acres vegetables, soups and other organic products brings $700.

Lots 192-211 consist of 20 “retort baskets,” round perforated rust-colored steel tubes. Each is 20 inches deep and about three feet across. They weigh at least 100 pounds each. For years, a half-ton chain hoist lifted them into giant pressure cookers nearby and the contents were processed for canning.

Bidding is slow. Finally, a burly man in a green stocking cap and a tattered flannel shirt says he will take them for $10 each.

“Sold!” snaps the auctioneer.

“What are you going to do with all of those?” someone asks.

“They’re cheap!” the buyer replies.

After the chain hoist, the three pressure cookers themselves come up for sale.

There is no bid. No one has any use for such ancient technology.

In the next room, there is more modern equipment. A 500-gallon steam jacketed kettle brings $8,500, a 200-gallon cooker $1,600.

In the fall of 1946, the six old apple trees at Walnut Acres produced their first crop for the Keenes. The harvest wasn’t huge, just 10 to 15 bushels. But the thrifty homesteaders weren’t about to let any of it go to waste. Using a big kettle and a tripod they had bought at a farm sale, the Keenes began cooking up batches of apple butter over an open wood fire. Instead of adding sugar, they experimented until they found just the right combination of sweet and tart apples. Volla! “Apple Essence” was born. It was a staple in the Walnut Acres price list from then on.

That first year, the Keenes made 100 quarts of Apple Essence. It sold for $1 a quart.

Word of Walnut Acres, Apple Essence and the farm’s growing list of other products quickly spread far and wide. So did the price list.

“The Natural Farmer
Spring, 2006

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Word of Walnut Acres, Apple Essence and the farm’s growing list of other products quickly spread far and wide. So did the price list.

“All the time we were falling in love with our fields we were being made aware of increasing outside interest in their returns,” Paul wrote in February, 1986.

“A first postcard, then a first letter, then a visitor came from New York City, which was 200 long, winding, rough miles away. I was sitting on the old barn roof, painting over the rust at last when that first auto appeared. I almost fell off.”

The Keenes had a lot of help from their many friends along the way.

“I am a customer from way back. We knew Paul and Betty for years and years. We were good friends. We met through Scott and Helen Haase, who with her husband Marty lives in Nova Scotia. “Helen gave me their catalog. It was three typewritten pages at the time. We ordered Apple Essence. We were very pleased with that and told people to order from them. We’re probably responsible for several thousand people becoming Walnut Acres customers.

“Over the years we got to know the Keenes very well because we went to natural foods conventions together. My husband had a publishing company and we often had a booth near the Keenes.

“We were younger than they. We always looked up to them because it seemed like they were always the spirit of the whole Natural Foods Association and everything that went with it. They spoke all over whole Northeast. Paul was in great demand as a speaker. He was just so marvelous. The auditorium was just always filled. He was always giving everybody a big lift. It took us quite a few years to go to Walnut Acres, to go to Mecca to see it. That just made me even more excited about promoting them.”

Walnut Acres’ business boomed. Draft horses were replaced by a classic Ford 9N tractor, then other, bigger tractors and new, larger modern farm implements. In 1958, the old dairy barn was

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converted to a custom-grinding mill and store. A new wing for a mill and refrigerated storage was added in 1964-65, along with a canner, freezer room, office and new retail store. More storage, a huge Kubota lawn mower, and bigger retail outlet went up in 1972. The farming operation now totaled 360 acres. The world was beating a path to Walnut Acres’ door.

Unbeknownst to the Keenes, their unassuming farm at Penns Creek was also producing a totally unexpected crop – new organic farmers.

“I was reading Paul Keene’s catalog and in each catalog was inspirational prose about life on the farm,” said Dave, a 36-year-old grad student at the University of Washington. I said, ‘That’s what I want to do ... be a vertically integrated farming, and manufacturing sales company,’” recalls Gene Kahn, president and CEO of Small Planet Foods and a vice president of General Mills.

In 1972, Kahn founded Cascadian Farm on 51 remote and hilly acres in Washington’s logging country. By the middle of that decade, following the Walnut Acres model, he began manufacturing organic jams and pickles himself. The business was not successful. Kahn says he soon switched to outside packers, providing benefits of scale that Walnut Acres enjoyed. The whole idea was to make Cascadian Farm products much less expensive and more mainstream. Cascadian was bought by Welch’s in 1990, then acquired by the General Electric pension fund in 1996. General Mills bought the company in January, 2000. “I am getting nothing but help and support from them,” Kahn says. “That’s something they have done to make us better.” His company projects sales of $100 million in 2001.

“Walnut Acres was my inspiration for entering into business. Paul Keene gave me a real model and a reason to enter business and paved the way for the whole industry. Walnut Acres was America’s first organic company of any scale involved in interstate commerce.”

Paul Keene took it all in stride. “We’ve wondered sometimes about our growth,” he wrote in February, 1986. “We would not want to grow so large as to limit our ability to apply our idealism fully to all portions of our work. We do not think we have done so; we don’t know how large we could grow and remain sound. We feel of late that we have come close to a size that seems ideal.”

“The solid virtues of the small farm remain. The time may yet come when we will see our country’s greatest activities in farming spread out and available to those who would use it wisely, on a small scale. We may learn to order things so that millions of families can once more make a substantial portion of a complete and satisfying living from the soil. Perhaps we can once again realize the virtues of simplicity and frugality.

“As we see it most people on this Earth gain strength from closeness to the soil and from thinking in small terms. Perhaps these are both basic needs, on which the world’s health depends. Perhaps it has always been this way, and we are just relearning what those who went before already knew. In the midst of so many rapid changes that just relearning what those who went before already knew. In the midst of so many rapid changes that just relearning what those who went before already knew. In the midst of so many rapid changes that just relearning what those who went before already knew. In the midst of so many rapid changes that just relearning what those who went before already knew. In the midst of so many rapid changes that just relearning what those who went before already knew. In the midst of so many rapid changes that just relearning what those who went before already knew. In the midst of so many rapid changes that just relearning what those who went before already knew. In the midst of so many rapid changes that just relearning what those who went before already knew.
Organic Means More Than Money

The Natural Foods Merchandiser, a trade magazine for the organic food industry, has published articles about the challenges faced by organic food companies.


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In March of 2001, Acirca CEO Mark Rodriguez founded Acirca, Inc., “a venture capital-financed packaged goods company targeting the rapidly growing, $20 billion worldwide market for organic foods and beverages,” according to Rodriguez’ corporate biography. Core investors reportedly included venture capitalists such as Michael Mogul, Ted Turner and America Online founder Steve Case. From 1998 to 1999, Rodriguez was CEO in North America for Great Brands of Europe, Inc., and 2000 to 2001 for America’s Original Organic Brand Begins Life Again, proclaims the headline on a Jan. 12, 2001, press release produced for Walnut Acres-Acirca by Inorgan...
The most important thing for us and what we consistently tell people we work with or talk to is that the new management and the new owners of this company really take our responsibility of the founders seriously and our aspirations are to enhance its position within the organic movement.

“The last thing that I want to do is cast a shadow on the organic food industry or the pioneers in the organic food industry. “We are trying to find a balance in terms of a deep-held and earned respect for the founders and the development of a new business model. The last thing I would want to do is disparage the former owners. “The sad thing for us,” Rodriguez adds, is that the public does not seem to understand the business reasons behind all of the changes. Yet, “when we tell the story in a straightforward, truthful way,” he adds, people say it suddenly makes sense. “It’s really discouraging.”

Has he ever thought about issuing a press release saying exactly that? Such a corporate mea culpa would not seem to understand the business reasons behind all of the changes. Yet, “when we tell the story in a straightforward, truthful way,” he adds, people say it suddenly makes sense. “It’s really discouraging.”

The explosion in popularity of organic food is worldwide. A telephone sampling of 1,000 adults by Roper Starch says exactly that? Such a corporate mea culpa would not seem to understand the business reasons behind all of the changes. Yet, “when we tell the story in a straightforward, truthful way,” he adds, people say it suddenly makes sense. “It’s really discouraging.”

Americans may, indeed, fear their food. But longtime Walnut Acres customers also fear a corporate rewriting of organic history. “It’s scandalous that they have not even acknowledged Paul’s existence,” says Mickie Haase. “This is a tragedy. The organic industry and its customers should know what has happened. I just get so boiling mad about this. I’m telling everyone I know who bought from Walnut Acres not to buy their products,” adds the woman who once brought the story in a straightforward, truthful way,” he adds, people say it suddenly makes sense. “It’s really discouraging.”

No wonder the auction security guards are edgy. Just how far things have degenerated becomes clear when the auction moves into the Walnut Acres retail store in early afternoon. Auctioneer Sherman holds up a rectangular cardboard sign bearing the Walnut Acres logo on both sides. “The name has been sold. It cannot be used in advertising. This is for nostalgic purposes only,” he warns the bidders. The sign brings $20.

