



ISSUE

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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 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.

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Egg safety an integral process for organic production

Egg safety is an emerging issue for the organic industry due to concerns raised by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that outdoor access for organic poultry, as required by national organic standards, is incompatible with its 2009 rule addressing food safety for eggs.

In adopting its egg safety rule, FDA sought to reduce the incidence of *Salmonella* in eggs. One of its strategies centered on limiting the exposure of poultry to potential disease vectors, such as wild birds, wild animals, rodents and flies. It also focused on prevention measures both in poultry houses and the adjacent grounds. The NOP requirement for outdoor access was expressly considered in this rulemaking.

An Organic Trade Association (OTA) review of 13 peer-reviewed U.S. studies and ten peer-reviewed studies from abroad concerning the impact of different housing systems on egg safety has shown there is no general consensus demonstrating the superiority of one housing situation over another regarding food safety and egg quality. Also, there is no scientific evidence that chickens with outdoor access are more susceptible to *Salmonella* than poultry raised exclusively indoors. Instead, a key determinant in susceptibility appears to be the actual management of the facility.

In late July, OTA and representatives from six organic egg-producing companies representing over 3 million layers met with FDA officials, as well as representatives of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Organic Program, and members of Congress, to exchange information about the compatibility of FDA's egg safety rule and organic standards. In total, the companies taking part represented the majority of all organic laying hens in the United States. In these meetings, these producers delivered messages about their outstanding food safety track record and measures they have in place.

Among the messages OTA members shared was the

requirement under NOP regulations that all chickens have access to the outdoors, and that the producers not only support outdoor access but know how to do this safely. Noting that consumers expect outdoor access for all organic livestock, OTA members made clear that they support a strong food safety system and FDA's egg safety rule. Most importantly, it was stressed that organic egg producers have exemplary audit systems in place and an outstanding food safety record.

"Consumers view organic as the ultimate standard. They expect that chickens raised organically get outside and have the ability to exhibit their natural behaviors," said Jesse Laflamme, co-owner of Pete and Gerry's Organic Eggs in Monroe, NH. "Food safety is a management

issue. There is no correlation between outdoor access and food safety issues."

According to Michael Cox, president of the Arkansas Egg Company of Summers, AR, "The organic industry as a whole is making great strides in the realm of food safety through continuous improvement of sanitation, training, and

understanding the science behind food safety... Consumers are thrilled that organic birds are raised outside. FDA's focus is on safe food, and that is what organic egg producers like us can deliver."

David Will, general manager of Chino Valley Ranchers in Arcadia, CA, agreed. "We meet, if not exceed, the requirements of the Egg Safety Rule. We test to an even greater degree than the rule calls for."

Gwendolyn Wyard, OTA's Associate Director for Organic Standards & Industry Outreach, noted that Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) such as sanitation, pest management, product traceability and contamination prevention are not only required by the organic regulations and verified through third-party inspections, they are, in fact, the foundation of organic production and handling systems since certified operators are required to take a preventive rather than reactive approach to pest and disease control. ■



Photos courtesy of Pete & Gerry's Organic Eggs



OTA Board updates its position on GMOs.

The Organic Trade Association's (OTA's) Board of Directors in July reviewed, revised and voted to adopt an updated policy position on GMOs. The following statements are included in this new position, posted on OTA's website (<http://www.ota.com/pp/regulatory/OTA-Position-on-GMOs.html>).

- OTA shall continue to call for a moratorium on GMOs in agriculture. OTA shall adopt policy positions that uphold the long-term goal of a moratorium on GMOs. Until that goal is reached:
- OTA supports mandatory labeling of all agricultural GMOs and their products.
 - OTA shall also adopt policies that address the problems the industry shall face as a result of continued GMO deregulation.
 - OTA shall bolster organic as the gold standard by advocating for continuous improvement of the organic practice standard.
 - OTA shall advocate for policies that assign the cost of contamination prevention and market loss to the developers of GMO technology.
 - OTA recognizes the critical role of seed in the supply chain and shall advocate for policies that secure a seed supply to the organic sector that is free of GMOs.
 - OTA shall educate the public and policy makers regarding the environment and health concerns emerging with GMOs. ■

March to seek mandatory GE labeling

A 313-mile march on the White House is being planned by organic companies in October to raise consumer awareness and pressure the U.S. government on the lack of labeling of foods made with genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The GMO Right2Know March: a Mobilization for GMO Labeling (<http://www.right2knowmarch.org/>) will kick off at the United Nations headquarters in New York City on Oct. 1, and will feature daily events in cities along the East Coast before ending at the White House in D.C. on Oct. 16, which is World Food Day.

