Vermont Governor Shumlin signs GMO Food Labeling Bill

News Notes compiled by Jack Kittredge

On May 8, 2014, upon governor Peter Shumlin’s signature, Vermont became the first state to require GMO labeling of food after a fixed date (July 1, 2016). Connecticut and Maine have also passed state laws calling for labeling, but both laws included a “trigger” which would implement the law only after a number of other states also passed such laws. Vermont is going it alone and fully expects either the Grocery Manufacturers Association or Monsanto or both to sue the state, calling the law unconstitutional.

The law included the establishment of a fund to help the small state defend it if necessary. Individuals wishing to contribute to the fund can do so at http://www.foodfightfundvt.org/.

source: Burlington Free Press, May 8, 2014

Leahy and DeFazio Protest NOP Sunset Change

Senator Patrick Leahy (D. VT) and Congressman Peter DeFazio (D. OR), the principal authors of the 1990 Organic Foods Production Act that created the National Organic Program within the USDA, have written Agriculture Secretary Thomas Vilsack protesting the department’s new interpretation of the “sunset” provision.

According to their letter, the law: “establishes the overall principle that in order for any organic product to be labeled as ‘organic’, it must be ‘produced and handled without the use of synthetic chemicals.’ In recognition that there may be circumstances where a synthetic chemical is needed, and no non-synthetic material is available to address the need, the law also establishes a very thorough review process whereby certain synthetic chemicals could be permitted for use in organic products under a temporary exemption to the synthetic prohibition but would sunset after 5 years…” In addition to establishing a very high hurdle for allowing the short-term (5-year) exemption to the synthetic chemical prohibition, the law also establishes a sunset process under Section 2118(e) whereby all materials on the National List become invalid unless the material is reviewed under the same statutory review procedures within 5 years of its previous adoption, and renewed by the Secretary of Agriculture. As with the initial listing, two-thirds of the full Board must vote in favor of that recommendation for it to be valid. This long-standing interpretation of this crucial aspect of OFPA is not only in keeping with the intent in writing OFPA, but is also in keeping with the plain reading of the statute.

“The therefore it was with great concern,” they continue, “that we learned about a policy change implemented by your agency this past September which turns the sunset policy of OFPA on its head, to create a presumption that all synthetic materials on the National List will be automatically renewed at the 5-year sunset mark, and to establish a high hurdle (two-thirds vote) to remove the material from the list. This is a complete reversal of the statutory and long-standing policy on the burden of proof that has required a two-thirds majority vote in order to re-new the material on the National List. Further, the policy change relegates the sunset review to a Subcommittee, and imposes major roadblocks to the review of the material by the full NOP as part of the sunset process. The letter concludes: “The OFPA is one of our proudest legislative accomplishments and we are extremely concerned by this significant and unwarranted policy change. It is counter to the key principals of public involvement and oversight in the organic certification process as well as adhering to the highest standards possible for organic food production. Thank you for your consideration of our views. We look forward to hearing from you soon.”

source: Letter to Secretary Vilsack, April 24, 2014

NOSB Bans Streptomycin, Final Antibiotic Used in Organic Apple and Pear Production

Tetracycline was banned for use in organic apple and pear orchards last year and now, with the National Organic Standards Board’s (NOSB) latest vote to ban streptomycin at the end of 2014, all uses of antibiotics in organic food production have been completely eliminated.

source: Center for Food Safety press release, May 15, 2014

Letters to the Editor

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NOFA Holds 40th Summer Confab
Report on TNF Survey Results
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Oregon Vote (continued from pg B-24)

sugar beets.

“But sugar beets grown here are all GMO seed,” he explains, “and are essentially contaminated for the world’s non-GMO international markets where local farmers are trying to protect their vegetable crops of Swiss chard and table beets from being contaminated by these GMO sugar beet crops.”

A similar measure passed in nearby Josephine County, but may not be enforceable because it was put on the ballot after Oregon, in October, passed a bill naming the state as regulator of seed and pre-empting local seed ordinances. Because Jackson County had a measure already on the ballot, it was exempted from that pre-emption.

source: Reader Supported News, May 20, 2014
The Natural Farmer Needs You!

The Natural Farmer is a quarterly membership journal of the Northeast Organic Farming Association. You may join NOFA through one of the seven state chapters linked at www.nofa.org. We plan a year in advance so those who want to write on a topic can have a lot of lead time. The next 3 issues will be:

- **Fall 2014:** Farming as Therapy
- **Winter 2014-15:** Grazing
- **Spring 2015:** The True Cost of Food

If you can help us on any of these topics, or have ideas for new ones, please get in touch. We need your help! The deadline for the issues are:
- Spring - January 31
- Summer - April 30
- Fall - July 31
- Winter - October 31

Advertisers and Sponsors see rate and deadline information at www.nofa.org. Check the menu bar under “Publications.”

Moving? The Natural Farmer will not be forwarded by the post office, so those who subscribe directly should send address changes to us. Most readers, however, get this as a NOFA member benefit and should send address updates to your local NOFA chapter.

Archived issues from Summer 1999 through Fall 2005 are available at http://www.library.umass.edu/spcoll/digital/tnf/. More recent issues are downloadable (starting 3 months after paper publication) at www.nofa.org as pdf files.

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978-355-2853, fax: (978) 355-4046
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ISSN 1077-2294
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Dear Jack,

Here is the NOFA survey. I must admit my shock at the question of if The Natural Farmer should remain a NOFA membership benefit. Hopefully this isn’t too serious. Maybe you’re used to this kind of thing? Perhaps the Interstate Council is considering replacing The Natural Farmer with something better? This would be very difficult since The Natural Farmer seems the best tool for furthering the goals of NOFA. This obviously includes the bread educational impact of the paper, but possible more importantly is its ability to provide a means of communicating between the far-flung NOFA membership, as well as from and to the various NOFA boards of directors. The Natural Farmer is also the most tangible part of NOFA membership and its loss would certainly make for unhappy members.