The auction moves through the warehouse, then into the bakery. Dirty dishes and utensils are still piled in sinks and wherever else employees left them when the business closed a few months earlier. A thin film of rancid grease covers many items. “This is depressing. I shoulda stayed home,” says a man in the back of the crowd. “Did it to themselves. Shoulda sold to somebody else,” his companion replies.

“Five times the money,” barks the auctioneer. “Let’s go!”

Lot by lot, the auction moves upstairs into main office, then the third floor offices. Former employees are there to bid on the new computers they used not long ago. Everything goes, typewriters, chairs and desks, cubicles, fax machines, computers, monitors, printers and boxes of software.

In the upstairs “peanut room,” an antique 25-pound peanut butter mill brings $600. Two peanut roasters go for $3,000 each. The peanut butter mill brings $2,200. Soon, the auction moves outside for the last odds and ends. A shed full of wooden bushel baskets and crates — enough to fill two pickups and a flatbed truck — brings $100. The old Farmall tractor brings $1,300, a wrecked 1994 Dodge Caravan $1,100. Other items, mostly old, rusty equipment, sell — on the first bid — for as little as $5.

It’s getting dark. Weary buyers begin piling inside to pay for their purchases. The auction clerks are overwhelmed. Waiting buyers start talking about their purchases, the auction, the demise of Walnut Acres. A woman in a blue jacket identifies herself as Marge Hartley, Paul Keene’s daughter. The other buyers are suddenly naturally curious, yet their tone is reverent, almost like they’re paying their last respects to an old friend.

Marge says she bought a pizza oven. She might use it to make granola. Her sister, Ruth, bought the peanut processing equipment. Ruth is thinking about getting back into making peanut butter. The old Farmall tractor was bought by Marge’s son and daughter-in-law who live near Pittsburgh. They want to move to Penns Creek, maybe in a year or so. Why? Why, to farm, of course.

“We still have the land,” Marge tells the other buyers on her way out. “We’ll be fine.”

EPILOGUE

In addition to taking over Walnut Acres, Acirca, Inc. bought other small natural food companies and spent lavishly on advertising in what Boston investment banker Scott Van Winkle told the Natural Foods Merchandiser (NFM) was “an insane strategy.”

According to NFM, “Too many investors were stirring the broth at Acirca ... with no background in the natural foods industry. Said Ben James of North Castle Partners, Acirca’s lead investor: ‘We had the wrong business model with the wrong management team.’” On June 17, 2003, the Hain Celestial Group, Inc. bought Acirca, Inc. — including the Walnut Acres “brand” soups and salads — for an estimated $13.5 million.

It was a small price to pay, considering that sales of natural and organic products in the United States totaled $19.7 billion in 2004.

Hain Celestial is “the world’s largest natural and organic products company,” Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer Irwin D. Simon said in the company’s 2005 annual report. In fiscal year 2005, Hain Celestial’s net sales totaled $620 million.

Even in their wildest dreams, Paul and Betty Keene probably never imagined such astronomical numbers might someday be possible as they stirred $100 worth of apple butter in an iron kettle over an open fire in the fall of 1946. They are both gone now, but their legacy is not yet forgotten.

In a news obituary last spring, The Washington Post’s Pat Sullivan reported, “Paul Keene, 94, one of the founders of the U.S. organic food movement, died April 23 at Messiah Village Nursing Home in Mechanicsburg, Pa., not far from the farm where he launched the modern commercial market for natural foods.”

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A Part Is Less than the Whole: How Does the NOP Stack Up to the Principles of Organic Agriculture?

by Elizabeth Henderson

“NOFA is dedicated to a vision of interconnected healthy communities living in ecological balance, deeply rooted in a sense of place, grounded in organic care of the land.”

For thousands of people in this country and millions around the world, family scale organic farming is a way of life based on cooperation and harmony with nature, building more socially just and sustainable communities, producing healthy, safe, nutritious, and minimally processed food, reducing food miles, energy waste and pollution, and trading on fair terms both with neighbors and with people in distant regions. Organic farming is part of the striving for peace among humans and between humans and all the other creatures of the earth above and below ground.

The values underlying the organic movement are expressed in the Principles of Organic Agriculture revised in 2003 by a task force of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM). Several people from the US, including Brian Baker of the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) and myself, contributed to the discussions of these principles. After a full year of intense exchanges, in September, 2005, the IFOAM World Assembly in Adelaide, Australia, ratified these principles:

**Principle of health**
Organic Agriculture should sustain and enhance the health and well-being of current and future generations. They concern the way people interact with living landscapes, relate to one another and shape the legacy of community values are embedded in agriculture. The Principles apply to the agricultural product produced in accordance with the Act and the regulations in this part.” In response to comments that criticized the organic law and the Rule for failing to address standards for fair treatment of farm workers, the NOP stated that this was not in their purview.

Four years after implementation, I think we can say that the NOP production standards do provide an adequate floor for practices on organic farms. The big exception is for livestock. Although the law requires “access to the outdoors,” the NOP has allowed certified to grant the USDA organic label to dairy and chicken farms that confine the animals to barns or even cages for large portions of their lives. Because the system is pass/fail, farms can qualify as organic by avoiding all prohibited materials while cutting corners on crop rotations, cover cropping and maintenance of biodiversity. In “Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California,” Julie Gutman rated 144 organic farms according to their agronomic practices. Of the farms grossing over $1 million or $10 million or more, none rated as “most agroecological.” (See chart on p. 48).

Elsewhere in this issue of TNF, you can read about the problems with the NOP and the processing of organic foods.

Despite its very limited parameters, by helping expand the acres under organic management and increasing the market, the NOP does contribute at least partially to the Principles of Health and Ecology. Through its definition of Genetically modified organisms as “excluded materials,” the NOP introduces USDA to the precautionary thinking embedded in the Principle of Care.

In our struggles to uphold the integrity of the USDA Organic label, which is so important to the many organic farms that cannot sell directly to consumers and must bear the organic label to gain access to markets, we should keep in mind that a marketing label is only a small part of the meaning of organic agriculture. The NOP is our toe in the door of USDA. Sometimes, that door squeezes us painfully. The challenge ahead is to get our whole foot and then our bodies and spirits into the food system in this country so that we can complete the agrarian transformation that is the dream and the promise of organic agriculture.
Standing in the parking lot of a 205,000 square-foot salad processing plant in northern California, one warm fall day in 2003, I saw how far organic food production had evolved. A chilled 16-wheeler that just arrived from the fields and a fork-lift was busy unloading the truck and stacking bins of freshly cut baby lettuce. Workers ushered the bins into a giant vacuum-cooling tube, taking the produce down to 38 degrees, and then into the refrigerated plant, where three mechanized lines with cascading water plumes washed, spun and then dropped the salad through a chute into plastic bags. They were among the 22 million servings of organic salad that Earthbound Farm, the third-largest organic food company, with more than $260 million in sales, dishes up weekly for sale around the country. Those who supplied this plant farmed big tracks of organic acreage, because this 24/7 farming model only works on a huge scale, and were paid $0.85-$1.10 a pound, depending on the variety.

What had brought me here? I had been an organic consumer since the mid-1990s, driven more by a passion for good fresh food and a cooking Jones than by any deep concern about nutrition, pesticides, the environment or the plight of small farmers. But the more I bought, the deeper I wandered into this world, first seeking out quality produce at markets like Whole Foods, and then branching out to a local farmers’ market where I met and befriended several organic farmers. One couple, Jim and Moie Crawford, of New Morning Farm in south-central Pennsylvania, who have farmed organically for 30 years, began to provide my seasonal produce and helped bring the philosophy behind organics into focus. With a background as a business journalist, questions naturally arose about what I was eating, where my food came from, and how organics had evolved from a scrappy back-to-the-land movement into a $14 billion industry. This led to the book project that became Organic, Inc., published by Harcourt this spring.

I not only wanted to explain the organic method to lay readers, who, like me, were only dimly aware of what it meant; I also wanted to find out what was behind the more recent conflicts that had arisen from this seeming success of organic food. So I went back to the early British pioneers, who in the 1920s articulated a post-industrial response to chemical farming, and then dove forward into the more recent group of the movement since the 1970s. (I did not delve deeply into biodynamics). I then focused on stories of people like the Crawfords, who were interested in bringing local foods to my city in Washington, D.C.; met Jim Cochran, one of the founders of the biggest organic food companies, like Earthbound and White Wave, the maker of Silk soy milk; and then began to delve into organic regulations, the battleground for many of the current conflicts. One abiding question I had was, what drove farmers to try the method, the entrepreneurs to build a natural foods market, and consumers like me to buy the food?

