

# Organic



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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 more than 1,700 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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## 2008 headlines reflect strong interest in organic sector

By Barbara Haumann

During 2008, interest in organic agriculture and products continued to grow. From additional launches of private label organic products, to establishments serving organic food at hotels and airports, consumers are finding more organic products where they shop and eat. Meanwhile, more campuses, producers and manufacturers are choosing organic production practices.

The following summarizes news highlights noted during 2008.

### Trend: Consumers find more organic products offered by retailers, dining halls and other venues.

#### In university food service:

- Dining halls at the University of Colorado in Boulder are adding local and organic produce as well as other organic products.
- Dining services at the University of Arizona offer organic products, including meat.
- Students at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute have opened the Terra Café featuring locally grown and organic food.

#### At eating establishments:

- Good Stuff Eatery, opening on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., offers organic ingredients.
- Organic to Go has opened a freestanding café at San Diego International Airport. The certified organic retailer with fast-casual cafés and catering services also has contracted to build three operations in D.C. and one in Arlington, VA.

- Pizza Fusion has received organic certification for its Fort Lauderdale, FL, site from certifier Quality Assurance International, and said it would seek third-party organic certification for all of its restaurants.
- Pizza Hut, Inc., has introduced pizza made with organic and all-natural ingredients.

#### Actions by retailers:

- Supervalu, Inc., has launched a Wild Harvest organic and natural private label brand nationwide priced at a 15 percent discount to branded organic and natural products.
- United Grocers has introduced Natural Directions, a line of natural and organic food products, in independent grocery stores throughout western United States.
- Safeway, Inc., has formed partnerships to sell its 'O Organics' line of organic foods and beverages in Asia and South America and has arranged with distributor Sysco Corp. to sell the products to foodservice outlets. Since its launch in 2006, the line has grown to 300 items.
- The Better Living Brands Alliance—a consortium of food and beverage manufacturing, marketing and distribution companies—is marketing 'O Organics' to other retailers.
- BJ's Wholesale Club, Inc., offers additional organic products under the Rosano and Earth Pride private labels.

- Roundy's launched an ad campaign touting its private label Roundy's Organic and Roundy's Select lines.
- Raley's and Price Chopper supermarkets now offer Full Circle organic products distributed by Topco Associates.
- Elzinga & Hoeksema Greenhouses in Kalamazoo, MI, received organic certification for its four-acre greenhouse supplying organic vegetable and herb plants to Meijer stores.

#### At hotels and vacation spots:

- Shangri-La Hotel and Resort in Bonita Springs, FL, has achieved organic certification for its 8.1 acres of property and is undergoing the organic certification process for its hotel restaurant.
- Hilton Hotels has launched an organic and sustainable food sourcing policy. The new Eat Naturally catering program at Hilton and Doubletree Hotels in Southern California focuses on offering fresh, local, organic food.
- Wyndham Hotels and Resorts now serves organic and Fair Trade Certified™ Starbucks™ coffees in its hotel restaurants, cafés, bars, and as part of its room service.
- Vail Resorts, Inc., offers organic dairy products at on-mountain eating venues at its five ski resorts—Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge and Keystone in Colorado, and Heavenly in California and Nevada.

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- Barr Mansion in Austin, TX, has become certified organic by Oregon Tilth as an event center and food service venue.

**Other venues:**

- Meals at the Democratic National Convention in Denver, CO, included organic and locally ingredients. Also, 15,000 volunteers at the convention received fanny packs made in the United States from organic cotton. The Republican National Convention also incorporated organic products.
- Efforts to provide school children with healthier food choices continue as companies like California-based YoNaturals stock school vending machines with organic and all-natural snacks.
- The Council on the Environment of New York City each summer conducts a program, "Learn It, Grow It, Eat It," with teenagers from the Bronx. The students are hired to grow organic fruits and vegetables, which they then sell at a Youth Market.

