The Natural Farmer

Summer 2015 Vol. 2, No. 105 Publication of the Northeast Organic Farming Association 1077-2294

NOFA Summer Conference Intensives Offer Skills for Body, Farm & Climate

by Nicole Belanger

The 41st annual NOFA Summer Conference will be held August 14-16, 2015 at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Presenters representing all seven NOFA state chapters will be offering a weekend of hands-on learning. Participants will gain new skills, make new connections, and enjoy the immersive Summer Conference experience. See www.nofasummerconference.org to learn about work exchange, affordable accommodations, and group registration, as well as the 144 main conference workshops and Children's and Teen Conferences. Registration is now open.

This year's pre-conference intensives take place on Friday, August 14, with four half-day seminars and one full-day seminar. Half-day sessions will cover topics including herbs, carbon farming, pastured poultry, and beekeeping. They run from 9:00 am to 12:30 pm, leaving time to attend the first set of main conference workshops beginning at 2:00 pm on Friday. Dr. Natasha Campbell-McBride – one of the two keynote speakers for 2015 – offers the full-day seminar, Healing your body with the GAPS Nutritional Protocol, from 9:00 am to 5:30 pm.

In 2015, we're returning to a workshop schedule with two slots on Friday, three on Saturday and three on Sunday. We're also breathing new life and energy into the Saturday afternoon Country Fair, including music, games, skill demonstrations, contests and more.

Pastured Poultry: From Brooder to Bag with Ken Gies

Ken Gies and his wife own and operate a poultry hatchery in Upstate New York. Gies buys in eggs from several suppliers, hatching a total of about 80,000 hybrid layers, turkeys, and broilers. The birds are certifiably organic, fed organic grain from day one. The Gies' prove out the genetics of the birds, raising 50-100 birds a year for their own use.

In his seminar, Gies will cover the basics from when chicks arrive: brooding, troubleshooting, introducing birds to pasture, feeding rations, and monitoring birds in the field. He will also discuss a persistent new strain of Avian Influenza and how small-scale growers can manage to get disease out of their systems. Part of the workshop will be devoted to the hands-on construction of low-cost equipment, including pens, feeders, waterers, and nest boxes. Processing will be briefly discussed, and there will be a demonstration of shackle building (a shackle is a device which holds the bird by the feet and suspends it in the air) and bleeder cones. The shackles that participants build will be for sale at cost.

Shortly after moving to New York from Canada in the late 1990s, Gies connected with the Northeast Pastured Poultry Association (NEPPA). Formed collaboratively by Heifer International and others, NEPPA's mission was to expand the base of pastured poultry producers in the Northeast and create a regional hatchery. Though Heifer typically works internationally, the organization determined that the region was in need of economic bolstering and supported the project.

A SARE feasibility study determined that the hatchery could be profitable in five years (though it actually took 10). Once developed and up and running, NEPPA disbanded, having

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Section B: Supplement on Organic Dairying

Letters to the Editor

Hi Jack,

Finally got started reading the winter Natural Farmer and wanted to let you know how wonderful it is. Thank you for examining this issue with such clarity and unashamedness.

Your little editorial is spot-on and I hope you make more converts to sanity with this issue.

Thanks for continuing to raise the bar for all of us.

Blessings,
Joel Salatin

Thanks, Joel,

Your kind words mean a lot to me and I appreciate your taking the time to write. More and more people seem to be getting the message about farming with nature, not trying to dominate it. It is a privilege to be involved in learning about and spreading this information! -- Jack

Hi Jack,

Thanks so much for the supplement to The Natural Farmer. What a superb job! I love it! Looking at Table 1 relating the real cost of eggs made me think of your efforts putting out The Natural Farmer. What is the real value of an organic newspaper's editor? Priceless!!! Thanks so much for your extraordinary efforts! I would like to put copies of the supplement in local libraries and share with my friends and family. Are supplement copies of "The Real Cost of Food" available to purchase?
-- David Carlson

Hi David,

Thank you. I really enjoyed that article too!

It never occurred to me to make that comparison with the paper, but Julie raises chickens and about 70 delicious eggs a day and as I think about it I realize it is a very apt comparison. I think one has to enjoy those jobs a lot. Probably one wouldn't do either for the money alone! Fortunately, as my children would readily tell you, I love pontificating. And what better vehicle for that these days (if you like to sleep in Sunday mornings and are too old for a blog) than a newspaper?

And yes, people can get extras. I always overprint a few copies of each issue for people who want another, or to send to a friend or straying child. I will ship one out to anyone in the US for the cover price of $5. Just send me the address and a check to The Natural Farmer. If you want a bundle, give me a call or Email with the number and if I have them I'll give you a bulk discount. – Jack

To The Natural Farmer,

In the Summer, 2014 issue of The Natural Farmer, page A21, there is an article by Donald Sutherland and Jack Kittredge called "The Cisgenic Hybrid Seed Conundrum". This article mentions that agribusiness interests might soon take over the organic seed market.

This is part of a larger trend. The supermarket where I shop in Wallingford, CT, has organic produce and organic packaged foods, but they come from thousands of miles away. I say to myself: "That is not what I mean by ORGANIC."

The brave souls who started organic farms 20 or 30 years ago are having trouble competing with large-scale organic production. Organic consumers have fought back by supporting CSAs and local organic markets, but I think there is one more thing we can do.

Why not have a new category of organic called "artisan organic" or "legacy organic" or "heirloom organic" or "vintage organic"?

Let's take the example of fresh "Romaine hearts". I can buy conventional for 14 cents an ounce or organic (from California) for 29 cents an ounce. As an organic consumer, I would be willing to pay 34 cents an ounce or 37 cents an ounce for "artisan organic" and that might bring local producers into the market.

This would not have to be a separate certification process, but rather just a few questions about 1) total annual revenue, 2) number of full-time employees, and 3) total number of acres under cultivation.

This would create a market niche for people who work hard with their own labor to create healthy food for their own communities. Organic consumers have come forward to support organic agriculture, local CSAs, and local organic markets, so why not take the next step?
Alan Eddy, Wallingford, CT

Dear Alan,

Thanks for your suggestion. I think most certified organic farms in the northeast would probably qualify for your new category if it is based on small size, as you seem to be proposing.

Speaking as an owner of one of the farms which might qualify, I think the bigger issue for most of us is that selling through retailers is often just not practical given our scale. Where CSAs and farmers markets and roadside stands work for us because we can move relatively small quantities of produce (a few bushels of something or less) produced for a few weeks during the year, this is harder in most retail operations, where they want larger deliveries (often pallet loads) and want them for longer seasons. The retailers, of course, charge you for the privilege of giving you larger orders by paying you significantly less per item so there is room for their markup.

We not only have a CSA here, but also sell to a retreat center and an urban health food store. So we know the comparative issues well. The CSA has to remain our major way of marketing as we get more for our efforts there than we can possibly recoup from the other markets, valuable as they are for some items that we have extra of, or that are unusually easy to produce in volume and we already sell as much as we can thru the CSA.

When we sell to the store, their usual markup is 50%. So for an item for which you pay 29 cents an ounce, we might get 19 or 20 cents. If you were to pay even 37 cents, as in your example, we would still get only 24 cents. If we can sell it at a farmers market for the original 29 cents it is usually better to sell it there. But others may be in different situations and be juggling different priorities, so thanks for your idea and maybe some folks will want to act on it. -- Jack

To the Editor:

The enclosed ($100) is a donation in favor of the print edition of the Natural Farmer, a superb publication. When publications I've gotten have gone to online only, I find I rarely read them any more, so I do hope you can continue the print edition.

A comment on the last issue, on the true cost of conventional crops vs. the cost of organics. In showing that some of the organic items are similar or actually cheaper and asking why those on lower incomes are not taking advantage of those prices, one important factor wasn't considered, one that has nothing to do with the food itself, and that is time and convenience. For better or worse, the supermarket has everything in one place, not just foodstuffs, but all the other products someone needs. A working person has little time to go to a farmer's market to save a dollar or two on a dozen eggs and some greens. A person on food stamps, maybe holding down two minimum wage jobs, maybe a single mother with a couple of kids, just wants to be able to get all the shopping done in one place as fast as possible, no matter what concerns she may have about organics vs. conventional. Then on to the Laundromat.
Best wishes, Leslie Gensburg, E. Burke, VT

Thanks, Leslie!