What surprised me was how varied the impulses behind the movement were – no singular political, ideological, religious or agrarian idea defined it, though many intersected. It was a way to go back to the land, to help small farmers, to keep chemicals out of the food supply, to heal the environment, to create an alternative food system, to change the current food system, to go forward with agriculture, to go backward with agriculture, to live on a sustainable footprint, to create society at large, to pursue nutritious food, to create local food markets, to create mass market products. Idealism and opportunism both played a role. One reason organic food succeeded was that it appealed to such a wide range of people, from fundamentalist Christians to vegetarian Buddhists, from rural right-wing libertarian farmers to left-wing liberals in San Francisco and New York. Like jazz improvisers, each had a unique take on the fundamental equation that linked soil, food and health.

Earthbound and its ilk, then, were just one strand in this cacophony. A lot of people have witnessed the rise of companies like them and summed up the progress of organic food as one of compromise, sell-out, and rise of the Organic Industrial complex. Other organic idealists looked at the same picture and saw what they had sought all along – the triumph of organic food among mainstream consumers and the conversion of farmers to more environmentally sound organic practices.

What I saw was a paradox. Organic food was envisioned from the beginning as an alternative to conventional industrial agriculture, but the pioneers were so convinced of their vision that only growth could bring validation; growth that came from convincing more people to eat organic food and more farmers to switch to organic practices. (This was J.I. Rodale’s mission in publishing). Ultimately, the success of organic food overwhelmed the ability of the small-scale model to feed it, which is why companies like Earthbound grew so dramatically once demand took off.

At the same time, after deriding organic food as the “ lunatic fringe” and “the muck and mystery school” “incapable of feeding the world,” the mainstream food industry woke up and saw a growth market expanding at 20 percent a year in a business that at best ekes out 2-3 percent gains. That is why the largest dairy company in the nation, $10.5-billion Dean Foods, bought Horizon and Silk, the two biggest organic brands. Organic food thus was embraced by the very food system it was supposed to replace. This identity crisis – and the meaning of organic foods as an “alternative” – has produced many of the conflicts you see today.

At the same time, there are also very real battles over organic regulations. Witness the recent regulatory interpretations to allow feedlot organic dairies with 5,000 cows. But curiously, Big Food is not always the foe when it comes to organic regulations, because why kill the golden goose? It’s not in a company’s best economic interest to do so, especially with so many media savvy public-interest groups watching every move. That is why, for example, Horizon Organic supported a more strictly worded pasture standard and Earthbound lobbied against the rewriting of the organic law in Congress this fall. Integrity is what gives value to the organic brand and many, though not all, big companies know it.

Although there is a worry that corporate organics will mean the death of the small farmer, I found the market wasn’t a zero-sum game. Some in California were incensed about the way Earthbound built its business and said they could not compete in lettuce at 85 cents a pound. But these farmers weren’t farming 2-5 acre farms, but had 500 acre tracts. In organic salad mix, the market had bifurcated between big and small players, just as it has in the rest of agriculture. The toughest spot to be was in the middle, too big to depend on direct sales, but too small to make it in wholesale markets. At local farmers’ markets, California farmers sold salad mix direct for about $4-5 a pound, undercutting Earthbound’s bags in the stores by nearly half with a much fresher product.
Whole Foods Markets expanded rapidly in the Washington, D.C., region, with more stores here than in any other part of the country stocked full of California organic produce (and a growing local supply). But this growth brought more consumers into the fold, raising awareness; a number of them, like me, traded up to farmers’ markets. Jim Crawford told me he has been able to sell as much as he grows. Though he disliked Whole Foods, because of the troubles his co-op had in selling to the behemoth, he told me they had created new customers for his market. Demand was never an issue. In fact, demand often exceeds supply, leading to the type of shortages and higher prices we now see in organic milk. While a third of American consumers buy some organic food regularly, it still represents only 2 percent of all food sales, 1 percent if you include the money spent eating out. So there’s still a lot of upside, whatever your ilk: CSA or Safeway.

We all know the $14 billion organic movement and industry is in conflict; that it continues to grow at 20 percent a year; that large, mainstream manufacturers have a foothold in the market; that growing numbers of farmers are choosing to go “beyond organic” and forgo certification. At the same time, organic farming is the only sector actually drawing more adherents while the rest of the farming sector shrinks. There are about 20,000 organic farmers nationwide, just under half of them certified.

The root strength that has sustained organics comes from the raucous culture that built this movement and market, one in which consumers, farmers, entrepreneurs, environmental advocates, nutritionists, agrarians, certifiers and chefs all participated. They didn’t always see eye to eye but that was the point. All came together and hammered out the meaning and method of organic food in a way that has well served the market. That should be recalled whenever an interest group comes up with a singular vision for organic food, for that path leads to weakness.

The biggest danger organics faces now is that these conflicts will lead to schism, so that organics loses the raucous, conflicted and democratic culture that has served it so well in the past. If that happens, if one interest group or one line of thought or one vision about what organics should be triumphs, then we will have a monoculture. And wasn’t that the enemy all along?


SAMUEL FROMARTZ

Natural Foods and How They Grew
denouncing the maneuver. The OTA, I believe, was seeking to restore the consensus on the use of synthetics in processed food hammered out in 1999 by the National Organic Standards Board, a history I detail in my book. This consensus was delicate, but worked out in good faith, albeit with a faulty legal foundation that had been in place for years. When Maine farmer Arthur Harvey sued the USDA challenging the regulations on synthetics and won, that consensus fell apart. Rather than go back to the table and hammer out a resolution – as even Vermont Senator Patrick Leahy advised – OTA rammed its change through Congress. And now OTA is paying the price in media reports about how it sold out organics to industrial interests.

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Sligh:
“Stay the Course”

by Jack Kittredge

Michael Sligh, farmer, author, founding chair of the National Organic Standards Board and director of the Sustainable Agriculture Program at RAIF-USA, takes the long view. “This is a crisis of success!” he insists, talking about the split in the organic industry caused by last fall’s amendment of the Organic Food Production Act. “We wouldn’t be in this position unless we had been more successful than any of us could have dreamed ten or fifteen years ago!”

Sligh has been with the organic movement a long time. Growing up on a West Texas ranch, he heard his grandfather and uncles argue about farm policies from a tender age. His grandmother, however, ran the kitchen garden according to the principles of a guy called J. I. Rodale who put out a magazine called “Prevention”.

So when Michael left home he rented land in Florida and started growing organically. All through the 1970s he farmed on his own as well as getting involved in certification and becoming a farm inspector for a local certification program. In 1983 he went to work for RAIF at a time when that organization was turning its focus from share croppers and farmers’ coops to policy issues such as farm credit, the spread of genetic engineering, and preventing privatization of plant biodiversity. Through RAIF he got involved in Oregon Congressman Jim Weaver’s ill-fated 1984 effort to set up an organic program, and again when Vermont’s Senator Pat Leahy tried in 1990.

“I was quite worried that if we gave too much power to the USDA then it would be a program that wouldn’t work on the ground out in the countryside,” he recalls. “The founding legislation was very innovative and unique in federal legislation. It created a mandate of power sharing – that the NOSB would have statutory authority over the National List was a very important piece that was put there on purpose. So was the fact that we envisioned peer review of the USDA’s accreditation so there was this citizen oversight of the accreditors who look over the certifiers’ shoulder who look over the farmers’ shoulder. And Congress admonished the USDA not to reinvent the wheel but to work with the existing architecture that was out in the countryside. The USDA was so opposed to the legislation that they testified against it. It was a bit of a shotgun marriage when it finally passed.”

When Sligh left, he went to work for Organic Farmers and Fishers of the Northwest (OFF NW) in 1993, and after three years he moved to Oregon to work for the Organic Farming Research Institute (ROFI) which had just been founded in 1994 by Satish Kumar.

The key mistakes around synthetics occurred early on, Michael recalls. “The farmers put a few categories of exemptions for synthetics used in growing in the legislation – things like pheromone traps and mechanical pesticides. Processors used that argument to get their own list, too. If the farmers were given a short list of synthetics, people felt it was only fair to give the processors one, too. It was sold as somehow not a permanent thing. But in fact the processors began to build their industry around those synthetics. I think we underappreciated how slippery a slope it was!”

“A majority of the board,” Sligh continues, “thought we should not even vote on it as it was not in the law. But the USDA said they would take it up with their counsel and they thought there was a way to resolve it, and wanted us to make recommendations. A majority of the board wanted to do that and the disagreements were papered over. There was also the understanding that after five years those provisions would all sunset and expire unless people who wanted them would come and repeat for them. Well, that didn’t turn out to be the case, they didn’t sunset.”

Asked what advice he has for long-time organic advocates who are outraged at the OTA amendment, he urges them to “stay the course”.

“We shouldn’t squander all the work and time we’ve put into it thus far. We shouldn’t lose pride in organic, it’s not too late!”

Michael points to the work of those in Europe who are taking long term views of where they want the organic industry to be in 10 or 15 years. They’re developing national organic action plans, coordinating governmental programs to bring new farmers into organic production. The Organic Farming Research Institute in Oregon has been working with the NOSB to come up with the Organic Action Plan that was put out last year. It essentially provides a national plan for organic production, something that was missing from the Organic Food Production Act.