**Trend: Increasingly, consumers are including organic products in their purchases.**

- Research from The Natural Marketing Institute reveals that consumers are increasingly incorporating organic into their lifestyles. Total household penetration across six product categories has risen from 57 percent in 2006 to 59 percent in 2007. The research also showed that the number of core users has increased from 16 percent in 2006 to 18 percent in 2007.
- Consumer interest in buying environmentally friendly products and organic food remains high among Northwest natural and organic product consumers despite tough economic times and rising food and energy prices. Recent market research by Mambo Sprouts Marketing showed that consumers in Washington and Oregon see buying 'green' as a priority. More than nine in ten consumers (92 percent) reported buying the same (54 percent) or more (38 percent) environmentally friendly products compared to the prior six months. Rather than cutting out such products, consumers report they are using money-saving strategies, such as using coupons, stocking up on sales, and cooking meals at home.
- Sixty-nine percent of U.S. adult consumers buy organic products at least occasionally, according to The Hartman Group report, *The Many Faces of Organic 2008*. Furthermore, about 28 percent of organic consumers (about 19 percent of adults) are weekly organic users. Organic categories of high interest to consumers are dairy, fruit and vegetables, prepared foods, meats, breads and juices.
- A Harris Interactive™ online survey conducted for Whole Foods Market during August showed that despite rising food prices, 79 percent of consumers do not want to compromise on food quality and 70 percent continue to buy the same amount of natural and organic foods. Two in three adults prefer to buy natural or organic products if prices are comparable to those of non-organic products. Overall, the survey found that 74 percent of adults purchase natural or organic foods, with 20 percent saying that more than one-fourth of all the groceries they buy are natural or organic.

**Trend: Campuses and universities announce efforts to encourage organic farming practices.**

- The student-run Environmental Action Team at the University of Nevada in Reno this summer started to farm using organic practices on three-quarters of an acre.
- California State University at Fresno was to receive a \$250,000 three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Hispanic-Serving Institute Education Grant Program to establish Fresno State's organic farming initiative. Currently, the student-operated Rue and Gwen Gibson Farm Market sells organic vegetables and greenhouse-grown organic herb and vegetable seedlings to home gardeners.
- The University of California has designated 10 acres at its Kearney Research and Extension Center for organic research.
- The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets granted Alfred State College \$29,320 to facilitate a collaboration between its dining services and local farmers. The Center for Organic and Sustainable Agriculture will provide technical, agricultural and marketing support to participating farmers.
- University of New Hampshire researchers have received a three-year \$380,000 USDA grant to study the university's organic research dairy as a sustainable closed agro-ecosystem. The grant will be used to study whether closing energy and nutrient cycles can help small dairy farms in the Northeast survive economic challenges.
- Aurora Organic Dairy and Colorado State University (CSU) have announced plans to collaborate in a multi-year master research agreement with several of the University's colleges. The collaboration, made possible through a three-year \$500,000 grant from the Aurora Organic Dairy Foundation, will focus on animal welfare, veterinary medicine, and soil fertility for organic pasture development in the Rocky Mountain West region.
- With increased legislative funding, the University of Minnesota's resources for organic farming include a faculty position at the College of Food Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences on organic and sustainable food systems; funding for two or more graduate assistantships focused on organic research; and a faculty position at the Southwest Research and Outreach Center in Lamberton, MN, centered on the study of organic crops.
- Organic Valley has donated \$50,000 to the University of Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy and Livestock Farmers through its Farmers Advocating for Organics Fund.

**Trend: States, farms and companies take additional steps to encourage organic operations and increase organic production practices.**

- To demonstrate that organic lawn care techniques are effective, SafeLawns.org has undertaken a two-year project to convert a section of lawn of more than four acres to organic practices at the National Mall in Washington, D.C. SafeLawns.org plowed a section of the lawn, added compost, and other natural soil amendments and fertilizers, then reseeded it. Partnering in the project, the National Park Service and Environmental Protection Agency will evaluate the organically maintained area to see how it performs in comparison to adjacent plots.
- Inmates at the Cook County Jail in Chicago, IL, can participate in the jail's garden project, which produces an average of 8,000 to 10,000 pounds of produce per season. The project has supplied over 500 tons of fresh produce to area homeless shelters and non-

profit organizations since its inception. Increasingly, efforts are being made to incorporate organic management practices.

