

Organic

I S S U E

INFORMATION FLIER – A PUBLICATION OF THE ORGANIC TRADE ASSOCIATION

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This newsletter is published by the Organic Trade Association, the North American trade association committed to the promotion of organic products in the marketplace, and the protection of the integrity of organic standards. Its membership includes nearly 1,600 producers, processors, distributors and retailers of organic foods, fibers, farm and garden supplies, and health and beauty products. OTA is your leading resource for information about this industry.

PHONE:
413-774-7511

FAX:
413-774-6432

E-MAIL:
info@ota.com

WEB SITES:
www.ota.com
www.theorganicreport.com

OR WRITE:
P.O. Box 547
Greenfield, MA
01302



www.StoreWars.org



Chewbroccoli, Tofu-D2, C3peanuts and Eggtroopers are among the characters making their debut in "Grocery Store Wars."

Just as the latest *Star Wars* episode hits movie theatres, the Organic Trade Association (OTA) released "Grocery Store Wars", an Internet-based mini-movie to promote organic products to consumers. **Just go to www.StoreWars.org.**

An organic products-based mini-movie with a *Star Wars* flavor, "Grocery Store Wars" is a creative project undertaken by OTA in collaboration with Free Range Graphics, creator of the popular and award-winning flash animation "The Meatrix" (www.TheMeatrix.com).

The goal: to reach shoppers, especially young adults, in a clever way to encourage them to try organic products when they shop.

After watching the mini-movie, shoppers are encouraged to learn more about organic agriculture and what they can do to support organic farms. They also are urged

to e-mail the link to friends, family members and acquaintances.

Simple steps to take

Links from the mini-movie offer consumers some simple steps to take to support organic agriculture. For instance, consumers are urged to start out by focusing on organic alternatives to the foods they generally eat. Then, it is suggested, add one new organic item purchase each week. With a wide range of organic products available, it is possible to find organic versions of virtually every food one might regularly eat.

Consumers are also urged to look for labels touting "organic":

- **100 Percent Organic**—may carry the "USDA Organic" seal.
- **Organic**—at least 95% of content is organic by weight (excluding water and salt) and may carry the "USDA Organic" seal.

- **Made With Organic**—at least 70% of content is organic and the front product panel may display the phrase "Made with Organic" followed by up to three specific ingredients.
- When **less than 70%** of content is organic, those ingredients that are organic may only be listed on the ingredient panel with no mention of organic on the main panel.

OTA suggests choosing organic products to minimize one's exposure to persistent organic pollutants (POPs). Studies have shown that U.S. consumers can experience up to 70 daily exposures to residues from POPs through their diets. The use of POPs is forbidden in organic agriculture. Consumers can reduce their exposure to POPs by purchasing the organic alternatives to the top ten foods

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(listed in alphabetical order) found most likely to be contaminated with POPs: 1) butter, 2) cantaloupe, 3) cucumbers/pickles, 4) meatloaf, 5) peanuts, 6) popcorn, 7) radishes, 8) spinach, 9) summer squash, and 10) winter squash. Source: *Nowhere to Hide: Persistent Toxic Chemicals in the U.S. Food Supply*, Pesticide Action Network North America, 2000.

In addition, selecting organic fruits and vegetables can be a sensible choice, particularly as studies have found conventionally grown fresh produce is three to four times more likely to contain one or more pesticides than organic produce. Government tests show that conventional apples, pears, peaches, nectarines, strawberries, cherries, celery, spinach and sweet bell peppers are the foods most likely to be contaminated with one or more pesticides. Choosing organically grown fruits and vegetables can significantly decrease the frequency and level of dietary exposure to pesticides. Source: Organic Center for Education and Promotion State of Science review, *Minimizing Pesticide Dietary Exposure Through Consumption of Organic Foods*, May 2004.

Consumers are urged to look for organic foods wherever they shop: a favorite grocery store, natural food store, or local farmers' market. And there are nonfood products made from organic cotton, wool and linen available. There are also many online sources of both organic foods and nonfoods.

Consumers unable to find the organic products they are looking for are encouraged to ask for them where they generally shop. Many store managers are willing to make special orders for their customers or help find alternatives to meet their needs.