Your donation will help keep the print edition alive. There is no poll more convincing than what people do with their limited dollars. That you have committed a generous amount to this cause speaks volumes. I know there are many others who feel the same. There is something about seeing a paper on the table and holding it in my hands that makes me find the time to read it.

Good point on the issue of time and convenience in shopping. American retailers certainly put a lot of energy into studying how to attract consumers seeking more of both. It is not something we organic farmers focus on as much as we might. Some of the innovations like multi-farm CSAs, which combine products from many farms, are moving in that direction. But we need to do a better job of making our products convenient, as well as healthy and tasty, if we want to avoid a dual food system for most Americans. -- Jack

Dear Natural Farmer,

Is it possible to have an extra copy of The Natural Farmer mailed to me? If so, please tell me the cost and I will send a check and you can send the copy. I would include the membership dues at the same time if you could tell me what I owe. It is the B section that I want — The Real Cost of Food. It is so much needed. I know people who do not inform themselves on cost vs price and they buy chemical food because life is hard and thinking is hard. Reading labels is hard. Avoiding big factory farms (organic or not) takes research. I have in mind friends without computers who have few sources of reliable reporting. They buy food grown on chemical farms and believe they cannot afford to change. I want to lend out The Real Cost of Food to people who just might learn from it.

You do a splendid job with clear and truthful writing and I am grateful.

If you think it wiser to download and have it printed here, I'll do it that way. I don't want to cause you trouble.

We have two small stores and two supermarkets with (partly) organic food in Great Barrington (near

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The Natural Farmer Needs You!

The Natural Farmer is a quarterly membership journal of the Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. 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 2015:
Biochar

Winter 2015-16:
Worms

Spring 2016:
Public Land

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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Letters to the Editor

my town) and farmers markets with partly organic vendors. I make one trip a week (reducing emissions). Because standard physicians seem hapless under the thumb of the insurance companies, I put money into organic food, grow an organic garden (I'm from the Ruth Stout era*), send out news on the climate crisis, cherish conversation and avoid doctors. The managers of stores with organic food believe in 'market forces' and they keep up with the fashions. That is, they do carry fancy food from far away, they do carry products that no one needs and food with dubious ingredients. Shopping takes work.

*Ruth Stout was a good deal older than I but I am now her age -- the age she was when she still had a few years to go.

Dorothy Weaver, Sheffield MA

Hi Dorothy,

Thanks for your interest and work supporting organic food. I always print a few extra copies for people such as yourself. I am happy to mail a copy anywhere you want in the US for the cover price, $5. If you want to send a check to The Natural Farmer at 411 Sheldon Rd, Barre, MA 01005 and give me the address I will do that for you.

I also make sure the paper is available as a pdf file on the website <www.nofa.org> three months after publication for folks who do have access to the internet or want to use their local library to view it for free.

I think you are wise to put your money into good food, gardening, and thoughtful activity. Health is very inexpensive compared to sickness, but so many people don't seem to believe that. Instead of eating basic foods raised without chemicals in soil that is alive, they continue to eat processed foods grown in dead soils with chemicals to mask the deficiencies -- which make them sick.

I'm getting up there too, but give my regards to Ruth if you see her before I do. She has always been one of my favorites! -- Jack

Dear Jack and Julie,

Here is our contribution ($200) to the TNF matching gift fund. As we live off the web, we would like to keep receiving the print version. We really appreciated the topics and content of the last three Supplements.

A hidden aspect of The Real Cost of Food is the total land area required to produce fruit, livestock and vegetables. To that end, four experienced teamsters joined me in trying to figure out the footprint of our small-scale (3-5 acres) organic market gardens. If our calculations were correct, land usage between the five farms was quite variable, ranging from 3 to 8 acres of feed and bedding to produce the manure, compost and live horsepower for each acre of vegetables. Although it could be argued that most of these ghost acres represent by-products from the grain and lumber industry (straw and shavings for bedding) or land not suitable for human food production (steep or poorly drained pasture and hay ground), it was still an eye-opener to see how much land our small vegetable operations depend on, convincing us to find ways to shrink our farms' footprints.

I am not sure how to calculate the real cost of conventional food production using this total land use measure because it is so difficult to determine the fossil footprint of tractor fuel and chemical fertilizer. In putting together the Supplement, did you come across any information on the number of acre-years of biomass it takes to make a gallon of oil or pound of nitrogen fertilizer? What about the acreage it requires today to grow a gallon of bio-fuel or ton of compost?

If my memory serves me correctly, research at Wes Jackson's Sunflower Farm showed that it took just as many acres of bio-fuel crops to run the tractors as feed and forage crops for the work horses to power the same size grain operations. I think John Jeavons once said it took 6 beds of carbon producing crops to make enough compost for 1 bed of his bio-intensive vegetables. (He has probably improved on the ratio since then.) Brian Caldwell's preliminary research on "Land Usage for Organic Vegetable Cropping Systems" suggests that .35 acres of feed and forage are required for each ton of dairy manure compost. Any thoughts or references on this line of thinking would be much appreciated.

Eric Nordell, Trout Run, PA

Dear Eric and Anne,

Thank you very much for the very generous gift for the matching offer! We are well on the way to raising another thousand dollars to help support the print version of the paper. I should report that the NOFA Interstate Council seems committed to keeping the paper going and we are trying to work on ways to put it up as a searchable, downloadable online resource as well as in print for the NOFA members who do not want to be consuming paper. I am very optimistic that we can have both versions viable soon, and supporting each other.

I like your project of calculating the land base required to provide necessary fertility and energy for the food-producing acreage. I have not seen any work on this question and it is clearly important. As you know the caloric yield of agriculture has gone from a significant gain in pre-modern times to something like a 10 to 1 loss, currently. This is to say that it takes conventional agriculture 10 calories of energy to produce one calorie of food. Since most of those energy calories come in the form of fossil fuel, we are obviously in for major changes. Either we will continue to have fuel and burn it, thus overheating the planet and bringing on catastrophic weather, or the fuel will run out or we will agree not to burn it, and will have to return to an agriculture based on draft animals and manure.

If you, or anyone else, would like to put pencil to back of envelope and do some figuring, I'd love to print the results. Tell me the assumptions you make, and the basis of your numbers, and we can start a lively little TNF page figuring out how much land we will need to support ourselves in a post-fossil fuel world. -- Jack

To the editor:

I just received the Spring issue of The Natural Farmer. Especially enjoyed Section B: Supplement on The Real Cost of Food. Am enclosing a check ($100) to help fund The Natural Farmer. I am a senior who enjoys "hard copies". Thanks and keep up the good work.

Leanna Deneale, Willsboro, NY

Dear Leanna,

Thanks so much for your generous donation. Julie and I are very moved by the amount of appreciation readers are expressing and donations they are sending to help keep publishing the paper version. It is really up to the NOFA chapters collectively to decide, but expressions like yours go a long way to indicate to them how deep the support for keeping the paper version alive is. -- Jack

Jack/Julie:

Your fine newspaper TNF is unique in its in-depth coverage of issues critical to today's farming. In particular, I have enjoyed and profited from the Rice Intensification issue and also the Grazing issue this past winter (I hope it's well in the past!). I am interested in a few hard copies of the Grazing section of the winter issue of TNF. There are a couple of people here in Maine who might find that set of articles of great interest. I know it's on line, but the printed version is very convenient.

Could you sell three back issues, at what cost, and what allowance for postage to Cape Elizabeth, Maine(Portland suburb).

Thanks, Frank Miles

Thank you, Frank,

For your kind words. They make a big difference to us! I generally overprint a few of each issue for exactly this purpose. I will send them for $5 each to any postal address in the US during the first year after they are printed. After a year they are "collectors copies" and cost more (mostly because I have to go up in the attic to find them!) Thus the Grazing one is still $5 but the Rice Intensification one is now $10. Send a check to The Natural Farmer in the right amount with the addresses and I'll get them right off. Thanks again! -- Jack

(A note accompanying a check for $50 reads): Just about the best, most intelligent, most useful paper around anywhere. Thank you. – Ann Clay, Arlington, VT

Thank you Ann. You are one of the most intelligent, discriminating readers anywhere yourself! Seriously, your words mean a lot! -- Jack

Hello, Jack,

The enclosed ($100) comes with a big "hurrah!" for the continuation of the print version of The Natural Farmer. Kind regards. – Margot Dilmaghani

Thank you, Margot, for this contribution and for your past donations to NOFA through sales of your music. It is wonderful to have thoughtful people appreciating one's efforts! -- Jack

Obituary for Juanita Morrow Nelson

August 17, 1923 – March 9, 2015

photo by Elizabeth Henderson

Juanita and Wally Nelson ourside their cabin at Traprock Peace Center in Deerfield, Massachusetts, date unknown. The bell under which they stand provided them a way to summon help if needed in their later years.