The Natural Farmer is a critically important source of information for farmers and gardeners in our region. Just recently the issue on the system of rice intensification caused much conversation and re-evaluation of growing techniques. No other publication or information source caused such a shared conversation among our growers. The Natural Farmer is the one publication that everybody reads! Then there is the non-toxic newsprint format. In a world of noxious electronic communication and famous glossy magazines it is a pleasure to be able to read The Natural Farmer with a clear mind. It is obvious that much care has gone into this publication.

Thanks you, Jack! – Bryan O’Hara

Dear Bryan,

Thanks so much for your kind words! The support of yourself and the many other people who answered the survey with similar strong encouragement for the paper in its current format has been very warming to Julie and me.

Many people probably don’t know how The Natural Farmer reaches them. Historically, a small number of people subscribe directly for $15 a year, but mostly NOFA chapters have included it as a free benefit of membership in NOFA. Each chapter pays $7 a year of their member’s dues for each subscription to the paper, which Julie and I edit, publish, and mail quarterly. When NOFA was growing and the Internet was young, this was seen as a bargain. Especially so since we developed an advertising and sponsorship program that enabled us to add many pages of color and more than double our total page count. Currently about half the total cost of the paper is borne by advertisers.

But as chapter newsletters went digital and electronic, as overall NOFA membership peaked and actually declined, and as finances became tougher for chapters, some states began to skip the subscriptions for low-income and “basic” members and our publication numbers declined somewhat.

Anyone familiar with newsprint publications like this one knows that a major part of the cost of such a publication is making the plates, setting up the press, and aligning all the aspects of printing. When the printer hits the “on” switch the whole press run is done in a few minutes. Thus a high press count is crucial to keeping the individual copy cost down. When the NOFA subscription numbers began to decline, we started losing money. Where once we had been turning over $2500 per year in excess earnings back to the Interstate Council to fund policy and other work, we had to stop. Then we began to go into the red on issues and had to cut our pages and such features as the NOFA Exchange, Calendar, and NOFA Contact People.

These recent economies have brought us back into solvency, but not all chapters are sure they want to continue to support the paper for $7 per every member per year. New Jersey has dropped it as a member benefit, and several states do not provide it for low-income or “basic” members. Thus the survey to see how important it is to members. As I write this we have 408 responses in hand, mostly very supportive of The Natural Farmer and wanting it to continue in the paper format. But that is less than 10% of the readership of about 5000, so it can be argued that the sample is unrepresentative.

By the time this issue is mailed, the Council will be evaluating the survey results and debating what happens to The Natural Farmer. (A summary of the results is posted in this issue of the paper if you are curious about them.) Anyone interested is welcome to provide input to his or her chapter – what you like, what you don’t like, how it could be done better, whether it should be done at all. We would like this decision to be as widely representative as possible.

Again, thanks for your support! – Jack Kittredge
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NOFA IC Names Sanne Kure-Jensen New Administrator and Bookkeeper

The NOFA Interstate Council (NOFA IC) has hired Sanne Kure-Jensen of Portsmouth, RI as its Administrator and Bookkeeper, replacing long time Coordinator Bill Duesing of CT NOFA and Bookkeeper Marion Griswold of Massachusetts. Sanne will come on board officially on July 1. In the next issue we will thank Bill and Marion for their devoted service.

“As the new Administrator and Bookkeeper, Kure-Jensen will be responsible for providing administrative support, coordinating the Interstate Council’s annual member retreat as well as managing the memberships, books and budget,” said Treasurer Jack Mastriani of New Hampshire.

The Interstate Council is a seven-member coalition of state chapters representing farmers, gardeners and consumers. Council President, Enid Wonnacott of Massachusetts for six years of dedicated service as the Bookkeeper and Bill Duesing of Connecticut for over thirty years of dedication to NOFA. Bill helped found the Connecticut NOFA chapter in 1982, later became its Executive Director and was the longtime President of the Interstate Council. Both will be retiring this summer.

NOFA is a growing regional coalition representing over 5,500 farmers, farm workers, apprentices, gardeners, chefs and consumer members. NOFA is a regional non-profit organization that regionally and nationally supports organic food growers, oversees the annual NOFA Summer Conference, and produces “The Natural Farmer” a quarterly newspaper with features on organic farming techniques, certification issues, organic market conditions and relevant policy and environmental developments. The Interstate Council works with archivist Robert Cox at the University of Massachusetts to chronicle the history of the organic food movement in the northeast.

An experienced agricultural writer, photographer and successful grant writer, Kure-Jensen is also the Administrator of NOFA’s Rhode Island chapter. She is a graduate of the University of Connecticut, and was co-founder of The Natural Farmer’s New England and New York divisions.

The Interstate Council also advocates for policies that regionally and nationally support organic growers, oversees the annual NOFA Summer Conference, and produces “The Natural Farmer” a quarterly newspaper with features on organic farming techniques, certification issues, organic market conditions and relevant policy and environmental developments. The Interstate Council works with archivist Robert Cox at the University of Massachusetts to chronicle the history of the organic food movement in the northeast.

The NOFA Interstate Council thanks Marion Griswold of Massachusetts for six years of dedicated service as the Bookkeeper and Bill Duesing of Connecticut for over thirty years of dedication to NOFA. Bill helped found the Connecticut NOFA chapter in 1982, later became its Executive Director and was the longtime President of the Interstate Council. Both will be retiring this summer.

