

Organic



ISSUE

46

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 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



INFORMATION FLIER – A PUBLICATION OF THE ORGANIC TRADE ASSOCIATION

Studies report multiple benefits of organic products

A French researcher's review of scientific findings concerning organic products has confirmed the high nutritional quality and safety of food produced using organic practices. The literature review, prepared by Denis Lairon of the University of Aix-Marseille in France, was commissioned by the French Agency for Food Safety (AFSSA) and published in *Agronomy for Sustainable Development* (http://swroc.cfans.umn.edu/organic/ASD_Lairon_2009.pdf).

In it, Lairon notes, there are nutritional benefits to organic produce, such as more dry matter, minerals and antioxidant micronutrients than their non-organic counterparts. Meanwhile, he writes, studies show organic foods have significantly lower amounts of nitrates and residues of toxic chemical pesticides, fungicides and herbicides than do non-organic foods.

This article appeared soon after much press coverage of a British article in-press in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* that concluded there wasn't much difference in nutrient density between organic and non-organic foods. That article, however, prompted criticism that it didn't look at all the attributes of organic products and included studies dating back 50 years that did not have clear parameters on whether products examined were truly organic.



Onsite farmers' markets and organic dishes in cafeterias are becoming part of hospital offerings.



Photo courtesy Fletcher Allen Health Care.

"The broader question is about what is health and what is nutrition, and isn't it more than just nutrient density," said Marion Nestle, Paulette Goddard Professor of Nutrition, Food Studies and Public Health at New York University, in reference to the

British article, "Nutritional quality of organic foods: a systematic review." "Doesn't a food system that avoids the use of pesticides, synthetic growth hormones and antibiotics while building healthy soil and protecting natural resources promote health and nutrition? I certainly think so."

Surveys of U.S. households show that one of the top reasons cited for purchasing organic is that the products are "healthier for me and my family," but it is important to examine what consumers mean by this. As shown by findings from the 2009 U.S. *Families' Organic Attitudes & Beliefs Study*, consumers say they choose organic products due to their concerns about possible effects of toxic and synthetic pesticides, synthetic

Photo courtesy Brattleboro Memorial Hospital.



growth hormones and antibiotics used in non-organic agriculture. They also want to avoid highly processed food produced without any restrictions on additives.

One of the confounding factors in comparing the nutritional aspects of organic and conventional agriculture has been that few studies have been conducted with the scientific rigor required to show definite differences. Even the authors of the British study acknowledged that although they did not see documented significant nutrient differences between organic and conventional food, they did not rule out that possibility.

Lairon, in his review, notes that current organic agriculture practices have the potential to produce high-quality products with improved antioxidant content, and lower nitrate accumulation and toxic chemical residue levels. What is needed now, he writes, is additional research support to give organic farmers tools such as improved cultivars that are disease-resistant, to help grow organic production from a “niche” to sustainable agriculture worldwide.

Trend: Consumers continue to choose organic products as they become more available and visible in additional venues.

- Seventy-six percent of U.S. shoppers continue to purchase natural and organic foods, according to Whole Foods Market’s annual Food Shopping Trends Tracker survey carried out by Harris Interactive. Staying loyal to organic food purchasing, consumers did, however, say they are using more coupons (54 percent), with 50 percent saying they are more likely to comparison shop and 45 percent are more likely to buy private label brands. In addition, 51 percent said they now eat dinner at home more often. Those cooking at home more say they do so to save money or to ensure that they are eating healthfully.
- More than three-quarters of respondents to a survey conducted by the marketing agency Pavone indicated they prefer to purchase organic and all-natural products if these items are comparably priced with other leading brands.
- Publix, which operates 1,010 stores in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, and Tennessee, now offers a shelf tag program to help consumers find products that are organic, made with organic ingredients, natural or Earth-friendly.
- More and more hospitals and health-related operations are incorporating organic food as part of their offerings. Giving impetus to this movement has been Health Care Without Harm, an international coalition of more than 430 organizations in 52 countries



Photo: Green Mountain Coffee Roasters.



Photos courtesy Uncommon Ground.