Juanita (Morrow) Nelson, 91, died peacefully following a period of declining health on Monday, March 9, 2015, at Poet's Seat Health Care Center in Greenfield, Massachusetts.

Heralded as a lifelong activist and pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement and the organic farming and simple living movements, Juanita was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on August 17, 1923, the daughter of Eula Jean (Middlebrooks) Morrow and Oscar Morrow, Sr.

Juanita graduated in 1941 from Cleveland's Central High School and attended Howard University in Washington, D.C. She served as secretary of the university's NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and experienced her first arrest for civil disobedience while protesting lunch counter segregation in our nation's capitol. In 1943, she enrolled in Western Reserve University, majoring in journalism, and worked as a reporter for the Cleveland Call & Post. In that role, she met her lifelong partner, Wally Nelson, while working on a story about segregated conditions in the jail in which Wally was awaiting trial as a conscientious objector. Juanita worked with CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) on both local and national levels.

In 1948, Wally and Juanita refused to pay taxes for war and military preparations and helped found Peacemakers, a pacifist group that took its name from the biblical Beatitudes: "Blessed are the peacemakers…." The group advocated non-payment of federal war taxes, non-registration for the military draft, and the promotion of nonviolence in all areas of life.

In 1950, the Nelsons became part of an integrated household in Cincinnati, Ohio, which led to tensions within a neighborhood where segregation was the norm. In 1955, Juanita earned a degree in speech pathology from Ohio State University, motivated by the fact that this would allow her to work on a contractual basis without withholding taxes.

The Nelsons moved to Philadelphia in 1956 and lived in Powelton Village, a culturally diverse and historic neighborhood. They spent four months at Koinonia Farm in Americus, Georgia, which had come under attack for refusal to discriminate based on skin color. Shots were fired into the community during the Nelsons' stay. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Juanita was arrested several times due to activities connected with tax resistance and civil rights protests.

With Wally, Juanita began her farming life in 1970 when they moved to Ojo Caliente in northern New Mexico. Fueled by a desire to live more simply in the face of U.S. war in Vietnam and to be less involved in the economic milieu that spawns war, they made their living by growing and selling produce and attempting to become as self-sufficient as possible. They learned to heat and cook with wood, preserve food, and make their own soap.

Their 1974 move to Woolman Hill, site of a Quaker conference center in Deerfield, MA, brought the Nelsons to the Pioneer Valley, where they became mentors to many people, young and old. Granted lifetime use of a small plot of land, the Nelsons built a compact home with no electricity or running water and received permission from the town to build an outhouse.

Juanita authored many articles and poems, as well as the 1988 book, A Matter of Freedom. She and Wally helped found the Valley Community Land Trust, Pioneer Valley War Tax Resisters, and the Greenfield Farmers' Market. After Wally's death in 2002, Juanita hatched the idea for the Free Harvest Supper, held in Greenfield, which has become a major community event in late August of each year. A longtime advocate of local food, Juanita challenged attendees at the 2006 Free Harvest Supper to eat locally, not just when it was convenient but year round. This challenge spawned Winter Fare, the first winter farmers market in Massachusetts. The idea soon spread throughout the Commonwealth.

For the last several years, Juanita lived with a series of close friends, including Eveline MacDougall, Elie Kastanopolous, and, most recently, Betsy Corner, Randy Kehler, and Kip Moeller.

Juanita was pre-deceased by her partner Wally Nelson and her brothers Charles Morrow and Oscar Morrow, Jr. She is survived by many nieces, nephews, and cousins in Ohio, and by a large national and international family of friends and fellow travelers. She will be sorely missed by many.

End-of-life arrangements are being handled by the Eternal Blessings Cremation Service in Guilford, Vermont.

Memorial donations may be sent to the Valley Community Land Trust, Box 1552, Greenfield, MA 01302, and to the Wally and Juanita Nelson Scholarship Fund at Greenfield Community College, c/o GCC Foundation, 270 Main Street, Greenfield, MA 01301.

News Notes

compiled by Jack Kittredge

Organic Production Enhances Milk Nutritional Quality by Shifting Fatty Acid Composition
Over the last century, intakes of omega-6 fatty acids in Western diets have dramatically increased, while omega-3 intakes have fallen. Resulting omega-6/omega-3 intake ratios have risen to nutritionally undesirable levels, between 10 and 15, compared to a possible optimal ratio near 2.3. A study, however, led by Charles M. Benbrook of Washington State University reports results of the first large-scale, nationwide study of fatty acids in U.S. organic and conventional milk. Averaged over 12 months, organic milk contained 25% less omega-6 fatty acids and 62% more omega-3 fatty acids than conventional milk, yielding a 2.5-fold higher omega-6/omega-3 ratio in conventional compared to organic milk (5.77 vs. 2.28). All individual omega-3 fatty acid concentrations were higher in organic milk—a-linolenic acid (by 60%), eicosapentaenoic acid (32%), and docosapentaenoic acid (19%)—as was the concentration of conjugated linoleic acid (18%).

The report found moderate regional and seasonal variability in milk fatty acid profiles. Hypothetical diets of adult women were modeled to assess milk fatty-acid-driven differences in overall dietary omega-6/omega-3 ratios. Diets varied according to three choices: high instead of moderate dairy consumption; organic vs. conventional dairy products; and reduced vs. typical consumption of omega-6 fatty acids. The three choices together would decrease the omega-6/omega-3 ratio among adult women by 80% of the total decrease needed to reach a target ratio of 2.3. We conclude that consumers have viable options to reduce average omega-6/omega-3 intake ratios, thereby reducing or eliminating probable risk factors for a wide range of developmental and chronic health problems.
source: www.plosone.org, December, 2013

US Honeybee Population Plummets by More Than 40% in Past Year
According to the USDA, U.S. beekeepers reported losing 42.1 percent of the total number of colonies managed from April 2014 through April 2015, much higher than the 34.2 percent from the year prior. The study was conducted by the Bee Informed Partnership in collaboration with the Apiary Inspectors of America and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Preliminary results indicate that U.S. beekeepers were hardest-hit in the summer of 2014, with an average loss of 27.4 percent of their hives compared to the 19.8 percent the previous summer.

The Associated Press reported that the study's entomologists were "shocked" when they noticed bees were dying more in the summer than the winter for the first time. Study co-author Dennis vanEngelsdorp of the University of Maryland told the news organization that seeing massive colony losses in summer is like seeing "a higher rate of flu deaths in the summer than winter. You just don't expect colonies to die at this rate in the summer."

A growing body of evidence has pointed to one class of pesticides in particular, neonicotinoids, as the culprit to the massive bee die-offs. In fact, the European Union banned the three most widely used neonicotinoids in 2013, but they are still used widely in the U.S.