“Organic is becoming the conventional system,” he asserts. “It’s happening before our eyes. We’ve had 7 of the top 15 multinationals come in and buy the top 23 organic brands in the last 5 years. That’s a huge change of who we are.”

“So new people are flocking into organics and education work has to expand. We’ve had a number of young NGOs and leaders emerge who were not at the table in the 1980s. We need regional dialogues over the next year or so to figure out where to go next. We need to strengthen civil society’s voice, as well as the voice of organic farmer groups. Extra label claims – fair trade, renewable energy, just employment practices -- can add value and differentiate food. We need to keep pushing forward the way we did in the past, confident that consumers will continue to follow our lead.”

Michael points to the work of those in Europe who are taking long term views of where they want the organic industry to be in 10 or 15 years. They’re developing national organic action plans, coordinating governmental programs to bring new farmers into organic production while preserving the price premium for those already doing it, setting organic production goals and figuring out how to meet them.

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Is Relationship Marketing an Alternative to the Corporatization of Organics?*  

A Case-Study of the Organic Farmers Association for Relationship Marketing (OFARM)*  

As giant food corporations increasingly buy in to the organic sector, the successes and disappointments of OFARM will both reveal and shape the extent to which organics will continue to offer North American field crop farmers a viable alternative to corporate-controlled conventional markets.

What are the prospects and possibilities associated with preserving or generating family scale production systems that enable the independence of smaller scale production?

This article reports the results of a year-long case study of OFARM. The purpose of the case study was to investigate the structure and functioning of OFARM and preliminarily assess the capacity of this organization to help maintain the independence of small family farms and organic product production.

The article also explores the possibilities for growers within the industry. Particularly the impact of agribusiness on shaping the possibilities for growers within the industry.

The findings of OFARM, and most of its member organizations, coincided with a boom in the sale of organic products beginning in the late-1990s. Despite the flourishing demand, organic grain growers were finding themselves disadvantaged in marketing due to the lack of reliable marketing information. Discussions of establishing an umbrella group for organic producers began in 1998, and OFARM was officially founded in early 2001. OFARM’s mission is to “coordinate efforts of producer marketing groups to benefit and sustain organic producers” (http://www.ofarm.org/). It currently includes 8 member organizations and, as described on their website, “represents the largest single organized block of producers in North America covering producers in 18 states and Ontario.

In legal terms, OFARM is a marketing agency in common, comprised of organizations that satisfy the Capper-Volsted requirements of farmer ownership and control. OFARM could market members’ grain, but the board has decided that individual organizations will continue to market grain while OFARM provides an overall umbrella. Some of the efforts of OFARM include the exchange of pricing and marketing information, and education of policy makers, collectively bargaining with buyers of members’ products and assisting farmers in adopting new crops and agronomic practices in their crop rotations. Currently, OFARM members interact in monthly conference calls for marketers, monthly marketing calls and meetings. For this reason, the researchers are confident in drawing these conclusions about OFARM’s functioning and effectiveness. To preserve confidentiality with a small sample size, we have combined quotations from interviews and observations in our discussion of results, and referred to all speakers vaguely as “members.” Drafts of this and other writings from the project have been reviewed by OFARM prior to release.

The results of our case study point to five preliminary points:

1. OFARM’s goal is to prevent the corporatization of organics by amassing and exercising economic power to create an orderly market in organics. This goes beyond getting more of the conventional food industry to recognize and respect, or provide a better marketing venue for the organics industry to than large food corporations. OFARM is an umbrella organization that also combined elements of the organic food industry and market to provide a better marketing venue for organics industry, and similar ideas and efforts elsewhere in the organic food industry.

2. The main benefit of OFARM that members describe is the exchange of information that enables participants to “know the value of their product” and, as a result, negotiate better terms with buyers. Of farmers, but the benefit of OFARM is the exchange of information that enables participants to “know the value of their product” and, as a result, negotiate better terms with buyers. Of farmers, but the benefit of OFARM is the exchange of information that enables participants to “know the value of their product” and, as a result, negotiate better terms with buyers.

3. Factors contributing to OFARM’s success include the trust developed among members, the flexibility afforded by the marketing-agency-in-
common business model and the seemingly inexhaustible demand for organic field crops.

(4) Paradoxically, organizing nationally has led in some cases to more regionally rationalized markets.

(5) The challenges OFARM faces come largely from deep-pocketed food corporations undermining farmers connections to organic marketing organizations, the need to recruit more members, and the constraints imposed by the Capper-Volsted legislation.

We discuss each of these points in turn below.

1. OFARM’s goals

In short, OFARM’s main goal is to prevent the conventionalization of organic produce. One member explains: “We want a fair and decent price for the grower, consistency in the market. We want to unite the organic community more than it is, so that it doesn’t become a product of the conventional market. We don’t want to conventionalize the organic market. We don’t want to let it be taken over by the big conglomerates where we’re slave labor out here. We want to maintain smaller farms.”

Another member concurs: “On the conventional side we’ve seen what’s happened: low prices for farmers and a market controlled by the bigger buyers, like Cargill and the rest. Something would have to be done. We talked about the price of production and what you need to make it workable. We didn’t want to get involved in government programs.”

So while conventionalization, in this formulation, is expressed in terms of farm-gate price, OFARM’s strategy for maintaining the viability of organic field crops is to exercise more power over the market. As one member explains: “We didn’t know what we would gain, but we had to do something to stabilize the prices. There were a lot of spikes in prices. We wanted to establish a market and establish prices.”

As another example: “We all get on the same page and put the same story out there and regulate prices to have good orderly marketing.”

For these marketers, then, OFARM is understood as not only a useful strategy, but a necessary one. With something as simple as a monthly conference call to discuss weather, crop, and market conditions, OFARM hopes to change the balance of power in the growing organic commodity market.

While “stabilizing prices and keeping them up” is the shared goal of interviewees, it was clear from the interview and observation data that price considerations were tempered by a desire to stabilize the industry. Some expressed worry that high organic commodity prices were “stifling” the animal product commodity systems they participated in, and all were clearly concerned about supporting the industry as a whole. In this sense, their desire for power in the industry involves accepting responsibility for planning an orderly growth of quantities and prices.

2. OFARM’s key strengths

OFARM has maintained a committed core group of members whose appreciation for OFARM continues to grow. All interviewees voiced strong support for OFARM as a critically important part of their organization’s mission. The most frequently emphasized benefit is the marketing information that comes through OFARM. Several interviewees used the same verbatim phrase to summarize the benefit of OFARM: “knowing the value of our product.”

They learn the value of their product through the prices buyers have paid others but also by information about weather and plantings that help them anticipate supply and quality. As one explains: “Our member producers benefit from the marketing knowledge I gain through OFARM, knowledge about a nationwide area. We know the quantities and qualities and prices out there. Our farmers feel protected under the umbrella, they’re not going out there all by themselves.”

“We know what the markets are going to be, in advance of what they are.”

“From OFARM, we can really know what our product is worth, through information on weather and market trends, what the value of the product is now.”

One member points out that having such information is not unusual: “Cargill has satellites out there, and that’s how they became successful. Now we have that too.”

Similarly, another comments: “With OFARM, our members now have a sense of being part of a larger organization, and a sense of marketing power. Farmers haven’t had that sense of marketing power.”

All interviewees emphasized that the information coming through OFARM was indispensable to their work, and thus only strengthened their ability to meet their obligations to their members.

In addition to the valuable market-related information, some members note how OFARM provides opportunities for mentorship, mutual support, and joint promotion. Several of those relatively new to national-scale organic marketing commented that OFARM also provides them with relationships with more experienced growers and marketers who they can and do call for advice. Similarly, some noted that they find it reassuring that, in the words of one member, “there are others trying to accomplish the same thing you are — stabilize prices and keep them up.” Others note that promotion of OFARM and of member organizations goes together. “Since we’ve been marketing, the whole concept has gained visibility,” notes one member, “OFARM is pretty visible out there. They always try to get some booth space where organic producers are going to be. That and the website has helped our visibility, and I get numerous calls from producers saying they want OFARM to market their grain.”

Overall then, the relationships formed through OFARM go beyond the direct exchange of infor-
While it is probably impossible to pinpoint where this trust came from, several members explain the important benefits of the National Organic Agricultural Market Association, an organization affiliated with the National Farmer's Organization (NFO) played in getting OFARM off on strong footing. The NFO helped OFARM get started by facilitating an early meeting, identifying potential member organizations, connecting OFARM organizers with organizations familiar with the marketing-agency-in-common structure as an organization umbrella, and providing initial in-kind resources like legal counsel, office support, and conference-calling facilities. Some of OFARM's initial success must be attributed to the catalyzing role the NFO and the IRA played in making needed connections.