NOFA is a growing regional coalition representing over 5,500 farmers, farm workers, apprentices, gardeners, chefs and consumer members. For more information on NOFA Interstate Council, see www.nofa.org or email sannek-jj@cox.net.

Capitol One to Terminate Credit Card Program Which Benefited NOFA

For almost four years, members have been using their NOFA branded credit card to buy seeds and soil amendments, feed and groceries, gas, books and a whole lot more. A percentage of each purchase was sent to the NOFA Interstate Council as quarterly rewards along with $50 for the first use of each card. Starting with our first rewards check in late 2010 for $198.84, the rewards added up. Over the last four years we have received over $20,000 for NOFA’s Interstate policy work.

Unfortunately, Capital One is ending the program. They won’t issue any more NOFA branded credit cards. However, we will continue to receive rewards for card use through September 30, 2014.

If you have a NOFA card, Capitol One will contact you about the conversion of the NOFA card to a Capital One branded one.

Many thanks to the nearly 90 members who participated in this program. Your rewards have significantly supported Steve Gilman’s position as NOFA Policy Coordinator. Steve works closely with the Interstate Council to represent NOFA’s interests on the national scene and with the NOFA chapter policy representatives to build capacity and share strategies at the state level.

The Interstate Council welcomes your future support of our critical policy work in the interests of organic farmers and consumers, and of the Northeast region as a whole. Contact President Enid Wonnacott through www.NOFAVT.org, or new IC Administrator Sanne Kure-Jensen through www.NOFA.org with your support.
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Produced by New Hope Natural Media, a division of Penton.
Anne Rufflin has been named Executive Director of NOFA-NY. Anne is a lifelong resident of Upstate New York with a genuine passion for local organic and sustainable farming, gardening and eating! Anne joined NOFA-NY on April 21st and comes with many years of experience in executive leadership and not for profit administration.

While much of her professional career has been centered in not-for-profit health care, she has lived on several small farms over the years where she has, in her “spare time” tried her hand at a variety of agricultural endeavors such as raising goats, chickens, and ducks, growing and harvesting hay, harvesting wild berries and apples, and making maple syrup. Today she lives in the beautiful Finger Lakes region with her husband, Chris, several horses and two beloved dogs. When she is not working she enjoys riding her horses and experimenting with new varieties and organic growing techniques in her flower, vegetable, and fruit gardens.

Anne has a BS degree in Management from SUNY-Binghamton and a Masters in Organizational Management from the University of Phoenix.

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NOFA Celebrates 40th Summer Conference
August 8-10, Amherst, MA

by Nicole Belanger, with Ben Grosscup

The 2014 Summer Conference will feature four workshop sessions per day Saturday and Sunday rather than the three sessions of years past. This gives conference goers the same number of workshops in two days as they got in three days last year.

On Friday, August 8, instead of offering two breakout sessions, there will be four intensive pre-conference seminars. This year’s keynote speaker – soil scientist Elaine Ingham – will lead a full-day seminar from 9:00 am to 3:30 pm. The title of this intensive is “Changing Dirt into Soil”.

There will be three half-day pre-conference intensives on Friday from 2:00pm to 5:30pm. Topics include Bioregional Herbalism, Resilient Urban Ecosystems, and Healing Autoimmunity.

Bioregional Herbalism: Stocking the Home Apothecary with Locally Abundant Herbs

Jade Alicandro Mace majored in Plant Ecology in college and first studied herbalism by volunteering on organic herb farms in South and Central America. Her seminar will teach effective folk methods of medicine-making easily done in the home kitchen. Using plants local to the northeast, Alicandro Mace will emphasize the use of medicinal herbs, including “identification and harvest guidelines, best medicinal preparations, and how to incorporate their use into our daily lives.” The session will cover tinctures, infused oils, syrups, oxymels, cordials, salves, vinegars, honeys, elixirs, water-based and topical preparations, and more. Jade considers herself a Biodynamic practitioner, based in Vermont and Massachusetts, food justice activist, and Certified GAPS Practitioner who has been practicing Homeopathy for 25 years. In her practice, based in Vermont and Massachusetts, food is medicine. Other than skin, the gut is the organ most in contact with toxins in our environment. She works with all clients to heal their gut, and to support their whole health and well-being. Her practice is based on the philosophy of healing from the inside out, and she offers support and healing for a wide range of conditions, including chronic fatigue, autoimmune disease, food sensitivities, and more.

Healing Autoimmunity with Naturopathic Medicine

Chris Decker is a licensed Naturopathic Physician and Certified GAPS Practitioner who has been practicing Homeopathy for 25 years. In her practice, based in Vermont and Massachusetts, food is medicine. Other than skin, the gut is the organ most in contact with toxins in our environment. She works with all clients to heal their gut, and to support their whole health and well-being. Her practice is based on the philosophy of healing from the inside out, and she offers support and healing for a wide range of conditions, including chronic fatigue, autoimmune disease, food sensitivities, and more.

Tools for Resilient Urban Ecosystems

At Scott Kellogg’s The Radix Ecological Sustainability Center in Albany, NY, this year they took out 10 dump trucks of asphalt and are supplying members of their CSE (Community Supported Environmental Education Center) with weekly shares of crops like city-grown greens, water cress, oyster mushrooms, eggs, and even rabbit (by special request). Prior to this work he began in Albany in 2009, Kellogg worked for nine years in Austin, TX with the Rhizome Collective. Participants in Kellogg’s seminar will look at cities as ecosystems. What can be done to improve their functioning while meeting the needs of their residents? Kellogg will share many of the tools in his toolkit, including worm composting, rainfall collection, and aquaponics to name just a few.