"The solution to the bee crisis is to shift to sustainable agriculture systems that are not dependent on monoculture crops saturated in pesticides," said Tiffany Finck-Haynes, food futures campaigner with Friends of the Earth. "It's time to reimagine the way we farm in the United States and incentivize organic agriculture practices that are better for bees and for all of us."
source: EcoWatch, May 18, 2015

Recapping Round 1 of the Vermont GMO-Labeling Lawsuit
On April 27, 2015, Chief Judge Christina Reiss of the U.S. District Court for the District of Vermont issued an opinion that mostly favored the State of Vermont and the positions of GMO-labeling advocates. Both supporters and opponents of mandatory GMO-labeling have been keeping a close eye on this lawsuit. This is because Act 120, if it survives litigation, will make Vermont the first state in the country to require that certain foods containing ingredients produced with genetic engineering bear mandatory labels.
The Plaintiffs challenged Act 120 from several angles. Here is how the Court addressed these issues:
• First Amendment. The Plaintiffs alleged that Act 120's GMO-labeling mandate violated the First Amendment's protections against unlawfully-compelled speech. The Court reasoned that unless Vermont's legislative findings prove unfounded at the permanent injunction stage of this litigation, the State has demonstrated a reasonable relationship between the state's interest and the GMO-labeling mandate.
• Commerce Clause. The Plaintiffs argued that Vermont's labeling measure violates the Constitution's Commerce Clause because the state-based labeling measure would create an undue burden on interstate commerce, ultimately resulting in a 50-state patchwork of labeling laws. The Court was not convinced, noting that there were no other states with conflicting labeling laws.
• Supremacy Clause. The Plaintiffs asserted that the GMO-labeling mandate was preempted by the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (FFDCA), the Nutritional Labeling and Education Act (NLEA), the Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA), and the Poultry Products Inspection Act (PPIA). The Court was not convinced by the Plaintiffs' arguments with regards to the FFDCA or the NLEA. However, the Court agreed that the FMIA and PPIA expressly preempted state standards for "[m]arking, labeling, packaging, or ingredient requirements in addition to, or different than, those mandated by federal law." This means that processed and packaged foods that are subject to USDA inspection, such as canned soups or frozen dinners containing meat or poultry products, cannot be subject to state GMO-labeling mandates. Vermont has already conceded this issue in its final rule, which implements Act 120.
• "Natural" Labeling Prohibition. The Plaintiffs also challenged Act 120's prohibition on advertising and labeling of products containing genetically-engineered ingredients as "natural," "all natural," or words of similar import. The Plaintiffs argued that this prohibition violated the First Amendment. The Court sided with the Plaintiffs on the First Amendment argument, reasoning that prohibitions on commercial speech are subject to "intermediate scrutiny" under the Central Hudson test. The Court held that Vermont has failed to demonstrate a "substantial" state interest in prohibiting these labels.
On May 6 one of the plaintiffs, the Grocery Manufacturers Association announced it would file an appeal of the ruling in the Vermont Federal District Cout.
source: AgFDABlog.com, May 4, 2015

Safe Mosquito Repellents Listed
Beyond Pesticides has evaluated Mosquito repellents for the summer and warns the public to avoid DEET-based repellents. It has published a list of least-toxic ones. There are various versions of each on the market, so check names and ingredients to find them. They include:
• Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus (they label the natural, non synthetic versions the best choice) which masks carbon dioxide and lactic acid exhalations which mosquitoes sense and home in on. Effective for 3 to 12 hours.
• Picaridin (Icaridin or KBR 3023) which is a synthetic version of the pipermine compound found in pepper. Effective for 3 to 8 hours.
• IR3535 which is a synthetic functionally identical to beta alanine, a natural amino acid. Effective 2 to 8 hours.
• Soybean Oil which is recommended by Health Canada. Effective 1.5 to 4 hours.
• Citronella Oil which is a classic repellent but does not seem as effective as the others unless formulated with them as an ingredient. Effective 0.5 to 3 hours.
source: "Pesticides and You", Spring 2015

Monsanto, GMO Food and Ukraine
A little-known aspect of the crisis in Ukraine is receiving some international attention. On July 28, 2014 the California-based Oakland Institute released a report revealing that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), under terms of their $17 billion loan to Ukraine, would open that country to GM crops. The report is entitled "Walking on the West Side: the World Bank and the IMF in the Ukraine Conflict."

In late 2013, the then president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovych, rejected a European Union association agreement tied to the $17 billion IMF loan, whose terms are only now being revealed. Instead, Yanukovych chose a Russian aid package worth $15 billion plus a discount on Russian natural gas. His decision was a major factor in the ensuing deadly protests that led to his ousting from office in February 2014 and the ongoing crisis.

According to the Oakland Institute, "Whereas Ukraine does not allow the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in agriculture, Article 404 of the EU agreement, which relates to agriculture, includes a clause that has generally gone unnoticed: it indicates, among other things, that both parties will cooperate to extend the use of biotechnologies. There is no doubt that this provision meets the expectations of the agribusiness industry. As observed by Michael Cox, research director at the investment bank Piper Jaffray, 'Ukraine and, to a wider extent, Eastern Europe, are among the most promising growth markets for farm-equipment giant Deere, as well as seed producers Monsanto and DuPont'."

According to the Oakland Institute, the terms of the World Bank/IMF loan to Ukraine have already led to "an increase in foreign investment, which is likely to result in further expansion of large-scale acquisitions of agricultural land by foreign companies and further corporatization of agriculture in the country."
source: http://www.counterpunch.org/2014/08/22/70838/

Agricultural Justice Project Wins Whole Foods Market Supplier of the Year Award
Whole Foods Market has awarded their 2014 Sup-

plier of the Year Award in the area of Responsible Sourcing to the Agricultural Justice Project (AJP) and Farmer Direct Cooperative (FDC). AJP was given the award for developing and maintaining their Food Justice Certification program, which many consider the gold standard in social justice certification. FDC, a farmer-owned cooperative of more than 60 certified organic, Food Justice Certified family farms located in Canada, was given the award for meeting the rigorous standards to be Food Justice Certified and leading the path towards a more just food system.
source: AJP press release, April 27, 2015

Chipotle Removes All Food Containing GMOs From Its Menu
Chipotle Mexican Grill has announced that it will remove all food containing genetically modified organisms (GMOs) from its menu. The Denver-based company is the first major fast-food restaurant chain to ban genetically engineered ingredients.

"This is another step toward the visions we have of changing the way people think about and eat fast food," Chipotle co-CEO Steve Ells told The New York Times, which first reported the story. "Just because food is served fast doesn't mean it has to be made with cheap raw ingredients, highly processed with preservatives and fillers and stabilizers and artificial colors and flavors."

Chipotle was also the first major chain to disclose which of its foods contained GMOs starting in 2013, when it said it was working on transitioning to a tortilla that did not use them. Ells said Chipotle felt it was best not to use GMOs given the "lack of consensus" about their effects. Chipotle still serves Coca-Cola fountain drinks, which are made with high-fructose corn syrup. But this past summer, Chipotle started testing a root beer that is organically sweetened in Denver. That test is ongoing, said Chris Arnold, a company spokesman.

The restaurant does not anticipate shortages of non-GMO ingredients. "We're working with our farmers to plant enough of these crops we need to meet our supply," said Ells. "With pork, it's harder because we only need one part of the animal, the shoulder, and the farmer needs to sell the whole animal to make it work."
source: Al Jazeera, April 15, 2015

OTA Distributes Description of Organic Checkoff Program
The Organic Trade Association (OTA) has distributed to certified farmers a description of its "organic checkoff" program through the USDA. The push for an organic checkoff program, much like those already set up by the beef, pork, dairy, avocado, Christmas tree and nearly two dozen other agricultural industries, has been on since a provision contained in the 2014 farm bill allowed for its creation. OTA lobbied for the farm bill measure. Unlike other checkoff programs, however, an organic one would be the first marketing program for a production method, not a specific commodity, and tasked with covering everything from organic apples produced in Washington state to imports of organic olives from the Middle East. That means promoting a broad range of products. Also, the program would face issues of how to talk up organic without implying it is healthier or at all better than its conventionally grown counter parts. Checkoff program claims, according to USDA rules, cannot disparage other commodities.

But an organic checkoff program comes with some other difficulties. Small farmers — a good chunk of organic producers — might be priced out of the new program's decision-making process. The checkoff framework calls for all growers with "gross organic revenue of greater than $250,000" to be assessed 10 cents for every $100 in net organic sales. For operations that fall under that $250,000 threshold, the assessment is voluntary. But only those who pay can vote in the checkoff. Of the approximately 14,000 USDA-certified organic farms, as many as 70 percent would fall under that $250,000 threshold, according to Ed Maltby of the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance.

Patty Lovera, an assistant director at Food and Water Watch, is concerned about the program."The way checkoffs for other commodities work is that farmers pay into the fund but large food companies are largely in control of decisions on how to spend the money," Lovera said. "So it's understandable that many organic farmers are wary of such an arrangement where their dollars are being controlled by giant food processing companies." Checkoffs have contributed to the disappearance of family farms, noting that hog producing farms have fallen by about 70 percent since the introduction of the pork checkoff, and reductions have also been seen in dairy and beef farms since their programs took effect, she wrote.