- New York State Agriculture Commissioner Patrick Hooker announced the formation of the New York State Organic Advisory Task Force to advise how the state can help organic farmers meet increased consumer demand for organic products.
- Herbruck Poultry Ranch, Inc., Saranac, Michigan, is spending \$13 million to expand its organic egg operation by 300,000 hens this year. The expansion adds an organic egg production and processing facility.
- A \$3.6 million slaughtering, meat processing and retail facility is being built in Athol, MA, to replace the Adams Farm slaughterhouse that burned down in 2006. The new facility will process certified organic and USDA natural meat.
- Aurora Organic Dairy is undertaking an initiative to measure and reduce its carbon footprint across its products' lifecycle, from cattle feed to cartons in retail dairy cases. The newly established Aurora Organic Dairy Foundation is providing more than \$320,000 to fund a long-term research partnership with the Center for Sustainable Systems, University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and Environment, to conduct lifecycle and sustainability research at Aurora Organic Dairy's facilities.
- The McEwen Ranch in Burns, Oregon, has received organic certification for over 150,000 acres. Managers of the ranch have negotiated an exclusive deal for Dakota Beef to buy all of the cattle the ranch produces.
- New York Agricultural Land Trust, a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting land for the future of farming in New York, has received contributions from Organic Valley and Byrne Dairy to support its communication and outreach plan.
- \* The Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) is partnering with Stretch Island Fruit Company to invest \$450,000 over the next three years in organic fruit research and education products to help growers increase the supply of organic fruit. OFRF awarded a record \$250,000 in organic project grants in 2008.
- An eco-industrial park at the Port of Columbia, Dayton, WA, aims to recruit organic and artisan food processing companies to market products under the Blue Mountain Station brand.
- Uncle Matt's Fresh, the organic produce arm of Uncle Matt's Organic, now manages over 1,000 acres of citrus groves that include 15 different family-owned farms.
- MicroCredit-NH, the micro-business development program of the New Hampshire Community Loan Fund, administers loans for the Organic Conversion Fund. With Stonyfield Farm and Organic Valley Family of Farms, the program assists New Hampshire dairy farmers in converting to organic production.
- The Coles County Board in Illinois in August took action to establish an enterprise zone with a site for a Family Farmers Meat processing plant. Work at the 10-acre site of the 33,000-square-foot plant, which will process organically raised and conventionally raised livestock, is scheduled to begin in 2009.

### Trend: More research looks at organic products and farming.

- **Alleviating global warming:** Research at The Rodale Institute has shown that organic practices can remove about 7,000 pounds of carbon dioxide from the air and sequester it in an acre of farmland per year. Thus, Rodale estimates that if all 434 million

acres of U.S. cropland were converted to organic practices, it would be the equivalent of eliminating 217 million cars—nearly 88 percent of all cars in the country today and more than a third of all the automobiles in the world.

- **Protecting soil and wildlife:** A four-year study by the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology found that organic agriculture is helpful in protecting soils and conserving wildlife. The study, representing the work of over 400 scientists and 30 governments and NGOs, grew out of discussions by the World Bank and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations about the need for an international assessment of the role of agricultural knowledge, science, and technology in 'reducing hunger and poverty, improving rural livelihoods, and facilitating environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable development' ([www.agassessment.org](http://www.agassessment.org)).
- **Hope for Africa:** Study results released by the United Nations (U.N.) in October suggest that organic farming offers Africa the most hope for feeding its people. Findings from research conducted by the U.N. Environment Programme show that organic practices are raising yields, improving the soil, and boosting the income of Africa's small farmers. See [http://www.unep.ch/etb/publications/insideCBTF\\_OA\\_2008.pdf](http://www.unep.ch/etb/publications/insideCBTF_OA_2008.pdf).
- **Comparable yields:** Research conducted jointly by scientists at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the agricultural consulting firm AGSTAT published in the March-April 2008 *Agronomy Journal* showed that organic crop rotations had similar yields to their conventional counterparts. The research compared six cropping systems (three cash grain and three foraged-based crops), which ranged from diverse organic systems to conventional systems. Results of this multi-year study found that forage crops produced using organic methods yielded as much or more dry matter as their conventional counterparts with quality sufficient to produce as much milk as conventional systems. The results of the study also revealed that organic corn, soybeans, and winter wheat produced 90 percent as well as the same crops produced in a conventional manner ([www.newswise.com/institutions/view/?id=1622](http://www.newswise.com/institutions/view/?id=1622)).
- **More nutrients:** A report, "New Evidence Confirms the Nutritional Superiority of Plant-Based Organic Foods," jointly produced by