The flexibility afforded by the marketing-agency-in-common structure has turned out to be a key component of OFARM's initial success. It has enabled participants to begin with literally nothing (no little resource investment (monthly conference calls) and then create the connections that enable high stakes investments (perhaps joint shipping, marketing, lobbying, and input purchasing) as trust and experience builds. Meanwhile, because member organizations continue to do their own marketing, they retain full autonomy as organizations. In the words of one member:

"Every time we meet we gain new appreciation for what OFARM does for us. We all see the benefits of working together."

OFARM was able to start small and build on a social infrastructure of trust. Contrariwise, projects that begin with a heavy financial investment might enjoy less time to make thoughtful, deliberative decisions that maintain connections to the group. Finally, OFARM as an organization has benefited from the seemingly inexhaustible demand for organic goods. The ever increasing demand has enabled the organization to set price floors, realize an early tangible success, and make longer range plans.

Several members reported farmers breaking contracts as tactics to gain extra high prices to secure supply. The relationships OFARM is forming will be important, as the availability of these commodities grows and exerts a downward pressure on price, but product needs to move through OFARM now in order to establish those relationships and nurture the overall network.

As a result, communicating the long-term value of OFARM to the farmer members of member organizations has been a constant issue. One of the questions the organization will have to resolve is how to approach promotion of the organization. Until now, OFARM has focused on recruiting other organizations and the addition of a new organization that incorporated in December 2004. Now, OFARM organizers with people familiar with the deep-pocketed corporations now getting involved in organics rather than through cooperatives. While OFARM's visibility has helped to recruit members to these organizations, the group in organics means that buyers are knocking on farmers' doors.

"The buyer side isn't the problem," one member explains, "the problem is farmer loyalty." This member explains:

"The demand dynamics have changed. It's a paradigm shift. Before we had to push organics, explain it and educate people. But now there's big money involved and we're being pulled. Demand is outstanding supply. For farmers it creates a lot of people knocking on their door and it undermines loyalty."

Another member reports:

"Farmers don't want to see that marketing change in there, they think they can do it on their own, but they're not seeing the bigger picture."

While the organic boom has several important benefits for OFARM, it also has a drawback; it encourages farmers within these organizations to market to the deep-pocketed corporations now getting involved in organics rather than through cooperatives. OFARM organizers with people familiar with the deep-pocketed corporations now getting involved in organics rather than through cooperatives. While OFARM's visibility has helped to recruit members to these organizations, the group in organics means that buyers are knocking on farmers' doors.

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resources that will enable its leadership role in the organic industry. Towards that end, OFARM has been staying apprised of current debates about exemptions of organic producers from conventional federal and state commodity check-off programs.

Finally, OFARM faces constraints stemming from the legally circumscribed structure of the organization. To comply with the Capper-Volsted Act of 1922, which exempts farmers from anti-trust legislation, all member organizations of OFARM have to be composed entirely of working farmers whose products represent at least 50 percent of that organization’s sales. This law is based on the assumption that all farmers have the same interests and that farmers’ interests are naturally opposed to those of others in the food chain. However, OFARM discussions frequently center on the challenges of sustaining family-scale producers at all points in the supply and corporate encroachment. In this sense, the interests of OFARM are more closely aligned with independent downstream businesses than with corporate farms. Dairy farmers and livestock producers are among the biggest customers of OFARM members because they need grain for feed. OFARM is working on bringing these producers under the umbrella in order to better maintain an industry that supports independent production. However, other kinds of businesses in the value-stream (processors, bakeries, etc) are not eligible to participate under Capper-Volsted requirements.

Discussion
At the most basic level, we conclude that OFARM is an interesting case that represents a promising step toward preventing this type of erosion. Institute for Rural America.

*This Research supported by a grant from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. An earlier version of this chapter was presented August 8, 2005 at the RC-40/Sociology of Agriculture Mini-conference on “An Agriculture Without Subsidies? Visioning a Market Driven Agriculture” in conjunction with the 68th annual meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Tampa, FL.

References


The Way Forward: The View from LaFarge

by Jack Kittredge

Organic Valley, the 700+ member farmer cooperative based in the Kickapoo Valley of southwestern Wisconsin, is one of the country’s largest producers of organic dairy products (knocking heads in the market with Aurora Dairy and Dean Food’s Horizon Organic Dairy). At $259 million in sales, the coop’s products are sold in 10,000 stores from coast to coast. The group is making a concerted effort to expand its operations in the Northeast, hiring Vermont Organic Farmers’ John Cleary and partnering to supply bulk milk for yogurt to Stonyfield Farm. Besides their branded dairy line of milk, cream, cheese, and butter they also sell soy milk, orange juice and, under the Organic Prairie brand, organic meat.

Chief executive George Siemon, one of the original 7 farmers who founded the coop in 1988, muses about their success: “I don’t like to say ‘lucky’. But we’ve been fortunate. We’ve avoided some of the binds that other coops have gotten into. We had help early on from the National Farmers Organization - they helped us financially a few times when we needed it. We always had our products processed at outside facilities so we never had that expense.”

Organic Valley has also managed to avoid the Achilles heel of farmer coops, undercapitalization. The coop requires members to invest a total of five and a half percent of their annual gross income from Organic Valley back into it. They can do this with a $0.60 deduction per hundredweight on each check the first year, or a $1.00 deduction the second year. The cooperative pays 8% on the investment, and if a farmer leaves the coop he gets it back.

“Not all farmers are willing to give so much of their check back,” says Siemon. “But you can look at it as a forced savings account. Farmers with a long term view see it that way. For us it is equity capital, which is the best kind.”

So far, Organic Valley’s family farmer base has kept it supporting firm organic standards. They support strong pasture standards for ruminants, and are among a small minority of egg producers who support outdoor access for chickens.

“I have 3000 birds on my farm, and they all have access to the out of doors. We have standards for how many square feet birds have to have. You just have to train them. You may laugh about training a chicken, but they’re like any other animal. Dairy farmers know how to train cows to go out. We put chicks out at 4 days old. They get used to it. If they sit inside until they are 6 months old its no surprise they don’t want to go out.”

Siemon doesn’t believe Avian Influenza is the threat to outdoor birds that others worry about. Flocks which have been outside have better health records than confined ones, he asserts.

Organic Valley has created a strong brand which consumers know and respect — something not all farmer coops manage to do. The brand has given them some power in the marketplace, and Siemon says they are not too worried about the competition from Aurora and Horizon. In fact, the real problems confronting the coop are the opposite – getting enough supply to meet growing demand.

“You need sustainable supply”, he says. “Right now there is not enough supply and we’d like to get more. But that means paying the best price you can and keeping those farmers with you for the long term. It means managing supply. We’ve been around since 1988 and seen supply problems come and go. In a place like the Northeast it is probably a case of constant undersupply. More dairy farmers are going out of business every day, there is strong demand, and Stonyfield Farm is taking a steady flow of organic milk to make yogurt for the nation. But in other regions it comes and goes.”

When the Harvey decision came down last June it delivered a blow to Organic Valley’s supply situation. The federal court ruling invalidated several USDA interpretations of the Organic Food Production Act, including permission to transitioning dairy farmers to feed 20% of their feed from conventional sources during the first 9 months of their final year of conversion. Although the law clearly says 100% of feed must be organic, the USDA had allowed transitioning farmers this exemption because of the high cost of organic feed, and many had taken advantage of it. When it was yanked out from under them, many dairy farmers felt they could not continue in the organic program.

“All of a sudden they were facing 4 times the cost,” explains George. “Most were producing their own forage, and buying in grain. Under the 80/20 rule, the grain was the 20% of the ration that was conventional. After Harvey all that grain had to be organic. For some that meant paying four times as much for feed.”

As a result Organic Valley found itself supporting the OTA in its controversial effort to amend the OFPA last fall. While not asking for a return of the 80/20 rule, the dairy part of the amendment allowed transitioning farmers to feed their own transitioning feed during the third year as organic, avoiding a four-year transition.

Siemon was not happy to be involved in a bitter dispute within the organic industry, and wants to prevent such an event from happening again. He feels two things need to be done.

“First, we need to educate the consumer. We need to talk about the quality of the food but also about the kinds of farms it comes from. We need consumers who care about keeping family farms alive, who want to buy locally and support farmers markets and CSAs. I’ve served on the NOSB, I talk about these issues on our product packaging panels, we regularly put money into consumer education.”

“Second, farmers need a face in Washington DC. We may not think it’s necessary, but if you are not at the table, someone else will be. The OTA tries to represent farmers, but it is primarily processors. That is who they really represent. Farmers need their own voice. We have tried to help farmers get organized, supporting groups like NODPA. We’ve put aside money to deal with this. It’s hard, but things in this country are controlled from Washington DC. Without their own organization, farmers will be left out.”