Friday Night Sing Along

Following the pre-conferences, there will also be a sing-along event on Friday evening starting at 7:30pm called “Singing for Food and Freedom: Carrying on the Legacy of Pete Seeger.” Confirmed Song Leaders include Sarah Stockwell-Arthen and Ben Grosscup. Contact Ben at ben.grosscup@nofa-mass.org with ideas for songs.

Soil Carbon, Climate & other Conference Tracks

With 150+ adult workshops to choose from on Saturday and Sunday, workshop tracks are a helpful way to plan your conference experience.

New this year is the Soil Carbon and Climate Track, a series of eight workshops on methods and monitoring of successful carbon sequestration in the soil. Presenters will include Jim Laurie (Biodiversity for a Livable Climate), Seth Itzkau (Africa Center for Holistic Management in Zimbabwe), and Peter Donovan (founder of the Soil Carbon Challenge).

Some of the tracks this year are being organized in collaboration with partner groups. The Neighbor Food Co-op Association is co-sponsoring the Co-op Track, four sessions on how the cooperative business model can be used to advance local organic food systems. The American Society of Dowsers, is co-sponsoring the Dowsing Track, four sessions highlighting the use of dowsing in agriculture.

Additional workshop tracks include The Draft Horse Track, six sessions about the care of draft animals for use in farm management; and The Permaculture Track, eight sessions on the principles and application of permaculture.

You can read full descriptions for all workshops, by category or by timeslot at www.nofasummerconference.org.

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*Source: IR2 Last 52 Wks ending 3/3/13*
A Family-friendly Event

Consider bringing your whole family to the conference. With special conference tracks for children 5-12 and teens 13-17, young people get to experience educational, age-appropriate, and fun workshops on gardening, farming, nutrition, and ecological sustainability with other youth from all across the Northeast. Childcare is also available for children 2-4.

The experienced staff offers hands-on workshops, crafts, games, opportunities to work with animals, and more.

Accommodations, Opportunities, and Registration

Affordable registration is available with discounted rates for children and teens and additional savings for multiple children from the same family. Accommodations for the budget conscious are also available, including camping and dorms. Rideshares are also available. Early bird pricing is available until July 11th.

The Summer Conference provides a marketplace for 100 vendors who come from all over the US and Canada. Vendors may opt to be inside one of the two main tents or in outside spaces where they bring their own tents. Email or call Bob Minnocci for more details: bob@nofamass.org; 617-236-4893. Please call only before 7pm.

Visit www.nofasummerconference.org to find out more about Farming Education Fund scholarships and opportunities for Work Exchange. Scholarships are first-come, first-served.

40th annual NOFA Summer Conference
August 8-10, 2014
University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA

Soil Carbon and Climate Track at the 2014 NOFA Summer Conference

These eight workshops provide information on farming practices that slow the carbon cycle by increasing the residence period of carbon in soil—providing a strategy for mitigating the climate crisis while producing quality high-yielding crops. They make up a track that runs through all eight of the workshop sessions, in which over 150 workshops for adults will be offered.

- Carbon Farming: Regenerative Agriculture for the Climate with Connor Stedman, Saturday, August 9, 8:00-9:30 am
- Building Deep Rich Soils in New England with Jim Laurie, Saturday, August 9, 10:00-11:30 am
- Grazing for Soil & Carbon with Seth Itzkjan, Saturday, August 9, 1:00-2:30 pm
- Monitoring the Carbon Cycle on your Farm with Peter Donovan, Saturday, August 9, 3:00-4:30 pm
- Harvesting your Cover Crop with Ruminants with Ridge Shinn, Sunday, August 10, 8:00-9:30 am
- Growing Clean Water: Topsoil & Water Security with Abe Collins, Sunday, August 10, 10:00-11:30 am
- Nuts for the Northeast with Keith Morris, Sunday, August 10, 1:00-2:30 pm
- Biological Management for Carbon Sequestration with Dan Kittredge, Sunday, August 10, 3:00-4:30 pm

Get more information about the workshops and register at www.nofasummerconference.org

What are people saying about Dr. Elaine Ingham?

Dr. Elaine Ingham will give a pre-conference intensive seminar, “Changing Dirt into Soil: Specific Approaches for Different Soil Types and Crops” at the NOFA Summer Conference on Friday, August 8, from 9:00am to 5:30pm. Takes place at UMass Amherst in the Campus Center Hadley Room (10th floor). She will also give 3 break-out workshops on Saturday, August 9 as part of the regular conference.

Register by 7/11, Member $70/Non-member $88
- By 8/2: Mem. $75/ N-m. $94 – After 8/2: Mem. $80/N-m. $100. More info at www.nofasummerconference.org

“Learning from Dr. Ingham’s insights into the functioning of the Mother Earth’s Cycle of Life was an ‘Oh my God!’ revelation for me. I first heard Elaine in 2004 and it changed the way I care for the land since. Her clear, scientific education about the ‘soil microherd’ was the elusive missing piece puzzle that allowed me to ride with Mother Earth instead of work at odds to her. Dr. Ingham is a visionary.”

- Lillabeth Wies, Owner, Landscapes by Lillabeth, LLC, Georgetown, MA

“Dr. Ingham teaches how microbiology plays a critical role in ensuring a proper system in the soil so all the soil organisms are in perfect balance. The balance of these organisms will allow our farms and gardens to thrive, because our plants are growing in concert with their soil life. She emphasizes that there are proper methods to create balanced and well-processed compost. By adhering to her composting methods, one can strive for maximum benefits and avoid nutrient lockups or spikes. She also highlights the equally important micronutrients needed for plant growth. Dr. Ingham explains the complexity of soil science in ways that enable practical application.”

- Bleu Grijalva, The New Urban Farmers, Pawtucket, RI

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What are people saying about Dr. Elaine Ingham?