Definition of organic

Organic refers to the way agricultural products, both food and fiber, are grown and processed. Organic production is based on a system of farming that maintains and replenishes soil fertility without the use of toxic and persistent pesticides and fertilizers. Organic foods are minimally processed without the use of artificial colors and flavors or irradiation.

Organic food is produced without the use of:

- toxic and persistent pesticides
- fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients or sewage sludge
- ionizing radiation (irradiation)
- genetic engineering.

In addition, organic meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products come from animals that are never given antibiotics or growth hormones.

True costs of food

Consumers may find that prices for organic foods may be higher than for their conventional counterparts. However, there are reasons for this.

“The price of organic food reflects, more or less, the full costs of making it. The price of chemically grown food does not. Among the costs not incorporated into the bar codes that beep their way through the check-out lane: fertilizer-contaminated groundwater, insecticide-contaminated fish, herbicide-contaminated rain, dead honeybees, poisoned wildlife, deformed frogs, eroded soil, toxic algal blooms, ozone depletion, and antibiotic resistance. These are what economists call “externalities”—the costs of an activity that are borne by others,” explains ecologist Sandra Steingraber, in an essay posted on OTA's consumer web site, The O'Mama Report. To understand more, go to http://www.theorganicreport.com/pages/322_the_ecology_of_pizza_part_2.cfm.

There is mounting evidence that if all the indirect costs of conventional food production—cleanup of polluted water, replacement of eroded soils, costs of health care for farmers and their workers—were factored in to the price of food, organic foods would cost the same or, more likely, be cheaper.

In choosing what to buy, consumers can make a difference. Farmers cannot do it alone, Prairie Writers Circle writer Jim Scharplaz explains in an article, “Biting the land that feeds us.” See www.landinstitute.org/vnews/display.v/ART/2005/03/15/4240ef7bb9c4f.

Benefits of organic agriculture

There are many benefits of organic agriculture, OTA points out. For instance:

Organic agriculture protects the health of people and the planet by reducing the overall exposure to toxic chemicals from synthetic pesticides that can end up in the ground, air, water and food supply, and that are associated with health consequences, from asthma to cancer.

Organic farming helps prevent topsoil erosion, improves soil fertility, protects groundwater, and conserves energy.

Organic methods are as efficient, economical and financially competitive as conventional methods, and better for the soil and the environment, according to The Rodale Institute's long-term Farming Systems Trial™ comparing crops under conventional and organic management.

Growing crops in healthy soils results in food products that offer healthy nutrients. There is mounting evidence that organically grown fruits, vegetables and grains may offer more of some nutrients, including vitamin C, iron, magnesium and phosphorus, and less exposure to nitrates and pesticide residues than their counterparts grown using synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. For information, see *Elevating Antioxidant Levels in Food Through Organic Farming and Food Processing*, posted at www.organic-center.org/science.htm?articleid=54.



A World of News



Organic news

- The Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service has launched a “Help Wanted: Organic Farmers” campaign to raise awareness in the farm community of the need to expand organic production and increase the number of organic farmers to satisfy growing consumer demand for organically produced food.
- House of Bread Franchising has added organic bread to its line of baked goods.
- Dominick's has remodeled its grocery store in Northfield, IL, to a Lifestyle format that features an organic food section double the size of that in a traditional Dominick's store.
- Dominican Hospital, Santa Cruz, CA, has taken steps to serve organic, sustainably grown, in-season food.
- Unilever has introduced a line of organic sauces under its Ragu brand.
- United Supermarkets, which operates 47 stores in West and North Central Texas, is adopting a new labeling system for food products that flags items according to specific attributes. Green labels indicate certified organic.

International news

- More than 26 million hectares of farmland globally are under organic management, according to *The World of Organic Agriculture 2005—Statistics and Emerging Trends*. Leading in organic area are Australia (with 11.3 million hectares), followed by Argentina (with 2.8 million hectares) and Italy (more than 1 million hectares). Meanwhile, Austria, Switzerland and Scandinavian countries lead in terms of the share of organic farmland compared to total agricultural area. Details: www.ifoam.org/Organic-Agriculture-Statistics-2005-Chapters1&2.pdf.
- In Paris, France, cafeterias in half of the preschools have received subsidies to provide organic beef burgers, potatoes, spinach and carrots, while schoolchildren through age 14 in the Second District are offered a range of organic choices, according to an article in the March 10 issue of *The New Zealand Herald*.
- The Church of England in the United Kingdom is considering adopting environmentally friendly practices, including offering organic wine and bread during communion.