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Growing the Farmer’s Pledge

by Mark Dunau and Elizabeth Henderson

The Farmer’s Pledge declares in one page what the Governing Council of NOFA-NY believes are the most important principles and practices of organic farming. These include not only stewardship of the land, but commitment to food safety, local agriculture, small farms, fair labor practices, and regional ecology. If a member of NOFA-NY believes his or her farm is in compliance with the Farmer’s Pledge, the farmer can sign the Pledge before a notary, and mail it to NOFA-NY with $50. No one from NOFA-NY will come to the farm to verify that it is in compliance with the Pledge; the Pledge itself states that customers may visit the farm by appointment.

In 2003, the Governing Council of NOFA-NY offered the Farmer’s Pledge to its membership. Currently, there are 85 farms in New York that have signed the Pledge. They consist of farms that were never certified organic, farms that were certified organic, but dropped their certification because of philosophical disagreements with the National Organic Program, and farms that have maintained their certification but wish to attest to standards not offered by USDA Organic. NOFA-NY originally introduced the Farmer’s Pledge, and now CT NOFA also offers it to their membership.

In New York, Pledged Farms receive labels for stationery and packing, and a large exterior poster of the Farmer’s Pledge to identify the practices of the farm and to display as an educational tool, as well as being listed in NOFA-NY’s Food Guide and NOFA-NY’s website. The Farmer’s Pledge is now also trademarked and copyrighted to keep it in good hands. $25 of each Pledge is donated to NOFA-NY’s Food Guide and NOFA-NY’s website. The Farmer’s Pledge is now also maintained their certification but wish to attest to standards not offered by USDA Organic. NOFA-NY originally introduced the Farmer’s Pledge, and now CT NOFA also offers it to their membership.

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The heart of the Farmer’s Pledge is the integrity of the farmer and the judgment of the consumer. The Pledge does not focus on the details of organic farming practices, but embraces the big picture by stating in the opening line that knowing the farmer is the consumer’s best protection. The Pledge seeks to emphasize the common ground between certified and uncertified organic farms in their understanding of organic farming without interference from the USDA. At each NOFA-NY Annual Conference there is a workshop to discuss possible changes to the Pledge. At the 2006 Conference, by consensus this workshop arrived at additions to the Farmer’s Pledge that are now being considered for inclusion in Pledge for the 2006 season. This article serves as a means to communicate these proposed additions. The Pledge has 19 bullet points; proposed changes include additions to four bullet points, and one new one. Proposed changes are underlined.

* serve the health of soil, people and nature by rejecting the use of synthetic insecticides, herbicides, fungicides and fertilizers;
* reject the use of GMOs, chemically treated seeds, synthetic toxic materials, irradiation, and sewage sludge in our farming, and all synthetic substances in post harvest handling;
* treat livestock humanely by providing pasture for ruminants, access to outdoors and fresh air for all livestock, banning cruel alterations, and using no hormones, GMOs or antibiotics in feed;
* practice minimal processing for all food products to preserve the natural nutritional value of food; NO use of irradiation, ultra-pasteurization, excessive heat, synthetic preservatives, or GMO processing agents or additives, and include all ingredients on labels;
* encourage the distribution of unsold but edible food to people who need it;

If you wish to make comments about these proposed changes, please direct them to Mark Dunau at ml.dunau@ny.tds.net or Elizabeth Henderson at ehenderson@redsuspenders.com. The Farmer’s Pledge can be read in its entirety and downloaded at www.nofany.org.

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Fifth Annual Organic Land Care Course Educates 63 Professionals by Kathleen Litchfield

The classroom grew quiet and a dozen students gathered near as Chuck Sherzi poured food-grade blackstrap molasses (a bacterial food), water-based humic acid, water-soluble kelp and a fish hydrolysate (fungal foods) into a five-gallon bucket, during his demonstration of compost tea creation.

Sherzi, a certified Soil FoodWeb advisor and staff at Boston Tree Preservation in Woburn, was one of 17 speakers in the 5th Annual NOFA Course in Organic Land Care in Massachusetts last month. The demonstration was part of his comprehensive presentation on the Soil FoodWeb, an integral piece of practicing organic land care.

During five days in January, 63 students participated in the 5th annual Massachusetts course, setting a registration record for the NOFA Organic Land Care Program – attesting to the fact that the trend for organic landscaping services is increasing at a rapid rate, driven by consumer concerns, environmental awareness and regulatory pressures.

The students included landscape designers, landscapers, gardening and nursery center owners and staff, consultants, professors, entrepreneurs and students. They ranged from their mid-20’s to their mid-60’s and hailed from Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey and even Pennsylvania.

For Sherzi, teaching at the course taught him more than when he was a student. “It was nice to come back and contribute that way,” said Sherzi, who took the Massachusetts Organic Land Care Course in January of 2003. “For what is offered in the course, and for what we charge, I think it’s probably the best kept secret in all of New England. I think, really, the speakers at the course, and the dedication that they have to the whole program, after five successive years, is all part and parcel of why it is so successful.”

The NOFA Organic Land Care Course is held annually in January in Massachusetts and February in Connecticut. It runs from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day and covers the following topics in depth: Principles and Procedures, Site Analysis, Design and Maintenance, Rain Gardens/Stormwater Infiltration, Soil Health, the Soil FoodWeb, Fertilizer and Soil Amendments, Composting, Lawns, Lawn Alternatives, Planting and Plant Care, Wetlands, Pest Management (Turf Insects, Perennials, Trees and Shrubs, Ticks and Lyme Disease), Wildlife Management, Disease Control, Weeds, Mulches and Invasive Plant Species Identification and Control. A case study is also held each day, to give students a chance to practice what they’ve learned in a group setting.

On the last day of the course in both states, an accreditation exam is administered. Students who passjoin NOFA’s esteemed community of Accredited Organic Land Care Professionals, advertised on the program’s website – www.organiclandcare.net – and in the annually published NOFA Guide to Organic Land Care.

The last day of the course also features a Client Relations panel, during which four professionals working in Organic Land Care answer students’ questions. Often, organic landscapers educate clients about transitioning from using chemical applications to using healthier, organic applications.

“The Client Relations Panel gives the OLC participants an opportunity to ask their burning questions and receive information of special interest,” said Kevin Stitt, who served on the panel for the first time this year. Stitt took the Organic Land Care Course in Massachusetts in 2004 and owns Organic Soil Care Inc. in Woburn.

“As an ‘04 graduate, being on the panel was wonderful. I saw some familiar faces and met some exciting new friends,” he said. “The OLC program is successful because of its broad scope of information covered. People can relate to and implement something in a real personal way.”

Additional new course speakers in Massachusetts this year were Plant Pathologist Cheryl Smith of the University of New Hampshire at Durham, who presented “Disease Control”; Stephanie White of Stephanie White Landscape Gardening in Harvard, who presented Planting, Plant Care and Weeds; and Frank Crandall of Wood River Evergreens, Inc. in Hope Valley, R.I., who introduced a brand new course section addressing the “Business of Running an Organic Company” which was extremely well received.

A special thank you to all of the Organic Land Care Course speakers, whom many of the students in their course evaluations praised as the “major strength of the course.”

In addition to those mentioned above, they are: Donald Bishop of Gardens Are . . . in Marlborough, Michael Nadeau of Plantscapes, Inc. in Fairfield, Conn., CT NOFA Executive Coordinator Bill Duasing of Solar Farm Education in Oxford, Conn., Dr. Kimberly Stoner of the CT Agricultural Experiment Station in New Haven, Conn., Todd Harrington of Harrington’s Organicare and Sustainable Growth, Inc. in Bloomfield, Conn., Tim Abbey and Dr. Richard Cowles of the CT Agricultural Experiment Station in Windsor, Conn., Freelance Environmental Educator Heather Crawford of Madison, Conn., retired UMass Extension Vegetable Specialist John Howell of Deerfield, Restoration Ecologist Charles Katuskka of Southborough, Marion Larson of MassWildlife Field HQ in Westboro, and Ann McGovern of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection in Boston.

Additionally, special thanks go to course volunteers Dawn Pavone of Fitchburg (2004 OLC course graduate) and Julie Rawson of Barre (NOFA/Mass executive director), to course evaluator Bernadette Giblin of Northampton (2004 OLC course graduate), and to “caterer extraordinaire” Stacy Miller of Wellesley. With the help of Denise Pegrum, the organic lunches served daily at the course could not have been more delicious, healthy or organic. Finally, and far from least, thank you to the staff of the Doyle Conservation Center – particularly Lisa DeLucia, Dick O’Brien, Steve Fuet and Annie Simpson-DeRose, for working so hard to meet our needs and helping to make the course a great success!

Congratulations to the 50 newly Accredited Organic Land Care Professionals who passed the examination during the Massachusetts Organic Land Care Course! We’re looking forward to a great year ahead.