But the rules really couldn't be written in a different way, said Missy Hughes, general counsel for Organic Valley and president of the OTA board of directors. "We've really tried to explore as many options as we can" but the law "requires that you have to pay to have a vote," she said. The $250,000 threshold was chosen because that is the limit for USDA's definition of a small farmer, she explained, adding that setting different payments for smaller farmers would come with its own pitfalls. "When you start talking about paying at a level that's nonsensical, you pay a nickel and then you get to participate, that just becomes" a problem on its own, she said.

What's more, the $250,000 in gross profits line isn't an exemption, but rather a level under which the assessment becomes voluntary, said Laura Batcha, OTA's executive director. "If you choose to participate, you get the full governing rights, you get to vote," Batcha said, adding that small farmers who responded the surveys from OTA on the checkoff are on board with the program. "Nobody would be excluded from participating."
source:https://www.politicopro.com/go/?id=46205

Archive Seeks NOFA Documents, Photos, Other Information
The University of Massachusetts maintains a historical archive on social movements, including the organic movement, and is soliciting materials for it. If you have such materials in your attic or cellar and want to get rid of them, contact Robert Cox at rscox@library.umass.edu. He may be able to solve your space problem and help students learn about NOFA, too.
source: Email from Bill Duesing, April 9, 2015

High Carotenoid Orange Corn Bred, Trialed in Africa
Purdue University researchers have identified corn genes that can naturally boost the carotenoid content of corn kernels. Carotenoids are anti-oxidants and pigments which are also precursors essential to the body's creation of Vitamin A, which itself plays

a key role in the immune system and eye health, including prevention of macular degeneration. Professor of Agronomy Torbert Rocheford and fellow researchers found these gene variations that can change white corn into a bio-fortified orange corn by natural breeding techniques. Varieties of orange corn are currently being grown in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Ghana.
source: Lancaster Farming, October 25, 2014

Petition to USDA Demands Changes in Scientific Integrity Policies, Procedures
USDA needs to strengthen its internal rules to better protect the department's scientists from outside political and industry pressures over their research, a group alleges in a petition to the department. The group, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), charges that USDA scientists "routinely suffer retaliation and harassment" from managers and private industry for research that conflicts with agribusinesses.

"It's one of the worst agencies in terms of direct industry influence in how scientists are handled," said Jeff Ruch, executive director of PEER, in describing USDA's protection of scientists. "There's not much of a political buffer between big agribusinesses and managers at the agency. In our work, we've found that scientists in the agency that are producing studies that are drawing industry concerns find their careers complicated."

USDA employs thousands of scientists involved in a broad array of work on plant production, livestock, food safety and the environment. The department prides itself on being one of the world's premier research institutions and has a vested interest in ensuring the credibility of its scientists. Thus, such allegations challenge the department's scientific integrity.

PEER is filing a petition to force USDA to beef up its policies on scientific integrity. The petition seeks to get USDA to adopt some of the best practices for scientific integrity used by other federal agencies to protect scientists from having their work suppressed or altered.
source: DTN.com, March 26, 2015

Groups Challenge USDA Over Sunset Rule Change
Organic stakeholders have filed a lawsuit in federal court maintaining that the USDA violated the federal rulemaking process when it changed established procedures for reviewing the allowed synthetic and prohibited natural substances used in producing organic food. A coalition of 15 organic food producers and farmer, consumer, environmental, and certification groups asked the court to require USDA to reconsider its decision on the rule change and reinstitute the agency's customary public hearing and comment process.

Under the law, a review of these materials takes place on a five year cycle, with a procedure for relisting if needed. Plaintiffs in this case maintain that the USDA organic rule establishes a public process that creates public trust in the USDA organic label, which has resulted in exponential growth in organic sales over the last two decades.

At issue in the lawsuit is a rule that implements the organic law's "sunset provision," which since its origins has been interpreted to require all listed materials to cycle off the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances every five years unless the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) votes by a two-thirds majority to relist them. In making its decision, the NOSB is charged with considering public input, new science, and new information on available alternatives. In September, 2013, in a complete reversal of the accepted process, USDA announced a definitive change in the rule it had been operating under since the inception of the organic program without any public input. Now, materials can remain on the National List in perpetuity unless the NOSB takes initiative to vote it off the List.

In a joint statement, the plaintiffs, representing a broad cross-section of interests in organic, said: We are filing this lawsuit today because we are deeply concerned that the organic decision making process is being undermined by USDA. The complaint challenges the unilateral agency action on the sunset procedure for synthetic materials review, which represents a dramatic departure from the organic community's commitment to an open and fair decision making process, subject to public input. Legally, the agency's decision represents a rule change and therefore must be subject to public comment. But equally important, it is a departure from the public process that we have built as a community. This process has created a unique opportunity within government for a community of stakeholders to come together, hear all points of view, and chart a course for the future of organic. It is a process that continually strengthens organic, supports its rapid growth, and builds the integrity of the USDA certified label in the marketplace.

The plaintiffs in the case, represented by counsel from Center for Food Safety, include: Beyond Pesticides, Center for Food Safety, Equal Exchange, Food and Water Watch, Frey Vineyards, La Montanita Co-op, Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, New Natives, Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance, Northeast Organic Farmers Association/Massachusetts, Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association, Organic Consumers Association, Organic Seed Growers and Trade Association, PCC Natural Markets, and The Cornucopia Institute.
source: Cornucopia press release, April 8, 2015

WHO: Glyphosate Likely Carcinogen
Glyphosate, an herbicide widely marketed by Monsanto Co. and other companies, likely has the potential to cause cancer in humans, a World Health Organization agency has said. The determination, published by researchers for the International Agency for Research on Cancer in a U.K. medical journal, is likely to fuel further debate over the safety of the heavily used agricultural chemical, which Monsanto sells under the trade name "Roundup." Glyphosate is the most-used herbicide in the U.S., according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Farmers have ramped up its use over the past two decades with the advent of genetically modified crops, including corn and soybeans, which can withstand sprayings of the chemical. Herbicide-tolerant biotech plants were grown on 94% of U.S. soybean fields and 89% of U.S. corn fields last year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In classifying glyphosate as potentially cancer-causing, the international research agency cited studies of occupational exposure to glyphosate in the U.S., Canada and Sweden, which they wrote showed "increased risks for non-Hodgkin lymphoma" along with a positive trend for some ailments in mice in separate studies. Though the researchers cited "limited evidence" that glyphosate was a carcinogen for humans, they classified it as probably carcinogenic to them, according to the article.

The assessment followed a meeting this month among 17 experts representing 11 countries, who evaluated the cancer-causing potential of glyphosate and four other pesticides. The research agency, which hasn't previously classified glyphosate, monitors global cancer cases while trying to identify causes and responses.
source: Wall Street Journal, March 20, 2015

(continued from page 1)
NOFA Summer Conference

met its mandate. The Gies' were the recipients of NEPPA's assets, passed on to them as members of the local community, in the spirit of Heifer projects.

For the Gies, education was not just part of their mandate after receiving the assets from the project. Said Gies: "My wife and I are both compulsive teachers. We love to share what we've learned… to help other people along. We like to see people get into [raising poultry]."

Appropriate for professionals and hobbyists and those keeping birds in urban or rural areas, the session will be tailored by Gies to the needs of attendees. He recognizes that local, organic meat and eggs are a niche market and thinks there is room for expansion with careful planning for local regulations, bird maintenance, and effective marketing.

Creating Herbal Remedies for Digestive Wellness with Brittany Nickerson
Herbalist, health educator and food activist Brittany Nickerson operates an herbal education and consulting business, Thyme Herbal, based in North Amherst, MA. She uses herbalism to engender skills that help people connect with nature and their own physical and emotional selves.

Nickerson's seminar is geared specifically to those that struggle with digestive health or are looking for alternatives for achieving digestive wellness. The seminar will focus on individual herbs and their uses. She aims for participants to have a user-friendly and empowering experience, learning how to integrate knowledge of herbs into everyday life using simple home remedies like herbal teas, syrups, tinctures, vinegars and honeys. Attendees will taste different herbal medicine remedies as Nickerson demonstrates how to make them.