Organic companies supporting the march include United Natural Foods Inc. (UNFI), Organic Valley, Nature's Path Foods, Stonyfield Farm, Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps, Kamut International, and Nutiva Rapunzel. Industry groups supporting the march include the Organic Trade Association, National Cooperative Grocers Association, Independent Natural Food Retailers Association, International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements, Non-GMO Project, Center for Food Safety, Food Democracy Now, The Organic Center, Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance, and the Northeast Organic Farmers Association of New York.

A recent MSNBC Health poll revealed that consumers show overwhelming support for labeling of GE foods (http://health.newsvine.com/_question/2011/02/25/6131050-do-you-believe-genetically-modified-foods-should-be-labeled).

Trend: Efforts are under way to advance organic agriculture.

- **Organic apprenticeship program:** California's Division of Apprenticeship Standards, College of Marin, and Fresh Run Farm offer students the first-of-its-kind apprenticeship program for organic farming in the United States. The Organic Farming and Gardening Apprenticeship Program will teach students about responsible farming practices including landscape ecology, composting and fertility management, as well as the business side of farming. Fresh Run Farm offers 22.5 acres of certified organic crop land, while the College of Marin's Indian Valley Organic Farm & Garden includes a 5.8-acre demonstration farm and garden.
- **Fostering biodiversity:** The U.S. Agency for International Development, Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, and Fair Trade USA are partnering to promote biodiversity, conservation, and environmental education about Brazil's coffee-growing communities. The new initiative, the Sustainable Sourcing Partnership Project, aims to increase producer organizations' understanding of and compliance with Fair Trade environmental standards and Brazilian environmental law. The project also supports producer organizations interested in organic production and promotes marketplace access for their products.
- **Research grants:** The Organic Farming Research Foundation

(OFRF) has awarded 314 grants totaling nearly \$2.7 million as it begins its 21st year. Most recently, OFRF awarded seven new grants totaling \$75,000. The projects, in California, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Dakota, Washington, and Ottawa, Canada, include breeding an "organic-ready" corn that resists GMO pollen and developing biological control for the apple flea weevil plaguing Michigan's organic apple growers. OFRF funds both research and educational projects. The next deadline for grant consideration will be Nov. 15.

- **Dairy at Rodale:** Rodale Institute has set aside over 100 acres to transition a neighbor's 80-head dairy herd to produce certified organic milk at the end of one year. At the same time, the herd owners will be transitioning pastureland to be certified organic after three years.
- **Your 2 Cents:** The Your 2 Cents program, an innovative initiative developed by the Rodale Institute, aims to provide scholarships to students pursuing degrees in sustainable agriculture, assist new organic farmers with start-up costs, create job opportunities for veterans by connecting them with organic farmers in need of assistance, and facilitate research comparing the nutrition of food produced organically with food produced using conventional methods. Funding for the Your 2 Cents program comes from participating companies, which donate two cents per case of goods sold to the Your 2 Cents fund. Uncle Matt's Organic signed



up as the program's inaugural partner.

- **My Organic Nation:** My Organic Nation (www.myorganicnation.org) has been launched by Nicole Mitchell, founder of M7 Marketing Inc., as a non-profit resource to help educate and build relationships among producers and consumers of organic foods. Its mission is to serve as a common ground and connection point for organic producers, retailers and consumers who have an interest in the production, marketing and consumption of organic foods.

Trend: Research shows benefits linked to organic practices.