For more information about the NOFA Organic Land Care Program, including its upcoming NOFA Organic Lawn & Turf Courses, visit www.organiclandcare.net or call Kathy Litchfield at (978) 724-0108 in Massachusetts or Bill Duasing at (203) 888-5146 in Connecticut.

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND ENVIRONMENT

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(617) 636-3777, nutrition.tufts.edu, nutritionadmissions@tufts.edu

– USA, PO Box 640, Pittsboro, NC 27312,

2003, Rural Advancement Foundation International

by Michael Sligh and Carolyn Christman

Market

Prospects, and Challenges of a Changing Organic

Who Owns Organic? The Global Status,

s

Who Owns Organic? The Global Status,

s

46

review by Jack Kittredge

Making a connection between trees & people

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Consolidation is even more advanced on the processing and distributing side of the business. In 10 years Hain, founded in 1993, grew into the largest processor of organic foods in the world with sales of $400 million a year. Earth’s Best has a 71% market share of organic baby food brands. In Canada, Stake Technologies produces organic corn and soy, supplies soy milk concentrate to the US, and supplies food for poultry producers throughout North America. It then processes, packages, and sells poultry as the only major supplier of organic chicken in Canada. United Natural Foods and Tree of Life are the only two national distributors of organic foods in the US, and handle about 80% of the market. The big winners in the current organic market are frozen foods, ready meals, baby food, baked goods and cereals, and dairy products. These are growing at 36% or more annually, compared to about 8.4% for produce.

Once we are familiar with the broad outline of the organic market, this report takes a look at some of the challenges facing the agricultural sector was by then a mirror image of U.S. farming economy; to awaken environmentalists to the benefits of organic methods; and to link the organic label with other production process identifiers such as fair trade, renewable energy use, and local sourcing to expand the green marketplace beyond any attempt to undermine it via “green-washing” – are all laudable and on target. How these can be achieved is the challenge it leaves to us.


The paradox of organic farming in California, according to Guthman, is that despite its beginnings in movements for food purity and environmentalism, it ultimately has come to replicate what it set out to oppose – industrial agriculture. How this came to be is the topic of this careful study of California agriculture.

She traces the roots of organic farming in the Golden State back to the early 1970’s with its counter-cultural movements and back-to-the-landers. Although initially fueled by these hippies and ideologues looking for a cleaner way of life, during the ten years between 1987 and 1997 (when Guthman began her study) organic acreage in California grew more than tenfold. This was the period of demand-driven growth when conventional farmers, with no commitment to organic methods, converted because of attractive organic market conditions – high prices and contracts offered by processors.

Thus, while the state’s median organic farm size as late as 1997 was 5 acres grossing $8,000, in fact the sector was by then a mirror image of U.S. farming generally – highly concentrated with over half of organic production coming from 2% of the farms. Attempts to weaken standards as large processors look for cheaper supply and realize they have the market and political clout to get their way. They also show their concern for the way the USDA has undercut independent certifiers (the MCI case merits half a page). And they are clearly worried about the growing threat of genetically modified crops contaminating organic ones.

The report’s conclusions and recommendations -- to develop international standards beyond the ability of large companies and governments to change; to protect a price premium to farmers and fair treatment of farm workers; to expand support for farmers willing to transition into organic; to educate consumers about the importance of a strong local farm economy; to awaken environmentalists to the benefits of organic methods; and to link the organic label with other production process identifiers such as fair trade, renewable energy use, and local sourcing to expand the green marketplace beyond any attempt to undermine it via “green-washing” – are all laudable and on target. How these can be achieved is the challenge it leaves to us.

This report is an attempt to get a snapshot of what is happening in the rapidly changing global organic marketplace. The numbers are impressive: 23 million hectares (a hectare is 10,000 square meters or about 2.5 acres) are in organic production globally. Roughly half of that is used for grazing, not cropping. The continent with the most organic land is Australia, with 10.5 million hectares, or 2.3% of its agricultural land. The continent with the highest percentage of organic farmland is Europe, with about 3% of agricultural land allocated to organic production. The global market for organic foods was about $26 billion in 2001. About 80% of this was in Europe and North America with Japan a distant third.

In many ways the organic marketplace is still rapidly evolving. National governments vary widely in the support they give organic agriculture; certification systems, standards, and certifiers vary widely; organic price premiums fluctuate by crop, time of year, locality and even type of retail outlet. Although organic farming developed in a highly competitive marketplace of many small producers and many small buyers, consolidation is already taking place. In California now 27 growers represent over 50% of organic sales in the state.

Although organic farming developed in a highly competitive marketplace of many small producers and many small buyers, consolidation is already taking place. In California now 27 growers represent over 50% of organic sales in the state.
TABLE 1. GROWTH IN CALIFORNIA'S ORGANIC SECTOR, FOR YEARS AVAILABLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>CCOF</th>
<th>CDAF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Growers</td>
<td>No. of Acres</td>
<td>Average No. of Growers per Acre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>4,964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>7,268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>13,938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>22,666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>36,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>43,870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>52,113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>49,121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>30,409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>54,604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>58,468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>648</td>
<td>70,213</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Notes: CCOF data represent only certified acegrowers and growers; up to 100 percent more are pending certification at certain times.

After 1990, CCOF figures include small amounts of out-of-state acreage.

After 1990, significant amounts of CCOF acreage were pasture or fallow (around fifteen thousand per year), and many wine grape growers certified but did not register (which was technically illegal). CCOF acreage exceeds CDAF acreage because of these and other discrepancies in reporting (see Klonsky and Tourte 1995 and 1998 for other caveats on the data).

1 This figure comes from the original Rodale certification program. The CCOF archives made available to me had no membership lists prior to 1986.

agricultural use has discouraged practices like fallowing it for a year or rotating it into lower value but soil-preserving crops.

This high cost of land has bedeviled efforts to improve soil or rely on natural cycles for pest control. Instead, the fastest solution is always chosen (usually expensive inputs) so the land can be quickly returned to production. During the years before the adoption of the national ‘3 years out of synthetics’ rule, organic growers would rotate their land through a year or two of conventional management to deal with fertility and pest problems before returning it to organic production.

Guthman’s study is part history, part anecdote, part economic analysis and part sociology. Those interested in the growth and evolution of organic farming in its most favored location would do well to read it. They will come away with a deeper understanding of this movement which became an industry, and the somewhat paradoxical twists and turns it took along the way.

Edible Forest Gardens

Volume One: Ecological Vision & Theory for Temperate Climate Permaculture

dave Jacke with Eric Toensmeier 2005, Chelsea Green Publishing

P.O. Box 428, White River Junction, VT 05001 (800) 639-4099

365 pages, hardback

$75.00

review by Jack Kittredge

David Jacke and Eric Toensmeier have been regulars at NOFA conferences, sharing their permaculture vision for many years. Now, at last, their long awaited magnum opus is out! This is volume one of a two volume work. Expect a review of the second volume next issue.

A mixed forest is the natural ecological state for most of the eastern United States. Although there is still a good deal of controversy about the number of Native Americans living here before Columbus, it is well accepted that they used slash and burn methods to clear forest patches for corn, beans and squash, and to increase the production of nuts, berries, herbs and fodder for wildlife. Constant rotation of these patches kept the forest renewed and the soils refreshed.

Between 1800 and 1800, however, 80% of the forest east of the Appalachian Mountains was cut.
It is a good system and has produced quite a readable little handbook.

The chapters are user friendly, including fact sheets and resource listings. At the end it is very helpful to appendices on recommended seed varieties, internet marketing, helpful books and websites, a career path, and a listing of the many farmers interviewed for the book, along with a short description of their operations.

The Wisdom of Small Farms and Local Food: Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic and Sustainable Agriculture by John E. Carroll, 2005, University of New Hampshire Durham, NH 03824 141 pages, paperback

review by Jack Kittredge

This book is a dedicated to the practitioners of the conservationist Aldo Leopold (and the agrarian ethic. Carroll believes that Leopold's most enduring legacy is the land ethic he developed and wrote of late in his life. Those conversant with Wendell Berry will find familiar ground here – imposing a limit to what we can do to nature not because it is right but because we must. If we do not, nature will be impoverished and so, ultimately, will we be as well. Carroll sees sustainable agriculture, based as it is fundamentally on the health of the ecosystem and the humans connected to it, as heir to Leopold's land ethic.

The bulk of this book involves a look at four land grant universities – Wisconsin, Iowa, Maine and Vermont – in order to assess how well their conservationist Aldo Leopold (and the agrarian ethic. Carroll finds that they do, indeed, uphold Leopold's ethic. The author traces the history and compares them to the core values of Leopold's land ethic.

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On the face of it, it does not look good for the scenario just mentioned above. JHK in his analyses of the alternative fuels is not optimistic. It is true that none of the alternatives are ready to step in to it. That method is the Fischer-Tropsch used by Germany in World War II to keep its air and mechanized forces moving even when they had no access to petroleum. It was also used by South Africa during the old regime. We should note that the apartheid regime did not end because cars could not get fuel.