She initially became drawn to the use of herbs for health and wellness through knowledge she learned in her own family. Her love of herbs was then rekindled and cemented when she enrolled in an ethno-botany class at the University of California, Berkley.

Nickerson will cover a range of specific herbs and categories of herbs used for digestive wellness. Carminatives, like fennel seed, peppermint and lemon balm, help stimulate circulation to the digestive system, breakdown and absorb nutrients, and eliminate gas. Demulcents, like licorice and marshmallow root, are soothing and healing to mucous membrane tissues. Bitter herbs, like orange peel, dandelion root and leaf, angelica, and yellow dock, support digestive health, help with breakdown of fats and oils, and create a friendly environment for healthy gut flora.

According to Nickerson, the nervous system is intricately linked with the digestive system, so many of the herbs she will discuss serve as remedies for both. For instance, since neurological responses to various stimuli initiate many digestive functions, stress management can aid digestion. "A healthy, calm, well-functioning nervous system is paramount to good digestion," she said. The seminar will be great for anyone interested in the uses and home production of herbal medicines for a variety of the body's systems.

Brittany teaches from the plants as they transition with the seasons, linking plant seasonality with a body's needs and a greater understanding of the environment. Through Thyme Herbal, she teaches courses like the Art of Home Herbalism and others geared towards individuals' personal and professional development. Herbal education is at the core of her work, even when doing private consulting. "I'm a teacher. I love teaching, and I'm very passionate about it."

Becoming a Backyard Beekeeper with Sanne Kure-Jensen
Kure-Jensen has kept bees in her wildflower meadow since taking a class with the Rhode Island Beekeepers Association in 2003. She has had up to eight hives, typically managing five to six. She collects swarms from her own property and nearby sites when asked. She has not had to buy a package of bees since her second year. "I always wanted chickens, but when I really looked into it, I realized bees were much easier to care for," said Sanne. To replace colonies lost to the weather this past winter she hopes for a prolific swarm season this May and June.

Sanne's workshop will be ideal for beginning and intermediate beekeepers. Pollinator and insect identification, anatomy and common behavior will all be covered, as will common diseases, pests and tips to minimize the risk of Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD). Sanne will describe commercial beekeeping operations that move hives across the country pollinating major crops and the risks to moving bees into commercial orchards. Sanne will share her own experiences and lessons from other beekeepers so participants can choose the approach that best suits their interests and needs.

Most people purchase an unassembled hive to save money. Attendees will team up to construct a wooden Langstroth hive, a commonly used hive style. This hands-on experience will help participants anticipate construction challenges and prepare them to construct their own hive for many years of use. The assembled hive will be auctioned off at the end of the workshop.

Kure-Jensen will touch upon important pollinator food sources and habitat needs, as well as the benefits of pollination. "Bees need to have a steady food source as early in the season as possible," said Sanne. "Start with crocuses in March and continue as late into the fall as possible. Try to offer a wide variety of flowering trees, shrubs, perennials, annuals, vegetables and herbs." Honey collection techniques and other bee products will also be covered. "By raising bees, growers get better vegetables, more fully pollinated apples and if we are lucky, we get honey from our happy bees," said Sanne.

Sanne encourages early registration, as her workshop size will be limited for maximum interaction. Participants will receive a list of tools to bring along for the hive construction, and extra tools will be available. Her resources will include favorite nectar plants, essential and optional equipment, potential suppliers and recommended reading. The workshop will allow participants to meet other aspiring and experienced beekeepers, building a network of potential mentors and collaborators. "Knowledge is power. The more you can gather the better," said Sanne.

Carbon Farming: Regenerative Agriculture for the Climate with Connor Stedman
Connor Stedman's pre-conference intensive provides an overview of farming practices that can help stabilize the global climate by sequestering atmospheric carbon in soil and perennial plants. The same practices also regenerate depleted natural resources (like soils) to increase the natural health, diversity and vitality of our landscapes.

Stedman is a naturalist and ecologist exploring the methods and message of carbon farming and regenerative agriculture. He sees himself as an educator and communicator, helping both the farming community and general public understand these practices, their applications, and their ecological and economic potential.

He works with Appleseed Permaculture in New York's Hudson Valley, doing whole farm planning and landscape design for working productive landscapes. Stedman is also the organizer of the internationally acclaimed Carbon Farming Course, training participants in a wide variety of carbon sequestering agricultural techniques. He holds a Masters' Degree in Environmental Planning from the University of Vermont.

This pre-conference session will review the science of climate change and carbon sequestration, introduce a whole range of carbon farming practices, and cover how these techniques can be applied on a property or in a specific climate region. Practices to be discussed will include improved annual techniques (e.g., organic no-till, compost, cover cropping), improved pasture techniques (e.g., holistic rotational grazing, pasture/rangeland compost application), agroforestry systems (e.g., alley farming, silvopasture, multifunctional buffers, savanna mimic systems), and other methods (e.g., biochar, keyline water planning).

Stedman will also cover current trends in carbon farming research, monitoring and markets. Among others, he sees three ways to think about the market potential for this type of agriculture: 1) Traditional carbon markets: These markets are complicated and the rules thus far (though he sees potential for this to change) typically favor large-scale forest management projects over agricultural projects that can store carbon while producing food. 2) Telling the story of a farm: Growers can communicate their use of these techniques and how they reflect the farm's values and environmental impact, setting them apart from other producers. 3) On-farm benefits: Additional benefits come along with these management practices, like improved resilience in the face of drought and flood, wildlife habitat and biodiversity, benefits for cycling and storage of nutrients, animal health, and cost and risk reduction.

"The messaging of carbon farming has focused most on the climate crisis," said Stedman, "but what regenerative agriculture is attempting is a whole rebuilding of natural systems in such a way that the economy and ecology are restoring themselves together, rather than economy growing at the expense of ecology."

Stedman aims to broaden the conversation about carbon farming from a single technique or small set of techniques. "There is no silver bullet anywhere in this conversation. There is a wide range of techniques, some of which are appropriate on some farms and some aren't." He also emphasizes the value of land repair and stewardship in agriculture, noting that our long-term future depends on the health of and access to land.

Growers of any experience level will find the intensive beneficial, including thinking about which of these techniques could be practiced on an existing farm or potential new operations. Those involved in regional planning and conservation planning will also gain an expanded understanding of land management and the potential uses and benefits of carbon farming and regenerative agriculture.

Healing your body with the GAPS Nutritional Protocol with Dr. Natasha Campbell-McBride
Participants in this pre-conference session will learn what Gut And Psychology/Gut And Physiology Syndrome (GAPS) is and how nutrition can heal it and other chronic diseases in the human body. In her keynote and pre-conference intensive Dr. Campbell-McBride will address the importance of healthy, balanced intestinal microbiology in preventing and eliminating chronic diseases. Her work also explores the connection between the functions of the digestive system and the brain. Read more about her work in the Spring issue of The Natural Farmer at www.nofasummerconference.org/2015_tnf_keynoters.php

Book Reviews

The Art of Natural Cheesemaking

by David Asher
published by Chelsea Green Publishing, www.chelseagreen.com
July 15, 2015, $34.95, 288 pages
review by Rachel Scherer

Are your curds and whey subverting the dominant paradigm? The premise of David Asher's book is that while bakers, brewers, and produce fermenteers have found their way to incorporating wild microorganisms into their formulary, cheesemakers are still largely dependent on freeze-dried cultures produced industrially.

The book's foreword by Sandor Ellix Katz, author and evangelist for food fermentation, serves to introduce and/or remind the reader that fermenting milk is an old and honored way of preserving this nutrient dense food as yogurt, kefir or cheese. From there, Asher's introduction makes it plain that the revival of home and artisanal cheesemaking in the US and Canada (his Black Sheep School of Cheesemaking is located in British Columbia) has uncritically accepted the use of industrial cultures, and neglected the rich history of cheesemaking with wild cultures.

This book is laid out much the same as other books on home or small-scale cheesemaking – chapters on milk, cultures and other ingredients, equipment, and aging, followed by chapters with step by step recipes. The differences between this book and the others on my shelf are in the extensive discussions of the way ingredients we commonly use are produced to yield very controlled and reproducible fermentations, and how to move from them into a natural ecology of cheese with more room for improvisation on the part of the maker and of the fermenting curds.