### Quote of Note

"My first priority when buying food is organic and local. Next comes organic from anywhere. Last is chemically grown food from anywhere else but local. I never buy locally grown food from people that poison me, my family and the other creatures that live around us. I try not to buy chemically grown food from farms that poison people and wildlife in other places. Organic growers need our support wherever they are. They cannot compete against heavily subsidized chemically grown food and expect to be anything but a niche market so long as the subsidies continue and we don't buy organic."

—Sharon Labchuk,  
Agriculture Critic,  
Green Party of  
Canada

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Drawing by Richard DiMatteo

## Organic in the News

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The Organic Center, the University of Florida Department of Horticulture and Washington State University, provides evidence that organic foods contain, on average, 25 percent higher concentration of 11 nutrients than their conventional counterparts. The report was based on estimated differences in nutrient levels across 236 comparisons of organically and conventionally grown foods ([www.organic-center.org/reportfiles/5367\\_Nutrient\\_Content\\_SSR\\_FINAL\\_V2.pdf](http://www.organic-center.org/reportfiles/5367_Nutrient_Content_SSR_FINAL_V2.pdf)).

- **Children and organic diets:** A study published in the April 2008 issue of *Environmental Health Perspectives* showed that children who substituted organic fruits and vegetables for conventional equivalents had lower concentrations of organophosphorus pesticides in their urine. The study, which involved children ages 3-11 conducted over four seasons in the Seattle, WA area, supported findings that dietary intake of pesticides represents the major source of exposure for infants and children.
- **Ecological virtues:** A study in the March 6 online edition of *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* showed that fertilizing apple trees with synthetic chemicals produced more adverse environmental effects than feeding them with organic manure or alfalfa. Stanford University graduate student Sasha B. Kramer and colleagues showed that the use of organic versus chemical fertilizers helped reduce nitrogen pollution.
- **Pasture-fed cows:** Organic cows grazing on fresh pasture produce milk with higher levels of antioxidants and beneficial fatty acids

such as conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) and omega-three fatty acids, according to research findings from Newcastle University in the United Kingdom published online in the *Journal of Science of Food and Agriculture*. Part of the ongoing cross-European Quality Low Input Food project, the study involved 25 farms across the United Kingdom and looked at three different farming systems: conventional high input, organically certified, and non-organic sustainable (low-input).

- **More antioxidants:** Organic lemonade contains ten times more eriocitrin (an antioxidant) than a glass of its conventional counterpart, according to a study by Washington State University supported by The Organic Center. The study assessed the bioavailability of three chiral flavonoids—hesperetin, naringenin and eriocitrin—found in citrus fruits and juices. Organic lime juice had three times the level of eriocitrin compared to conventional lime juice. The findings are published in *Biopharmaceutics & Drug Disposition*, Vol. 29, pp. 63-82, September 2007.
- **Higher nutrients in organic blueberries:** Researchers studying cultivation practices for high-bush blueberries in New Jersey found that blueberry fruit grown organically yielded significantly higher fructose and glucose levels, malic acid, total phenolics, total anthocyanins and antioxidant activity than fruit grown using conventional methods. Findings were published in the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, Vol. 56, pages 5,788-5794 (2008), published online on July 1, 2008 ([http://www.unep.ch/etb/publications/insideCBTF\\_OA\\_2008.pdf](http://www.unep.ch/etb/publications/insideCBTF_OA_2008.pdf)). □