Dr. Elaine Ingham will give a pre-conference intensive seminar, “Changing Dirt into Soil: Specific Approaches for Different Soil Types and Crops” at the NOFA Summer Conference on Friday, August 8, from 9:00am to 5:30pm. Takes place at UMass Amherst in the Campus Center Hadley Room (10th floor). She will also give 3 break-out workshops on Saturday, August 9 as part of the regular conference.

Register by 7/11, Member $70/Non-member $88
- By 8/2: Mem. $75/ N-m. $94 – After 8/2: Mem. $80/N-m. $100. More info at www.nofasummerconference.org

“Learning from Dr. Ingham’s insights into the functioning of the Mother Earth’s Cycle of Life was an ‘Oh my God!’ revelation for me. I first heard Elaine in 2004 and it changed the way I care for the land since. Her clear, scientific education about the ‘soil microherd’ was the elusive missing piece puzzle that allowed me to ride with Mother Earth instead of work at odds to her. Dr. Ingham is a visionary.”

- Lillabeth Wies, Owner, Landscapes by Lillabeth, LLC, Georgetown, MA

“Dr. Ingham teaches how microbiology plays a critical role in ensuring a proper system in the soil so all the soil organisms are in perfect balance. The balance of these organisms will allow our farms and gardens to thrive, because our plants are growing in concert with their soil life. She emphasizes that there are proper methods to create balanced and well-processed compost. By adhering to her composting methods, one can strive for maximum benefits and avoid nutrient lockups or spikes. She also highlights the equally important micronutrients needed for plant growth. Dr. Ingham explains the complexity of soil science in ways that enable practical application.”

- Bleu Grijalva, The New Urban Farmers, Pawtucket, RI
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Scientist Who Warned of Glyphosate Dies

Dr. Andres Carrasco, an Argentine neuroscientist who challenged pesticide regulators to re-examine glyphosate, has died. He was 67 and had been in declining health.

In 2010 Carrasco, principal investigator at his university’s Cellular Biology and Neuroscience Institute, had heard reports of increasing birth defects in farming communities after genetically modified crops were approved for use in Argentina, and so decided to test the impact of glyphosate on frog and chicken embryos in his laboratory. His team’s study, published in the peer-reviewed Chemical Research in Toxicology journal, found that injecting very low doses of glyphosate into embryos can change levels of retinoic acid, causing the same sort of spinal defects that doctors are increasingly registering in communities where farm chemicals are ubiquitous. Retinoic acid, a form of vitamin A, is fundamental for keeping cancers in check and triggering genetic expression, the process by which embryonic cells develop into organs and limbs. “If it’s possible to reproduce this in a laboratory, surely what is happening in the field is much worse,” Carrasco told the AP.

Carrasco’s research was criticized by Argentine authorities, but has become a rallying point for a growing movement of “fumigated people” in Argentina and beyond, who are calling on governments to strictly enforce pesticide spraying limits to reduce human exposure.

source: http://www.miamiherald.com/2014/05/10/4109776/argentine-scientist-who-challenged.html#storylink=cpy

Chinese Ministry: GMOs Harm Health Of Chinese People

Lieutenant General Mi Zhenyu, Vice President of the Academy of Military Science of China,
has published an article titled ‘Must Face Up to the Harm Caused by Imported GM Soybeans to the Health of 1.3 Billion Chinese People’ in the Chinese ‘Science & Technology Abstracts Newspaper’ under the leadership of China’s State Science & Technology Ministry. China is currently the largest importer of Roundup Ready Soybeans from the U.S. and Brazil and the main export market for GM soybean farmers in all GM soybean producing countries. source: Sustainable Pulse, April 30, 2014

Courts Challenge Biotech South of Border
In Brazil the Federal Appeals Court has unanimously decided to annul the decision by Brazil’s Biosecurity Commission (CTNBio), which had allowed the release for cultivation of Liberty Link GM Maize. The ruling is another legal disaster for the biotech industry as it follows the decision taken by a court in the Campeche region of Mexico to ban GM Soybean cultivation to protect the traditional beekeeping of the Mayan people.

Never before has a Judge stated that there is a need for studies on the negative impacts of GMOs in all major biomes in the country. The decision may force Brazilian authorities to reconsider all other commercial releases of GMOs in Brazil. Federal Judge Candido Silva Alfredo Leal Junior read excerpts from his decision for about an hour and a half. In addition to his comments on biomes, the Judge ordered CTNBio to develop standards to enable the general public to have access to documents in the file processed by the Commission.

source: The Ram’s Horn, March-April 2014

Report Slams USDA for Stalling Animal Welfare Regulations in Organic Poultry Production
A Center for Food Safety (CFS) report has
chastised the USDA for stalling poultry animal welfare regulations and hiding behind a faulty economic impact analysis. According to CFS the vast majority of egg and poultry operations would not be financially impacted by increased animal welfare standards, making USDA’s failure to implement regulations suspect.

In response to recommendations put forth by the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), USDA commissioned an economic assessment, which asserts that a handful of large organic egg producers would exit the organic market if USDA requires improved living conditions for poultry. The authors claim that the economic impact on the largest producers—hosping more than 100,000 birds—would be “substantial.”

Yet the assessment overlooks the obvious question: whether facilities this large could ever meet the baseline animal welfare requirements recommended by the NOSB? USDA’s economic assessment acknowledges that the majority of small and medium-sized producers already comply with NOSB’s recommendations. Yet the agency has nonetheless allowed a few large producers to assert unwarranted influence in its decision to take no action.