Asher's recipes for the most part acknowledge a starting point from a yogurt, kefir, previous whey batch, or moldy cheese already in existence, and then propagating the resulting culture to make it totally local to the experimenter's own kitchen. The process is not unlike maintaining sourdough starter or making pain au levain with a chunk of dough from the previous rising. My personal experience with starting cheeses with whey from the previous batch have been very successful in creating a distinctly different flavor profile than inoculating with freeze-dried culture each batch. Unfortunately, as a small scale commercial producer, I know from experience that the regulatory agencies in Massachusetts would not approve my longstanding yogurt and kefir cultures from a colleague's Uzbeck grandmother, and since they require all fermented milk products sold to the public to begin with FDA approved cultures, there is a long haul ahead to get traditional natural cheesemaking approval. This is discussed quite frankly in the book, and David Asher admits to being a "guerrilla cheesemaker".

The book fails in one matter that is common to many of its neighbors on the bookshelf: there is no discussion of how milk from different species and/or at different points in lactation requires different handling. The only differences attributed to milks are raw vs pasteurized/homogenized. Having only ever used raw milk, and often using non-commercial cultures, I was disappointed by the broad strokes used to characterize the foundational product, the milk.

That being said, this book is wonderfully written and therefore a pleasure to just read. As a technical manual the clear explanations seem easy to follow, and I look forward to trying the recipes. There is much here to learn for experienced as well as new milk fermenteers.

Altered Genes, Twisted Truth: How the Venture to Genetically Engineer Our Food Has Subverted Science, Corrupted Government, and Systematically Deceived the Public

by Steven M. Druker
published by Clear River Press
distributed by Chelsea Green
2015, 511 pages, $21.95
reviewed by Jack Kittredge

This is an important book. Druker, a public interest attorney, sued the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1998 to get to the bottom of why and how the agency made the determination that foods derived from genetically modified organisms (GMOs) were "Generally Regarded as Safe" (GRAS) when there was clear scientific evidence that they could not be regarded as safe. The memos and internal documents he uncovered, along with the other evidence presented in this book, tell a chilling story of how business interests have corrupted our political leaders and many within the science community.

The story begins in 1996, when Druker became interested in the effort, just beginning to be commercialized, to restructure the genetic basis of the world's food supply. The decision by the FDA to allow these foods onto the US market was key to the success of this technology, and he wanted to understand how that happened. His suit resulted in the turning over of thousands of documents from the FDA. An analysis of these documents revealed that the scientists within the FDA had issued strong warnings that genetic engineering of foods entailed significant risks, and they should undergo serious long term safety tests before being released to the public. Yet those warnings had been ignored and over-ruled by the political appointees at the head of the agency.

The bulk of Druker's book is a narrative of how this new technology, guided by commercial interests and an ideological rejection of regulatory caution in favor of "regulatory relief", came to be so successful. It is written as a page-turner, a narrative telling the story of people -- how some of those people became so focused on victory that they were willing to cut corners and conceal the truth. Of course this is an old story, but it is one with important lessons for today's citizens.

The record of President George H. W. Bush's "Competitiveness Council", headed by Vice President Dan Quayle, and its efforts to sidetrack the government's regulatory scientists, is a sorry one. Yet it is the drama repeated now in virtually every gathering of establishment scientists or publication in which biotech companies advertise.

Anyone who disagrees with the dominant paradigm – in this case that GMOs are safe – is automatically driven from the community of respectable scientists. This inquisition does not proceed by burnings at the stake, but by funding cuts, rejection by peer reviewed journals, failure to get tenure, even termination. Who, in that environment, has the strength of character to continue to pursue independent studies where they may lead? Far easier to follow the herd

and either avoid the topic entirely or forego your integrity and make sure your studies don't ask the critical questions.

This is the real value of Druker's book. It shows us how science, the modern era's last remaining bastion of unchallenged authority now that church and royalty have been debunked, has itself been consolidated.

But, like all efforts to canonize doctrines that fly in the face of common sense, the dogma of 'GMOs as safe' is already collapsing. Polls show even gullible Americans are no longer fooled but want labeling so that, once labeled, they can refuse to buy them. Despite the chilling morality tale Druker recounts, the conclusion is going to be a reaffirmation of faith in people.

Less Medicine, More Health: 7 Assumptions That Drive Too Much Medical Care
by Dr. H. Gilbert Welch
published by Beacon Press, 2015
$24.95, 218 pages

reviewed by Larry Siegel

I do not read books on matters medical. Until. Having conducted more than half my life guided by the philosophy that less is more, I was drawn to Less Medicine, More Health like a bee to nectar. I was not disappointed. Fair warning: if you are comfortable with conventional medical care, with its plethora of diagnostic tests and pharmacological solutions, do not, I repeat, do not read this book. If, however, you harbor, with me (healthy) reservations that all is not healthy in the health-care world, then this book becomes a must-read. Dr. H. Gilbert Welch has turned the prevailing assumptions that drive medical care on their ears. I have the notion that were the author to appear before a jury of his peers, he would be judged a heretic and burned at the stake.

The overriding premise of the book is, in the words of the author, …as a society, we have overstated the benefits of medical care and underplayed its harms." He then proceeds to document, quite convincingly, the benefits that are overstated and the harms that are underplayed. Each chapter addresses one of seven assumptions: All risks can be lowered. It's always better to fix the problem. Sooner is always better. It never hurts to get more information. Action is always better than inaction. Newer is always better. It's all about avoiding death. No. No. No. No. No. No. And no.

Using personal observation resulting from his twenty-five years as a primary care practitioner and first-hand accounts by friends or acquaintances, the author has provided compelling arguments to support his assertions. There are (quite necessarily) statistics and references to studies, but the author's assertions are not mired in them. Quite the contrary, Welsh has injected a healthy dose of the personal in his accounts, resulting in, for this reader, a book far

more engaging and far more persuasive than one not so injected. On a deeply personal level, he writes of health issues regarding his wife, the end-of-life experiences of his father and mother, and medical matters related to himself. The book is not bereft of value judgments but they are clearly spelled out ("Medicine has been increasingly dominated by the interest of making money.")

Most importantly, H. Gilbert Welsh does not present himself as some personage on a pedestal conveying some holier-than-thou attitudes. Rather he projects himself as the guy-next-door who just happens to know something about epidemiology (probably because he is). If some notion sounds like shit, guess what, Welsh tells you it sounds like shit. Despite the seriousness of the subject matter, humorous moments appear with regularity. We learn his high school friends were Eee, JB, K-dog, and the M.A.N. I need not tell you (though I am) that this is not the fodder for books of this genre. Which makes it that much more appealing. And effective.

I may be criticized for focusing more on the author and less on the content in this review, but it is a package deal, my goal being to pique your curiosity. I urge you to read this book. If your library does not have and will not buy it, use inter-library loan (government spending at its finest). Or, buy it, with the knowledge that H. Gilbert Welch, M.D. has directed all royalties to grassroots charitable organizations in northern New Hampshire and Vermont (as he has done with his previous two books). Ask your doctor to read it. If he or she declines (or, worse, begins to criticize it), maybe it is time to find another practitioner. Kathy and I are fortunate. When, last December, we went for our annual 'physical,' our doctor (who, admittedly, has always been 'left-of-center' in his practice) sat us down and chatted for a period of time on any matters we wished to chat about. It was a check-in, not a check-up, and we left a bit confused by it all. Then we read Less Medicine, More Health and became not confused at all.

Hydroponics in Organic?

Introduction

by Steve Gilman
Interstate NOFA Policy Coordinator

Vermont organic farmer Dave Chapman has been spearheading the charge against the National Organic Program's (NOP) allowance of hydroponic crop production – growing crops in liquid nutrient solutions – to qualify for the US Department of Agriculture's organic certification label. Maintaining that organic growing is and always has been fundamentally soil-based, Dave has rallied growers, enlisted farming groups and set up farmer and consumer petitions on a website called http://www.keepthesoilinorganic.org/.

NOP Deputy Administrator Miles McEvoy maintains there's nothing in federal guidelines for organic certification that specifically excludes hydroponic or aquaponic (fish-based) production if those operations use certifiable organic inputs as the basis for their nutrient solutions. NOP has been ignoring, however, recommendations made in 2010 by the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) which voted 12 to 1 to exclude hydroponics from organic certification.