- **Organic practices and poultry:** A study by researchers led by Amy R. Sapkota of the Maryland Institute for Applied Environmental Health, University of Maryland College Park, School of Public Health, has found lower prevalence of antibiotic-resistant *Enterococci* on U.S. conventional poultry farms that transitioned to organic practices. The study, published online Aug. 10, 2011, in *Environmental Health Perspectives*, concludes that the voluntary removal of antibiotics from large-scale U.S. poultry farms that transition to organic practices is associated with a lower prevalence of antibiotic-resistant and multi-drug resistant *Enterococcus*.
- **Salmonella in poultry:** Scientists at the University of Georgia's Center for Food Safety have published a paper comparing the incidence of *Salmonella* in organic chickens compared to conventional chickens raised by the same company in the same area in North Carolina. The team also analyzed the antibiotic-resistance status of 70 of the *Salmonella* isolates. Their findings showed 38.8 percent of conventional birds were infected with *Salmonella*, while only 5.6 percent of organic birds were infected. Even more remarkably, 39.7 percent of *Salmonella* isolates from conventional birds were resistant to six antibiotics, while zero percent of isolates from organic chickens were resistant to these six. The paper appeared in the journal *Foodborne Pathogens and Disease*, Vol. 7, Number 11, 2010.
- **Organic dairy farming:** Research published by ecologists at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, in the *Journal of Applied Ecology* (Vol. 48: 561-569) has shown that organic dairy farming benefits insect biodiversity, insect-flower interactions and pollination of wild plants. The study, conducted in Ireland, looked at the effects of organic versus conventional farming on insect-flower interaction network size and structure, bee and hoverfly diversity, and pollination in ten pairs of organic and conventional dairy farms.
- **Outdoor living for cows:** Computer simulation studies by USDA researchers led by Al Rotz suggest that dairy cows living outdoors year-round may leave a smaller ecological footprint than cows raised inside. The model findings, published in the May-June 2011 issue of *Agricultural Research*, indicated that keeping dairy cows outdoors all year lowered levels of ammonia emission by about 30 percent. In addition, total emissions for the greenhouse gases methane, nitrous oxide and carbon dioxide were eight percent lower than in a high-production confinement system. Meanwhile, fields formerly used for feed crops, when converted to perennial grassland for grazing, experienced carbon sequestration levels climbing from zero to as high as 3,400 pounds per acre.

Trend: Increasingly, consumers choose organic.

- **Reasons for buying organic:** *Better Homes and Gardens'* 2010 Food Factor Survey, conducted among more than 3,600 women across the United States, showed the primary reasons why U.S. women buy organic food are health (73 percent) and safety (66 percent). Women in the survey also were willing to pay a 27 percent premium for an organic product. Another finding was that women age 50 and over are especially driven by socio-political benefits of organic agriculture.
- **Pregnant women and organic:** A recent study from the Norwegian Institute of Public Health found that organic food is widely used among pregnant women in Norway across different groups. Almost one in ten pregnant women consumes organic food regularly, and organic eggs and vegetables were most often selected. Demographically, they generally had more than four years of higher education or less than 12 years of education. Many were under age 25 or over 40 years old. Income had no correlation with those who purchased organic foods.
- **Enticing food labels:** The annual Eco Pulse survey of 1,013 shoppers conducted by Shelton Group found that products labeled "100 percent natural" and "Organic" were the leading ways to get people's attention. Asked "Which is the best description to read on a food label?," 25 percent chose "100 percent natural" or "All natural." This was closely followed by "USDA Certified organic" or "Organic," chosen by 24 percent of respondents. Another 17 percent opted for "Grown in the USA," and 15 percent chose "No artificial flavors & preservatives." Compared to the annual survey conducted a year ago, the "natural" label lost ground this year, while USDA Certified Organic moved up five percentage points.
- **Organic preferred:** Fifty-eight percent of respondents to a Thomsen Reuters-NPR health poll indicated they prefer organic over conventionally produced foods. The percentage was higher for young consumers and those with more education. For instance, 63 percent of those under age 35 and 64 percent with at least a bachelor's degree prefer organic products. Of those who do choose organic products, 36 percent said they choose organic in an effort to support local farmers' markets, while 34 percent cited their wish to avoid exposure to toxins.
- **Shopping for Health:** Findings in the Shopping for Health 2011 study released by the Food Marketing Institute and *Prevention* revealed 45 percent of shoppers bought organic food in a six-month period, up from 40 percent when the annual online survey was conducted the previous year. Organic fruits and vegetables led the organic items purchased, with dairy and eggs surpassing cereal/bread/pasta, and meat/poultry edging past packaged foods.
- **Traceability:** Petaluma Poultry has adopted the HarvestMark program, the fresh food traceability solution from YottaMark Inc.

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This program empowers consumers to use their smartphones to trace, in-store, the origins of the food they purchase. To do so, consumers download the free HarvestMark App, available for the iPhone and Android, to instantly Trace Our Tracks™, to see where the chicken in the packages came from. Petaluma Poultry's Rosie® Organic Free Range Chicken is the first to use this tool.

- **Organic apples:** USDA's Economic Research Service has completed a report on apples entitled *Characteristics of Conventional and Organic Apple Production in the United States*. The 28-page report was posted July 2011 (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/FTS/2011/07Jul/FTS34701/FTS34701.pdf>). It found that while U.S. acreage and production of apples has declined in recent years, consumer demand has spurred a fast-growing organic apple sector, with apples managed organically accounting for about six percent of total U.S. apple acreage.