Keeping in mind, this is a man who does not think the suburbs have always been that crude was always cheaper to get and easier to crack. If that is changing forever and every apartment will become uninhabitable. What will happen when the gas pipelines are repurposed and pilot lights don’t automatically repressurized and pilot lights don’t automatically get and easier to crack. If that is changing forever and every apartment will become uninhabitable. What will happen when the gas pipelines are repurposed and pilot lights don’t automatically repressurized and pilot lights don’t automatically.

So what is the big disaster he is talking about? The term that has become popular is “peak oil.” What peak oil means is that sometime soon, if it hasn’t already happened, we shall have extracted half of all the oil that was ever created. We are at that point at the “peak” of production on a bell curve. It does not take a genius to understand the implication of these facts. In a world where the majority of Americans want to live in the burbs and commute far away and the Chinese worker thinks of “The Great Leap Forward” no longer in Maoist terms, but rather as four cylinders of bliss, something has got to give.

But that is not all, as the sub title of converging catastrophes evidences. JHK treats a lot: the economy, disease, the environment as well as peak oil. As to the general theme of peak oil, it is, in and of itself, not controversial. Only a few, marginalized folks believe there is an unlimited amount of Texas Tea. Even the people who disagree with peak happening now, don’t argue that it is more than a few decades away. So where is the controversy?

The nature of the controversy is what will life be like when we wake up to the fact that peak oil has arrived. Will it be 1973 all over again with long lines at gas stations? Will suburban McMansions go for a fraction of original cost as people try desperately to get closer to a more survivable venue? JHK does not shy away from the questions and he is unequivocal that it will not be easy. The range of possibilities goes from a dieoff of a majority of our species to a very local, agriculturally based existence. His focus on the return to a more local mode of existence leads him to compliment NOFA for, among other things, preserving traditional knowledge.

Though JHK is known for his criticism of Suburbia, his stark representation of an urban aspect of the coming crisis says it all:

“What will happen to the water pipes in a sixty story residential building in Chicago if the regional natural gas pipeline goes down in February for six hours? What will happen is that the pipes will burst and every apartment will become uninhabitable. What will happen when the gas pipelines are repurposed and pilot lights don’t automatically repressurized and pilot lights don’t automatically restart in some buildings? It is a recipe for gas explosions.”

Keep in mind, this is a man who does not think the burbs have a future. The future he posits will not be a one time event while we just do the workarounds. Energy shortages will be the norm because we are short of energy.

So, will it really work out that way? Y2K got our paranoid juices flowing and then fizzled. Is this just another scare. Maybe, maybe not.

There really was a y2k emergency. Fortunately, the wakeup call came soon enough and there were sufficient resources to make the New Years Eve transition uneventful. Have we received the wakeup call in time and are the resources there to avoid the long emergency? To paraphrase a saying au courant during the Viet Nam war, “What if they gave a Long Emergency and nobody noticed.” By that I mean, yes, constant price increases in fuel and related commodities, but not so steep that they destroy the economy. Tight fuel supplies, but no gas lines a la 1973.
Calendar

Saturday, March 4: Workshop on traditional pickling (lacto-fermentation) with Seth Travis of the SauerKraut Cellar in Great Barrington, MA for more info: seedpotato@yahoo.com or 781-794-4358

Thursday, March 23: Community Tree Conference, Vermont, MA for more info: (413) 545-0895 or www.UMassGreenInfo.org

Monday, April 3: Workshop on Growing Organic Apples with John Bernis of Hawthins Farm, Concord, MA, WORKSHOP IS FULL

Tuesday, April 4: Workshop on Climate Change and Agriculture: Promoting Practical and Profitable Responses, Windsor, CT for more info: Vern Grabinger (vernon.grabinger@farm.edu) or to register: farm.edu/sustainableagriculture/climatechange.html

Saturday, April 15: Workshop on Waste Vegetable Oil Car Conversion by the Green Grease Monkeys in Jamaica Plain, MA for more info: seedpotato@yahoo.com or 781-794-4358

Saturday, April 15: Get Your Growing Season Off to a Good Start workshop at Many Hands Organic Farm, Barre, MA, for more info: www.mhof.net/farm@mhof.net or 978-355-2853

Saturday, April 22: Workshop on Making Biodiesel with the Green Grease Monkeys in Hudson, MA for more info: seedpotato@yahoo.com or 781-794-4358

Saturday, April 29: Workshop on Basic Carpentry at the Heartwood Institute, Washington, MA for more info: seedpotato@yahoo.com or 781-794-4358

Saturday, May 6: Workshop on the Basics of Organic Gardening with Frank Albani, Jr. at the Soule Homestead, Medfield, MA for more info: seedpotato@yahoo.com or 781-794-4358

Saturday, May 13: Workshop on Small Scale Organic Dairying with Mark Fellows at Chase Hill Farm, Warren, MA for more info: seedpotato@yahoo.com or 781-794-4358

Saturday, May 20: Workshop titled: ‘The Game of Logging for Landowners’ at NESFI, Belchertown, MA for more info: seedpotato@yahoo.com or 781-794-4358

Saturday, June 3: Workshop on Cheddar Cheese Making at Upingil Farm, Gill, MA for more info: seedpotato@yahoo.com or 781-794-4358

Saturday, June 3: Herb Fest 2006, Coventry, CT, for more info: 860-742-8239 or www.topmostherbfarm.com

Saturday, June 10: Bread baking workshop with Paul Bantle, The Pfeiffer Center, Chestnut Ridge, NY for more info: www.pfeiffercenter.org or 645-352-5020

Saturday, June 10: A Sustainability Living Tour at two sustainable homesteads/farms in Ashfield, MA, for more info: seedpotato@yahoo.com or 781-794-4358

Saturday, June 24: Workshop on Growing Organic Strawberries with Mike Raymond at Land’s Sake, Weston, MA, for more info: seedpotato@yahoo.com or 781-794-4358

Saturday, July 8: Foraging for Wild Edibles with Russ Cohen at Hampshire College, Amherst, MA, for more info: seedpotato@yahoo.com or 781-794-4358

Saturday, July 15: Workshop on Using Draft Horses with Dale Perkins at Overlook Farm, Rutland, MA, for more info: seedpotato@yahoo.com or 781-794-4358

Saturday, July 22: Workshop on Free Range Chickens for Eggs and Meat with Jack and Dan Kittredge and Julie Rawson at Many Hands Organic Farm, Barre, MA, for more info: seedpotato@yahoo.com or 781-794-4358

Saturday, July 29 & Sunday, July 30: Workshop on Strawbale Construction with Deva Racusen in Greenfield, MA, for more info: seedpotato@yahoo.com or 781-794-4358

Thursday, August 10 – Friday, August 11: NOFA Summer Pre-Conference on Organic Food and Farming Education, Amherst, MA. For more info: 978-355-2853 or www.nofamass.org

Friday, August 11 – Saturday, August 13: NOFA Summer Conference, Amherst, MA, for more info: 978-355-2853 or www.nofamass.org

Saturday, September 30: Preserving the Harvest workshop at Many Hands Organic Farm, Barre, MA, for more info: www.mhof.net/farm@mhof.net or 978-355-2853

Saturday, October 28: Workshop on Teaching for Change, Farming for Profit with Deb Habib at Bucky Barus at Seeds of Solidarity Farm, Orange, MA, for more info: seedpotato@yahoo.com or 781-794-4358

Sunday, October 29: Garlic workshop at Many Hands Organic Farm, Barre, MA, for more info: www.mhof.net/farm@mhof.net or 978-355-2853

New Hampshire: Individual: $30, Student: $23, Family: $40, Sponsor: $100, Basic $20* Contact: Elizabeth Obelenus, 4 Park St., Suite 208, Concord, NH 03301, (603) 224-5022, nofanh@innvei.com


New York: Student/Senior/Limited Income $15, Individual $30, Family/Farm/Nonprofit Organization $40, Business/Patron $100. Add $10 to include subscription to The Natural Farmer. Contact: Mayra Richter, NOFA-NY, P O Box 180, Cobleskill, NY 12043, Phone (607) 625-6632, Fax: (607) 625-2260, email: office@nofanj.org www.nofanj.org

Rhode Island: Student/Senior: $20, Individual: $25, Family $35, Business $50 Contact: Membership, NOFA RI, 51 Edwards Lane, Charlestown, RI 02813 (401) 755-7818, fritzvohr1@hotmail.com

Vermont: Individual $30, Farm/Family $40, Business $50, Sponsor $100, Student $25, Low Income $15* Contact: NOFA-VT, P O Box 697, Richmond, VT 05477, (802) 434-4122, info@nofavt.org

*does not include a subscription to The Natural Farmer
The extent of takeover by large food companies of the organic industry. This issue contains news, features and articles about organic growing in the Northeast plus a Special Supplement on

Who Owns Organic?