Farm Director Natalie Pfister tends to one of Uncommon Ground’s organic raised beds.

working to transform the health care industry worldwide so that is ecologically sustainable. Since 2006, more than 250 hospitals have signed Health Care Without Harm’s Healthy Food In Health Care Pledge.



Organic tomatoes ripen in the Uncommon Ground garden.

In doing so, some hospitals are offering food to patients. Others are incorporating organic choices in their public cafeterias and restaurants. Still others are growing herbs and produce or hosting farmers’ markets on their grounds.

- Stanford Hospital & Clinics in Stanford, CA, has launched a new menu for in-patients featuring organic, locally grown, sustainable ingredients. The Farm Fresh program was developed in collaboration with Jesse Cool, a nationally recognized Northern California chef, restaurateur and food writer.
- Uncommon Ground, a Chicago restaurant, is home to the nation’s first certified organic rooftop garden. Located 30 feet above the restaurant, the 2,500-square-foot garden boasts a wide range of organic produce items from which Uncommon Ground’s chef draws.
- The North American organic coffee market topped 1.3 billion dollars in 2008, making it the single most valuable organic product imported into North America, according to data released



in July by coffee market analyst Daniele Giovannucci. According to *The North American Organic Coffee Industry Survey 2009*, approximately 89 million pounds of organic coffee were imported into the United States and Canada in 2008, a 12 percent increase from 2007, with most of the sales taking place in the United States. The 29 percent annual average growth rate for the organic category documented by Giovannucci between 2000 and 2008 dwarfs the estimated 1.5 percent projected annual growth rate of the conventional coffee industry. Currently, 40 countries account for the organic supply, with Brazil, Ethiopia, Mexico and Peru among the leaders. *The North American Organic Coffee Industry Report-2009* is available at <http://ota.com/bookstore/2.html>.

Trend: More funding and recognition become available for organic research, products and farming.

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has hired Miles McEvoy as the new Deputy Administrator of USDA's National Organic Program (NOP). His hiring came with the announcement that NOP is now an independent program area within USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) due to the increased visibility and emphasis on organic agriculture throughout the farming community. NOP has received increased funding and staffing for the new fiscal year which began Oct. 1.
- Agricultural Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan on Sept. 16 announced that \$4.8 million would be awarded to local organizations in 14 states to build community food systems and fight hunger and food insecurity as part of USDA's 'Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food' initiative. One of the organizations receiving the funding provided through USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) is Florida Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc., (FOG) in Gainesville, FL, which is being granted \$25,000. OTA Board member Marty Mesh is executive director of FOG.
- USDA on Oct. 30 announced more than \$19 million in grants to universities across the country to solve critical organic agriculture issues through the integration of research, education, and extension projects. "These grants are part of USDA's new 'Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food' initiative, which will help develop local and regional food systems and spur economic opportunity by assisting organic producers with new production and marketing practices to meet rising consumer demand," according to Agricultural Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan.
- Researchers at Iowa State University's Organic Program have received a \$599,000 grant from USDA to set up a water quality monitoring project to compare organic and conventional plots in Story and Greene Counties in Iowa. The project is designed to demonstrate the benefits and challenges to soil and water availability,

both in quality and quantity, posed by implementing certified organic practices.

- In the United Kingdom, Sarah Brown, wife of Prime Minister Gordon, had begun planting some organic vegetables in her garden at 10 Downing Street.
- The Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) has been accredited by USDA to certify farms under the National Organic Program. According to an *Associated Press* article, the department will concentrate on certifying crops the first year, and will not conduct organic certification for beef cattle or dairy operations until 2011 at the earliest. Six ODA employees are now trained and qualified to conduct organic inspections. Oregon becomes the 16th state to offer certification under NOP, joining its neighbors Washington and Idaho among others.
- The Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) is once again sponsoring a Farmer-to-Farmer Mentoring Program during 2010 to help new organic famers make the transition to organic production with help from experienced farmer mentors. Coordinating the program is Harriet Behar, MOSES organic specialist (harriet@mosesorganic.org; 888-551-4769).