“One percent of large organic egg and poultry producers are holding 99 percent of the industry hostage by unduly influencing USDA to delay implementation of animal welfare regulations,” said Lisa J. Bunin, Ph.D., organic policy director for Center for Food Safety. “If USDA fails to remedy this situation by adopting timely regulations, consumer confidence in organic will suffer.”

source: Center for Food Safety press release, April 24th, 2014

Rodale: Reversing Climate Change Achievable by Farming Organically
Rodale Institute has released a white paper

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stating that “We could sequester more than 100% of current annual CO2 emissions with a switch to widely available and inexpensive organic management practices…If management of all current cropland shifted to reflect the regenerative model as practiced at the research sites included in the white paper, more than 40% of annual emissions could potentially be captured. If, at the same time, all global pasture was managed to a regenerative model, an additional 71% could be sequestered. Essentially, passing the 100% mark means a drawing down of excess greenhouse gases, resulting in the reversal of the greenhouse effect. Regenerative organic agriculture is comprised of organic practices including (at a minimum): cover crops, residue mulching, composting and crop rotation. Conservation tillage, while not yet widely used in organic systems, is a regenerative organic practice integral to soil-carbon sequestration. Other biological farming systems that use some of these techniques include ecological, progressive, natural, pro-soil, and carbon farming.”

source: April 21, 2014 press release from Rodale Institute

‘Extreme Levels’ of Monsanto’s Roundup Herbicide Found in Soy Plants
A new study led by scientists from the Arctic University of Norway has detected “extreme levels” of Roundup in genetically engineered (GE) soy. The study, coming out in June’s issue of Food Chemistry, looked at 31 different soybean plants on Iowa farms and compared the accumulation of pesticides and herbicides on plants in three categories: GE “Roundup Ready” soy, conventionally produced (not GE) soy, and soy cultivated using organic practices. They found high levels of Roundup on 70 percent of GE soy plants. You may ask: “who says
when Roundup contamination can be considered ‘extreme?’” Monsanto itself. In 1999, the chemical giant defined an ‘extreme level’ of the herbicide as 5.6 milligrams per kilogram of plant weight. The Norwegian scientists found nine milligrams of Roundup per kilogram, on average.

Other research has detected Roundup residues in animals and people. A study led by German researchers and published in January in the Journal Environmental & Analytical Toxicology, found high concentrations of glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup, in the urine of dairy cows and humans.

source: EcoWatch, April 19, 2014

US Food Companies Find Going ‘non-GMO’ No Easy Feat

Eighteen years after GMO crops were introduced to help farmers fight weeds and bugs, they are so pervasive in the supply chain that securing large and reliable supplies of non-GMO ingredients is nearly impossible in some cases. The hurdles are so high that the growing “GMO-free” trend could result in a price spike for consumers, industry experts say. Just ask General Mills.

As one of the world’s largest makers of consumer food products, the Minneapolis-based company has hefty buying power in the marketplace for corn, soy, sugar, oats, and other commodities needed for its packaged food products. But when the company announced last month that its 70-year-old “yellow box” Cheerios would be made free of genetically modified ingredients, the effort capped more than a year spent tracking down ingredients that have undergone no genetic modification. Cheerios is primarily made with oats, for which there are no GMO varieties. But even securing small amounts of non-GMO corn and sugar

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Meat Processing – Working to develop stronger infrastructure for local slaughter and meat processing.
used to sweeten the cereal was a challenge, officials said. General Mills said it spent millions of dollars installing new equipment for processing non-GMO ingredients and setting up distinct transportation and handling facilities to keep non-GMO supplies from mixing with biotech supplies.

“A lot of food manufacturers are looking at switching over to non-GMO. The demand is out there,” said Aaron Skyberg, director of SK Food International, a North Dakota-based bulk ingredient supplier to U.S. and foreign food companies. “But it is a huge learning curve for them.”

The market moves have caught the eye of some investors. One, San Francisco-based Equilibrium Capital Group, is looking at investment opportunities in grain storage, transportation and converting farmland to non-GMO crop production. “There are significant infrastructure issues, but there is real demand,” said Equilibrium principal Rob Hurlbut, a former food industry executive.

source: Reuters Media, Feb 18, 2014

USDA Report: GMO Crops Don’t Increase Yields But Do Increase Herbicide Use

A report issued by the USDA’s Economic Research Service (ERS) says that genetically engineered seeds have not resulted in increased crop yields. In fact, it says, “Yields of herbicide-tolerant or insect-resistant seeds may be occasionally lower than the yields of conventional varieties.” The authors also found that herbicide use for GMO corn has increased from 1.5 pounds per acre in 2001 to over 2 pounds per acre in 2010, presumably because of growing resistance among weeds.

source: Organic and Non-GMO Report, April 2014

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Tim and wife Emily are in partnership with his parents Jon and Lisa at Zweber Farms — home to 120 milk cows, along with dry cows and youngstock near Elko, Minnesota. Tim and Jon share the management of this Century Farm. Tim’s brother Steve and sisters Sarah and Sam also help out when they can.

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TNF Survey Results
by Jack Kittredge

Many NOFA members spent time filling out the survey sent out by Email by the chapters to their members, and reprinted in the last issue of the paper, on the future of The Natural Farmer. I greatly appreciate your time doing that, and would like to report briefly here on the results. If you are interested in looking at all the surveys in their raw form, including the difficult-to-summarize comment section, I have entered them into an easy-to-read Excel spread sheet which I would be happy to Email to anyone curious about the readers and what they like and don’t about the paper. If you would like a copy of the surveys, just Email me at TNF@NOFA.org.

We recorded 408 respondents (of about 5000 who get the paper). Of these, 42% were gardeners, 34% farmers, 11% homesteaders, 9% consumers, and 4% Farm/Ag. Service Providers. Not all respondents receive the TNF. Only 85% do because New Jersey has dropped it and some state chapters do not sign up all their members. Of those who do get the paper, however, 95% read it — a very satisfying number!