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

- **Pesticides' effects on male hormones:** Tests on 37 widely used pesticides revealed that 30 of them blocked or mimicked male hormones, according to scientists at the University of London's Centre for Toxicology led by Professor Andreas Kostenkamp. "Our results indicate that systematic testing for anti-androgenic activity of currently used pesticides is urgently required," the scientists wrote in the study published online Feb. 10 in *Environmental Health Perspectives*. Sixteen of the 30 had no known hormonal activity until the tests were conducted, and are not included in a screening program being undertaken by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Most of the newly discovered hormone disruptors are fungicides applied to fruit and vegetable crops, including strawberries and lettuce. Traces of the chemicals remain in foods. Of the compounds tested, the most potent in terms of blocking androgens was the insecticide fenitrothion, an organophosphate insecticide used on orchard fruits, grains, rice, vegetables and other crops.
- **Prenatal pesticide exposure:** Three independent studies published online in *Environmental Health Perspectives* found that children whose mothers are exposed to common agricultural pesticides are more likely to experience a range of deleterious effects in their cognitive development, including lower IQ, as well as impaired reasoning and memory. Organic agriculture prohibits the use of these pesticides, and all other toxic and persistent chemicals. The peer-reviewed studies, all funded by grants from the National Institutes of Health, found links between delayed cognitive development and both dietary and environmental exposure to some of the most widely used agricultural pesticides. The studies examined individuals from a range of ethnic backgrounds, and those who lived in both rural and urban settings. Links to the studies are included in OTA's press release posted on its website (http://www.organicnewsroom.com/2011/04/studies_identify_link_between.html).
- **Excessive nitrogen:** A major new study, the European Nitrogen Assessment, has found that nitrogen pollution costs each person in Europe around £130-£650 (\$214 to \$1,070) a year. The study, carried out by 200 experts from 21 countries and 89

organizations, estimates that the annual cost of damage caused by nitrogen across Europe is £60 billion to £280 billion (\$100 billion to \$456 billion), more than double the extra income gained from using nitrogen fertilizers in European agriculture (<http://www.nine-esf.org/ENA-Book>).

- **Roundup and birth defects:** Earth Open Source in June 2011 posted a 52-page report entitled "Roundup and birth defects: Is the public being kept in the dark?" co-authored by a group of international scientists and researchers. The report, which includes 359 citations to science papers, magazine and web articles, and other reports, cites documentation showing that industry and EU regulators knew as long ago as the 1980s and 1990s that the herbicide Roundup (glyphosate) caused birth defects in experimental animals, sometime even at low doses (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/57277946/RoundupandBirthDefects5>).
- **Bt toxin in human blood:** A study accepted for publication in the journal *Reproductive Toxicology* conducted by scientists at the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University of Sherbrooke Hospital Centre in Quebec, Canada, reports the presence of Bt toxin, widely used in GE crops, in human blood. Although scientists and multinational corporations promoting GE crops have maintained that Bt toxin poses no danger to human health as the protein, Cry1Ab, breaks down in the human gut, the findings from this study show this does not happen, and instead found it circulating in the blood of pregnant and non-pregnant women. The study also detected the toxin in fetal blood. Cry1Ab toxin was detected in 93 percent and 80 percent of maternal and fetal blood samples, respectively, and in 69 percent of tested blood samples from non-pregnant women.
- **Monarch Butterflies' Decline:** A new study raises concerns about the effects of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) on monarch butterflies. The use of crops genetically engineered to resist pesticide applications has resulted in the decline of milkweed, a weed that is key to monarch butterflies' survival. Monarch butterflies depend on access to milkweed to lay their eggs and to feed their larvae. According to the new study, published in the journal *Insect Conservation and Diversity*, this decline may be a contributing factor in the decline of the monarch butterfly population.
- **Herbicide resistance:** At least 21 weed species have developed resistance to the herbicide glyphosate (Roundup) and some weeds are also developing resistance to alternative herbicides, according to articles published in the May-June 2011 issue of *Weed Science* (<http://allenpress.com/publications/journals/wees>). For example, researchers at the University of Georgia in Tifton found multiple resistance in Palmer amaranth to glyphosate and the herbicide pyriithiobac. In addition, research confirmed resistance of Italian ryegrass in hazelnut orchards in Oregon to glufosinate ammonium, a non-selective broad-spectrum herbicide. Still another study confirmed the first documented glyphosate-resistant Johnson grass biotype in West Memphis, AR. "The herbicide resistance issue is becoming serious," wrote William K. Vencill, journal editor, adding, "It is spreading out beyond where weed scientists have seen it before." ■