Trend: Research offers positive findings about organic practices

- **Earthworm tea:** Testing food-waste teas on the growth of tomato and cucumber plants, Keith Fletcher and colleagues at Oregon Soil Corporation, along with Clive Edwards of The Ohio State University, found that vermicompost tea increased plant growth and yields by up to 50 percent. In addition, the teas successfully suppressed pests and diseases, and limited the damage caused by plant pathogens, parasitic nematodes, aphids, and spider mites. Also, the research showed the tea produced favorable



Photo courtesy: Truck Farm.

Ian Cheney (left) and Curt Ellis smile at the success of their New York City-based Truck Farm business, which they operate from the bed of their 1986 Dodge truck.



environmental soil conditions required for healthy microbial activity, made nitrogen available to the plants, and provided plant growth promoters. Made from earthworm excrement steeped in liquid, earthworm tea is a popular fertilizer used in organic agriculture.

- **Organic pork production:** Researchers from Iowa State University have published the results of a study on the costs of continuous and seasonal (both winter and summer) organic pork production. The cost of production per hundred pounds was \$63.88 for pigs from the continuous system compared with \$59.45 for the seasonal system, a difference of \$4.43 per hundred pounds or \$11.09 per market pig. Seasonal systems costs are broken down further. See: <http://www.ipic.iastate.edu/reports/01swinereports/asl-1784B.pdf>.
- **'Killer spices':** Researchers led by Murray Isman at the University of British Columbia in Canada have found that essential oil pesticides, also dubbed killer spices, show promise as an environmentally friendly alternative to conventional pesticides while posing less risk to human and animal health. These new pesticides, generally a mixture of tiny amounts of two to four different spices diluted in water, sometimes kill insects outright, and others repel insects. Some spice-based commercial products are now being used by organic farmers.

Trend: Practices not allowed in organic production continue to be linked to environmental and health concerns.

- **Disappearance of bees:** A comprehensive report released by Buglife in the United Kingdom shows neonicotinoid pesticide imidacloprid damages the health and lifecycle of bees. Comparatively new synthetic chemicals related to nicotine that are toxic to insects, neonicotinoid pesticides are used as a coating for agricultural seeds and in potted plants. According to Buglife, the chemicals spread throughout the plant and into the nectar and pollen that the bees then eat (www.buglife.org.uk). Meanwhile, a new study published by USDA's Agricultural Research Service and university scientists suggests that a higher rate of infection from pathogens, such as viruses, bacteria, and fungi, has one of the strongest link to the recent disappearance of honey bees. The findings were published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (www.pnas.org).
- **Atrazine contamination:** The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) in August released a report entitled "Poisoning the Well: How the EPA is Ignoring Atrazine Contamination in Surface and Drinking Water in the Central United States." According to the report, inadequate monitoring systems and

weak regulations have led to extremely high levels of atrazine in watersheds and drinking water. In response, NRDC recommended the use of atrazine be phased out, the adoption of farming techniques that minimize the use of atrazine, and consumers' use of home water filtration systems.

- **Pesticides on peaches:** An Aug. 12, 2009, article in the *Chicago Tribune* reported that preliminary 2009 USDA tests show more than 50 pesticide compounds on conventionally produced domestic and imported peaches. Five of the compounds exceeded limits set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and six of the compounds are not approved for use on peaches in the United States.
- **Threats to amphibians:** The insecticides chlorpyrifos and endosulfan used in the fertile Central Valley of California negatively affect amphibians that breed in the Sierra Nevada Mountains to the east, according to a study published in the August 2009 issue of *Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry*. Laboratory testing by Donald W. Sparling and Gary M. Fellers examined how the insecticides affect two frog species at environmentally realistic concentrations. Endosulfan was more toxic than chlorpyrifos to both species, but each has detrimental effects, the study showed.
- **Vulnerability to pesticides:** Children age 7 and under are more susceptible to the toxic effects of certain pesticides than are adults or older children, according to a study published online June 9, 2009, in *Environmental Health Perspectives*. In the study, researchers at the University of California at Berkeley discovered that younger children lack sufficient levels of a key enzyme that protects against the effects of certain pesticides. The enzyme, called paraoxonase, plays a key role in helping the body neutralize and eliminate organophosphate pesticides. ♦



Cabbages thrive in an organically managed field.

To view this issue electronically, go to <http://www.ota.com/news/whatsnews.html>.