Among respondents, 93% were members, and 7% were not. Of those who do not get the paper, 87% would consider joining to get it.

Regarding the importance of the TNF, 47% say it is very important, one of the main reasons they join NOFA, 44% said it is moderately important but they would join NOFA even without it, and 8% say it is not important to their membership.

Connecticut respondents were 14% of the total, Massachusetts had 37%, New Hampshire had 5%, New Jersey had 9%, New York had 19%, Rhode Island had 3%, Vermont had 11%, and “Other State” had 2%. Regarding format, 82% prefer continuing the paper format, while 18% prefer an electronic format.

Thanks again for all your participation and let me know if you would like to peruse the raw survey responses and comments.
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The Cisgenic Hybrid Seed Conundrum

by Donald Sutherland and Jack Kittredge

Cisgenic seed cell fusion is a biotechnological process using mutants or mutations in which the nucleus is removed from a plant cell and replaced by a mutated nucleus from a different plant within the same botanical family. Chemicals and radiation are used in the process to stimulate the mutations. This creates a hybrid plant containing the mitochondrial and chloroplast DNA from one cell and the nuclear DNA from a different one. Cell fusion can also involve protoplast or somatic fusion—meaning the nuclear DNA from two or more plants from the same family are fused so the resulting seed contains DNA from both.

Hybrid seeds were first developed with induced mutagenesis in the early 20th century to possess disease resistance and features to increase yields. Since the 1950s cell fusion hybrid techniques have evolved from random treatment with chemical/electrical/radiation stimulation to a site-direct mutagenesis process targeting specific genes with “marker-assisted breeding”.

This targeted mutation, known as genome editing, uses tools including complex protein structures called “zinc fingers,” or meganucleases, that can selectively insert or silence genes in crop species and induce errors to initiate mutations. This shortens development time for crops by years, compared to working with traditional breeding and open pollinated seed.

According to a 11/21/2013 news report by Business Week, industry experts say over the past five years breeding and biotechnology have improved on prior haphazard methods of cell fusion mutagenesis by using molecular markers and sequenced genomes of crops to site direct crossbreeding, making conventional breeding more like genetic engineering. The article quotes Paul Schickler, president of DuPont’s Pioneer seed unit as saying “There is not a black line between biotechnology and non-biotechnology, it’s a continuum.”

Business Week also cites reports from the National Academy of Sciences, representing the consensus of experts in the field, saying that the risk of creating unintended health effects is greater from mutagenesis than any other technique, including genetic modification. Mutagenesis deletes and rearranges hundreds or thousands of genes randomly, spawning mutations that are less precise than GMOs. The academy has warned that regulating genetically modified crops, while giving a pass to mutant products, isn’t scientifically justified.

In addition to the regulatory-free environment they operate in, the magazine suggests mutant crops are “not scientifically justified.” It's a continuum.”

Several of the large production research seed companies that produce organic seed, “are not talking when asked which of their hybrids will indeed see organic seed production consolidated into the ‘organic’ seed line,” says Liana Hoodes, Specialist in Organic Seed. “IFOAM would like to see crops to site direct mutagenesis in seed production are genetic engineering a form of GM. But many of us in the organic community know that that would seriously compromise the ability of organic farmers to grow commercial crops of several brassica varieties.”

We do know that Monsanto/Seminis are getting.”

These difficulties in getting a GMO to the market, and some have in recent years.” says Piero Lagoda, who heads up the UN program. That’s spurred even more interest in the mutant varieties, he says. In 2013 alone, Lagoda’s program has received requests to help irradiate a record 31 plant species ranging from sugar beets from Poland to potatoes from Kenya.

BASF, the world’s biggest chemical company, developed its Clearfield wheat and other crops through chemical mutagenesis which alters the crops’ DNA by dousing seeds with chemicals such as ethyl methanesulfonate and sodium azide, according to company filings in Canada, reported Bloomberg News in a 11/13/2013 article.

“Their technology is superior for many decades without issue, without concern,” Jonathan Bryant, a BASF vice president was quoted as saying in the Bloomberg news report.

Overall the debate over whether cell fusion and mutagenesis in seed production are genetic engineering has caused confusion and conflicting answers in the organic community. In organic farming transgenic genetic engineering (GE) is banned, but cisgenic seed created by the cell fusion process is permitted under USDA organic regulations. By international organic certification standards, however, established by The International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM) cell fusion is classified as genetic engineering.

“Cell-fusion is a controversial topic,” says John Navazio, Senior Scientist with the Organic Seed Alliance and Washington State Univ. Extension Specialist in Organic Seed. “IFOAM would like to see crops to site direct mutagenesis classified as ‘organic’ products, isn't scientifically justified.”

Several of the large production research seed companies that produce organic seed,” he continues, “are not talking when asked which of their hybrids are produced using cell fusion mediated CMS. By the way, there is also ‘naturally occurring CMS’ which we have used in hybrid carrots, onions, and beets for many years and should not be included in this debate.”

“Our community know that that would seriously compromise the ability of organic farmers to grow commercial crops of several brassica varieties.”

The Natural Farmer
Summer, 2014

A-21
The use of Cytoplasmic Male Sterility (CMS) in creating hybrid seeds.

**Female plant flowers from Line A have a sterile cytoplasm and do not produce pollen and cannot self-pollinate. This CMS characteristic is inherited maternally, therefore, when a CMS female Line A, is crossed with a genetically identical maintainer Line B that produces pollen, all the seed produced retains the CMS trait. The restorer Line R is genetically different from Line A and contains nuclear genes that compensate for the defect in the cytoplasm and restore fertility to the hybrid cross. The first commercial CMS Brassica napus hybrid, Hyola 40, was registered in 1989 by Advanta Seeds. This was quickly followed by the very popular hybrid Hyola 401 in 1991.**

**Political y, in Europe and the US the debate of whether the process of using cell fusion in seed production is genetic engineering comes down to looking at the issue in a product-oriented or process-oriented perspective.**

Klaus-Peter Wilbois is head of the agriculture division at the German office of The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture, FiBL.