Consumer trends

- A study by Mintel from 2002 to 2004 showed the number of people purchasing organic products rose to 41 percent, from 34 percent. The largest age-group jump occurred in the 18- to 24-bracket, growing from 28 percent to 47 percent. Use in the 55-

to 64-year-old group grew from 24 percent to 37 percent.

- Approximately 27 percent of U.S. consumers are eating more organic products than just a year ago, according to the *2004 Whole Foods Market Organic Food Trend Tracker* survey of 1,000 American consumers. Conducted by Synovate, the survey found that 54 percent of Americans have tried organic foods and beverages, with nearly one in 10 using organic products regularly or several times per week. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents who choose organic foods buy fresh organic fruits and vegetables.
- U.S. organic food and beverage sales totaled \$10.9 billion in 2004, an increase of 18 percent from 2003, according to the Natural Marketing Institute's (NMI) *2005 Organic Consumer Trends Report*. The study estimated that approximately 32 percent of U.S. consumers use organic products, down from 40 percent in 2003. However, consumer awareness has grown, with 90 percent of the population reporting they have heard of organic products.

Research updates

- An article, “Risk and risk management in organic agriculture: Views of organic farmers,” published in *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems* (Vol. 19, No. 4, December 2004) reported that grain, soybean and cotton farmers cited contamination of organic crops from genetically modified organisms as a major risk. Farmers also raised the need for crop insurance to reflect the higher prices received for organic crops
- A study conducted by Johns Hopkins researchers has investigated possible antibiotic resistance in airborne bacteria in a swine concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO). Their conclusions: exposure to airborne bacteria from a CAFO provides a potential pathway for transferring antibiotic-resistant bacteria from animals to humans (*Environmental Health Perspectives*, Vol. 113, No. 2, February 2005).

Quote of Note

“I believe that the economy within which farmers must operate is responsible [for destructive agricultural practices]. This economy aims only for cheap food and a quick bottom line. It forces farmers to cut corners with our soil and water, to use practices that harm the land on which agriculture depends.”

—Jim Scharplaz,
The Land
Institute's Prairie
Writers Circle,
“Biting the land
that feeds us.”

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- Taste tests found organically and conventionally grown potatoes may be told apart by flavor but only if the potato skins are left on, according to research conducted at The Ohio State University. The results were published in the *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture* (April 15, 2005).
- Research conducted by a Bangladesh scientist and funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture has developed in a garlic tablet that can be used in place of chemical pesticides to treat seeds, according to a March 7, 2005, story carried by *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Online*. The garlic tablets are used to mix a solution into which the seeds are dipped to help protect them from insects.
- Rats fed organic food were slimmer, slept better, and had stronger immune systems than those fed conventionally grown produce, according to a team of scientists from the Danish Institute of Agricultural Sciences and Dr. Kirsten Brandt of Newcastle University's School of Agriculture. Findings were reported in the Feb. 18, 2005, issue of *The Scotsman*.
- Conducting a study on uncooked poultry products, researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health found more drug-resistant, pathogenic bacteria on products where antibiotics had been used in production. Results were published online in March in *Environmental Health Perspectives*.

Environmental news

- A report, *Messages from Monitoring: Farm Workers, Pesticides, and the Need for Reform*, (www.fwjjustice.org), calls for stronger regulations concerning pesticides, including phasing out of highly toxic pesticides. Data for the report came from a new medical monitoring program on farm workers and their families in the state of Washington. The report found that pesticides are causing major nervous system changes in one in five workers who regularly handle them.
- World Wildlife Fund has released a report, *The tip of the iceberg: Chemical contamination in the Arctic*, that shows the Arctic region and its wildlife are increasingly contaminated with chemicals, pesticides, and other pollutants never used there.
- A bill was introduced in the state legislature in Connecticut to allow municipalities to restrict the cosmetic use of pesticides for lawns and turf.
- A study from the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment warns that people are damaging the planet at an unprecedented rate. Ten to 30 percent of mammal, bird and amphibian species are already threatened with extinction, and approximately 60 percent of the ecosystems that support life on Earth are being degraded or used unsustainably. Taking part in the study were 1,360 experts in 95 nations.