Instead of addressing the NOSB recommendations and going to final rule-making, McEvoy has simply allowed a number of the larger certifying agents to go ahead and certify hydroponic crops (while not identifying them as hydroponic).

Further, some foreign operations in Mexico, Holland and Canada are able to sell in US markets under the USDA Organic seal. As an organic soil-based greenhouse tomato grower who invested in a two-acre greenhouse operation, Dave lost his markets when Whole Foods switched suppliers to a 35 acre indoor hydroponic greenhouse tomato operation in Mexico, certified by California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF).

Responding to the mounting criticism, the NOP recently issued a notice in the Federal Register calling for nominations to a Task Force to "to assess the diversity of these soilless production practices and advise on what specific practices may or may not be supported by the current USDA regulations."

The NOP, however, restricted the nominations to "experienced hydroponic growers" only, with no representation for opposing views. When challenged the NOP declared this omission an "oversight" and issued a clarification "that our objective is to assemble a task force whose members represent a diversity of perspectives on the topic", and "who have relevant experience and knowledge that will enable them to provide valuable contributions to the process."

At this point NOFA, NOC and other groups are engaged in a search for qualified candidates willing to work on the Task Force – and to support their nominations. As this task force process will take a few years to complete, groups are also calling for a moratorium on any new hydroponic certifications until rulemaking is finalized.

Letter from David Chapman

Hello all,

It has been a year since I last sent an update. I was swept away by the farm last March, and it left me little time for working on this issue. Since then the petitions have slowly grown in numbers with no help from us, and are presently hovering around 1200 signatures. Clearly we have barely touched the organic customers yet. I confess that I was discouraged about petitions after talking with Mark Kastel from Cornucopia last Winter. He said that no number of signatures would move the NOP, and that our only real hope was political pressure from our Senators and Representatives. Our Vermont delegation has given us their support, but so far to no avail. I have heard that Cornucopia is planning to have a front page article on the hydroponic issue in their Spring newsletter.

There has been some other progress since I last wrote. The National Organic Coalition passed a resolution of support for the NOSB recommendation last year. The NOC is a broad coalition of organizations, and getting the members to agree on anything is a major victory. I have posted their resolution on the website.

I have also posted the open letter to Miles from the Agrarian Elders. Last year we managed to reach all but two of them to sign a letter of support.

I was approached by a reporter from the Wall Street Journal recently. He is interested in pursuing a story on this issue. He needs to find a good hook to sell it to his editors. Any ideas?

As many of you know, Miles McEvoy came to Vermont in February to speak at the NOFA Winter Conference. I attended two sessions with him, plus we had a chance to talk together afterwards. The take home story from it all was that Miles is NOT going to act on the NOSB recommendation. There is no change there. Miles› story is that the NOSB recommendation is too vague to make a rule. He also said several times that he is helpless to effect a change or to offer real leadership on this issue. He kept insisting that he did not have the power to block hydroponic growing from certification.

When I asked Miles for an example of how the NOSB recommendation is too vague, he said that one example is that it didn't define soil, so how would the new rule come up with that definition? I suggested that most of Europe, England, Canada, Mexico, and Japan have all successfully addressed that challenge, and that it wouldn't be too difficult to examine their language and come up with good wording. That hadn't occurred to him.

Miles acknowledged that there is a lot of opposition to "organic hydroponic" in Vermont, but he doubted that people in the rest of the country cared. What about the National Organic Coalition? What about the many people from all over the country who signed the petitions? What about the organic standards from rest of the world? What about the recommendation from the NOSB? The USDA still stands virtually alone in the world in their redefinition of organic. Perhaps Miles has been spending too much time in Washington, and has lost touch with the rest of the organic community?

Miles' response to the dissent of so many of us in the organic farming community is to form a "task force" to come up with clear language for rule making. Apparently going back to the NOSB isn't good enough. But when I pressed him on the mission of

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the task force, he said it was simply to look at the issue with fresh eyes, getting strong input from all interested parties. As it turns out, the actual announcement in the Federal Register for the task force states clearly that "Candidates for the hydroponics and aquaponics task force should have 3 years of demonstrable work experience in hydroponic and aquaponic production in any of the following roles: Producer; researcher or scientist, consumer representative; conservationist; systems designer; organic inspector; or accredited certifying agent. Candidates with demonstrable knowledge of organic production or certification procedures are preferred." Good heavens! It seems that they only want people with at least three years experience in hydroponic growing to be part of the task force. Even if they make an exception allowing someone like me, I will be a lonely minority voice on the task force, when in fact, hydroponic growing is a very minor and highly controversial part of the organic community. This is like forming a task force to consider the issue of GMOs in organic growing, and then limiting participation to Monsanto employees.

The truth is that the NOP does not agree with the NOSB recommendation, so they are creating a NEW advisory board to come up with a more acceptable answer. If the real issue was that the NOSB recommendation was too vague, Miles could simply send it back to the NOSB for clarification. The NOSB has already spent years of work on their recommendation, including a long period of public comment. The intent of their recommendation is quite clear. It is also clear that the NOP does not agree with the NOSB intent. So their solution is to create an advisory board that will come up with a more agreeable recommendation!

Having said all that, I am coming to the sad truth that we are losing the organic standards. Organic as redefined by the USDA is changing into something new. The new definition is driven by money rather than beliefs. And most sadly, this weakening of organic integrity is coming under a Democratic president (whom I have contributed to and campaigned for). I hate to say it, but we really were doing better with the NOP organic standards under Bush!

So what to do? Our farm is forced to be involved with USDA organic certification, regardless of my beliefs. But rather than it being something that I am proud of, certification is turning into another task to be completed in order to satisfy the requirements of the supermarket chains, much like GAP certification. I will continue to work to reform the organic standards, but I think that the term organic will no longer serve as a way of letting our customers know how we farm. We are NOT growing in the same way as the hydroponic growers in Mexico. And our customers want to know that. If "Certified Organic" no longer shows the difference, do we need to find another way of identifying what we do? Believe me when I say that this is not a direction that I wish to go in.

When I began farming organically in 1981, there really wasn't any economic incentive. Very few people cared about organic, even though it had been around for 35 years. The first two years at the farmer›s market, I got as much grief from customers as support. Back then organic was a way of farming that was intertwined with a way of living. Now, at the same time that organic farming succeeds wildly in the marketplace, it is abandoning some of the core principles that made it so popular. I am seeing a growing movement of farmers who are organic, but not certified. They are mostly smaller farms that are selling locally. Many of them have signed the petition. Perhaps it is time for some of us to find a new name for old practices. "Organic" is just a word. Sir Albert Howard's first two books never used the word, but the principles were already clearly established. We can keep the principles and find a new word. Certainly no matter what we do, "certified organic" is an economic powerhouse that will continue to grow.

I met a nice young guy at the conference who worked for the Organic Trade Association. He was trying to bring some of the many smaller organic farms in the country into the OTA to join in their "Got Organic" marketing campaign. But I am struck by the growing distance between my farming practices and the organic standards. If the organic standards no longer represent how we farm, why would we help promote "organic" farming to our customers? After a lifetime of believing in and supporting organic farming, I find myself wondering how I can find a new term to signify how I farm. "Organic farming" is now the property of the USDA, and it looks like they really don't care what we think about that. Have we turned the henhouse over to the foxes for supervision?

There are divided opinions about participating in the "task force". I will probably reluctantly agree to join Miles'"task force" if invited, even though I don't meet the requirements. Based on the public notice, I will not be permitted to join. Even if I AM permitted, who else has been blocked from participation? All the other organic growers. Given the radical position of allowing hydroponic growing to be certified as organic, wouldn't a more balanced approach have most of the task force consisting of representative of the majority view, with perhaps one representative of the "organic hydroponic" group?

Probably the best we can hope for from the USDA is some kind of identifying word on the organic label for "Hydroponic Organic". I think the deck is pretty well stacked against us, but I urge all of you to volunteer for the "task force" as well, even though none of you qualify as having enough "organic hydroponic" experience! This is a thankless task. I would also like to hear back from any of you with your thoughts about this (rather lengthy) letter.

Best to all,

Dave Chapman (davechapman52@gmail.com)