“In the private organic farming sector as outlined in the IFOAM standards,” he says, “a process-oriented approach prevails. Therefore the use of genetic engineering lab techniques is not in compliance with principles of organic farming.”

Legally, however, current USDA and EU directives are product-oriented, and if cell fusion is used within the same botanical family it is not GE and those seeds are not judged GMOs.

“For instance,” Wilbois continues, “cell fusion techniques which are used to convey cytoplasmatic male sterility (CMS) in cabbage or chicory crops to produce hybrids are regarded as genetic engineering in the organic sector but would not lead to a GMO in a legal sense, since the crops (Japanese radish as CMS donor) belongs to the same brassica family as cabbages like cauliflower or broccoli. The same is true for sunflower and chicory (both asteraceae).”

Right now, farmers wanting to avoid genetically engineered seed and protect their crop’s organic integrity have no way of knowing if their seeds are cisgenic. If the campaign to ban genetically engineered seeds in organic production, currently being promoted by OCA and organic seed breeders (High Mowing Seeds, Wild Garden Seed, Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Company, Adaptive Seeds, etc), converges with state GMO labeling campaigns, there is going to be a flurry in the open pollinating and natural hybrid seed market. As organic farmers, we need to be ready to offer our thoughts on this to our colleagues, our customers, and our certifiers.

Donald Sutherland and his wife Laura Davis are USDA organic certified farmers in Hopkinton, MA. Donald is a freelance writer and a member of the Northeast Organic Farming Association.
Who will feed China? What does it mean for us?
by Bill Duesing

I started to write this piece last week after reading Tom Philpott’s article in Mother Jones, “Are We Becoming China’s Factory Farm?”

The short story is that China is importing more of our pork because it is cheaper to raise pigs here than it is in China. That is largely because of the low cost of subsidized grain here and the pollution and drought which limit production there.

And as China is moving away from small scale farms and into industrial hog operations, they are also importing nearly a quarter of the US soy crop to process into oil for people and meal for pigs.

So it wasn’t a surprise to see a report this morning about big soy farming organizations from this country and South America meeting recently in China to push for strengthened trade relations so this hemisphere can remain the premier supplier of soy to China. They did however, express concerns for speedy approval there of the new biotech varieties industrial growers favor.

This is not really new. The large US organizations funded by the soy check-off program have had an office in China to promote American soy exports since 1981.

Now soy is our largest export to China, just ahead of trash and scrap.

The same forces that have China buying our pork, and Smithfield, this country’s largest pork producer, are causing joy among dairy farmers.

Bloomberg news reports that “China Milk Thirst Hands U.S. Dairies Record 2014 Profits.” Demand for milk and milk products, driven by rapid growth in exports to China and Mexico, has driven up the price of milk at the farm and puts upward pressure on the prices of most dairy products to consumers.

What we get

Maybe this wouldn’t be so disturbing if we didn’t know about the effects of this long distance, industrial food system.

Industrially produced pork and dairy leave behind lots of manure to pollute our air, land and water. The jobs at these factory farms and processors are often low paid, dangerous and very unpleasant.

The genetically-engineered corn and soy grown in the U.S. to feed animals here and in China leave behind damaged soil, air, water, communities and estuaries after massive applications of anhydrous ammonia, Roundup, neonicotinoid insecticides, atrazine, super phosphate and other ecocides.

In response to strong demand, high prices and subsidized crop insurance, farmers are plowing up millions of acres of prairie and wetland each year to plant more row crops. This is an unmitigated environmental disaster. Stable and perennial bio-diverse ecosystems are replaced by annual, chemical-drenched monocultures. The soil disturbance from plowing and fertilizing releases massive quantities of greenhouse gases. The Environmental Working Groups calls them worse that those from the Keystone XL pipeline.

If yields aren’t so good, crop insurance helps out.

Climate Connections

This is even more disturbing in light of the release of the latest report on climate change impacts and the options for adapting to them. The news that agriculture will be much more affected by changes in the climate has many people very concerned about the future food supply.

China’s efforts to feed its people through buying control of entire global supply chains makes sense, in a way. However, since they have bought into the industrial model, they are dooming themselves and the rest of life on this planet to a more dire future.

The local, ecological alternative

“We wake up before it is too late: Make agriculture truly sustainable now for food security in a changing climate,” is the subtitle of the UN’s Trade and Environment Report 2013. It recommends a rapid and significant shift away from “conventional, monoculture-based industrial production” of food that depends heavily on external inputs such as fertilizer, agro-chemicals, and concentrate feed.

Instead, it says that the goal should be “mosaics of sustainable regenerative production systems that also considerably improve the productivity of small-scale farmers and foster rural development”.

This is what is happening here in Connecticut with a thousand new small farms started between 2007 and 2012. Just look at how many more people are now growing vegetables, producing maple syrup or selling eggs from a cooler by the road.
Whole Foods Market wants YOU …to help build our local food supply!

Come grow with us:
In 2012, we purchased more than $37,000,000 worth of local produce and flowers in our North Atlantic and North East regions—and we’re not stopping there!

If you are, or would like to be a grower of:
• organic broccoli
• organic blueberries
• organic strawberries
• organic melons

Please contact Mike Bethmann, Rich Thorpe or Brian McKeller regarding potential opportunities:
• mike.bethmann@wholefoods.com
• richard.thorpe@wholefoods.com
• brian.mckeller@wholefoods.com

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