

THE CULTIVATOR

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News From [The Cornucopia Institute](#)

Dear {first_name_merged_here},

Here is the latest news from The Cornucopia Institute.

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Action Alert



Message to President Obama: Please Fix the USDA's Organic Mess Overhaul of Management and Culture Needed

Please urge President Obama and new USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack to **take immediate action to repair the USDA's increasingly dysfunctional National Organic Program (NOP)**. **Suspect imports** of grains, nuts, and vegetables from China and other countries, questionable organic milk, beef, and eggs from **giant factory farms**, and the erosion of opportunity for family farmers are plaguing the organic sector.

Make your voice heard by downloading the proxy-letter from The Cornucopia Institute's website ([click here](#)).

We will hand deliver your letter to both Mr. Obama and secretary Vilsack.

Cornucopia's **Change@USDA** campaign is helping stakeholders in the organic community unite for rehabilitation of the NOP. **We need a sweeping management shakeup at the National Organic Program. We need your help to build momentum for change.**

Despite Legal Setback, Raw Almond Fight Continues

The March 9 dismissal, on technical grounds, of the lawsuit challenging the USDA's raw almond pasteurization mandate will not end the controversy. "The court's decision sidestepped the merits and substance of the lawsuit," said Cornucopia's Will Fantle. Cornucopia has helped organize legal resources for and coordinate legal strategy on the almond lawsuit.

The USDA's lack of legal authority to enact the controversial regulation and its fumbling of the rule's implementation were among major substantive issues detailed in the lawsuit - none of which the court has yet to rule on. Eighteen California almond farmers and wholesale nut handlers had filed the suit against the USDA last September.

"Instead," said Fantle, "the judge decided that almond farmers, just like consumers and retailers, have no right to have their concerns about the illegal nature of the almond treatment scheme heard in court."

Implemented in September 2007, the almond rule requires treatment with a toxic gas (propylene oxide) or steam heat for all raw almonds produced by American growers and sold commercially to domestic consumers. Imports of foreign nuts are exempt from the rule as are exports shipped abroad from the U.S. These imported nuts, generally of lesser quality, are destroying the livelihood of organic, family-scale almond farmers in California.

"We are not abandoning the fight to return to grocers' shelves an American-grown, highly nutritional raw food that has been eaten with confidence and enjoyment for decades," added Fantle. Cornucopia staff is currently conferring with legal counsel in preparation for a potential appeal.

For more details, [click here](#).



Saving Organic Dairy

The state of the (organic) dairy nation is not good. That shouldn't be too much of a surprise since the entire dairy industry, and general economy, is in

freefall. But for many of us who have been involved in building the organic dairy sector over the last two decades, as a viable and economically just alternative for farmers, we are not ready to idly sit by as farmers get screwed.

I've spent the last 20 years as an evangelist for organic food and farming. There is no doubt that abandoning agrichemicals has a big payback for consumer health and our environment. But, organics has been the best social-justice vehicle we've seen in the family farming movement. The premium price for organic milk has, historically, been a lifesaver for about 1800 family dairy farms.

Unfortunately, with the meteoric rise in organic commodity prices, 2008 was the first year in history that I couldn't look a farmer in the eye and say that your family would be better off making the arduous and expensive conversion to organic production. Profit margins, for many families, have eroded to zero or worse - some conventional producers were doing far better than their organic neighbors.

Just like in conventional dairy, a lot of middlemen were making big money in speculating and trading organic feed grains and hay. And I know many dairy families do not begrudge cash-crop producers for inching back up to parity. But, unfortunately, 2008 was the first time in the history of the organic dairy marketplace that farmers were just flat-out unable to pass along their increased costs to maintain a living wage.

This is not because organic consumers have turned their back on their long-term support for the "story" behind the organic milk label. But rather, it was illustrative of an evolving conspiracy over the last decade between the USDA and a handful of "factory farm" organic milk producers taking over the industry - making organic milk, in their words, "more affordable."

To read the rest of this article by Mark Kastel, [click here](#).

Cornucopia Board Holds Annual Meeting

by Lynn Christianson

Board and staff members of The Cornucopia institute gathered in Chicago on January 23-25, 2009 for the organization's annual board meeting.

In addition to reviewing 2008 program work and financials, board and staff



Annual Meeting Attendees

members looked ahead into 2009 at upcoming issues and challenges. The Board also held board member and officer elections. Meg Hannah, Bill Welsh, and Roger Featherstone were reelected as board members to new two-year terms. Meg Hannah as reelected as Board president, and Bill Welsh was reelected as vice-president. Bill Heart was newly elected as secretary, and Roger Featherstone was reelected to the post of treasurer.

A new member elected to the Board is Steve Sprinkel. Mr. Sprinkel is a Harvard-educated author and organic farming consultant. He has farmed organically for over 30 years and also operates an organic-based grocery and restaurant, The Farmer and Cook, with his partner, Olivia Chase. They reside in Ojai, CA.

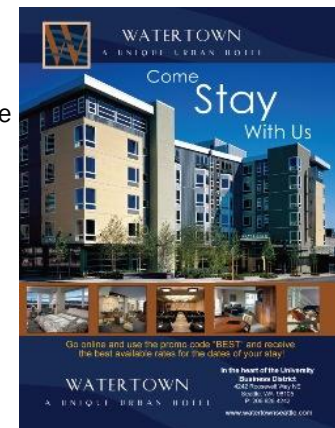
Tom Willey joined Cornucopia's policy advisory panel. Tom, with his wife, owns a seventy-five acre farm that is part of the Central San Joaquin Valley in Madera, CA. He has been a farmer since 1980, and T & D Willey Farms has been certified organic since 1987.

The Cornucopia Institute is proud to welcome these new members into their roles.

A special part of the weekend was a visit to the historic Heartland Cafe. Board, staff, and friends were welcomed with open arms by the owners. The group was treated to a verbal history of the cafe by co-owner, Michael James, and provided a short educational talk by Cornucopia supporter and raw-foodist, Joan Levin.

The Watertown Hotel, in Seattle, has helped underwrite Cornucopia trips to their city in 2007 and 2008. Washington State is a hotbed of organic farming and Cornucopia has quite a few members and organizations that support our work there.

The Watertown has an environmentally-friendly focus with a very sophisticated European design focus. Says Mark, "I've enjoyed my stays there and felt extremely comfortable. They even have bikes to loan to guests!"



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The Cornucopia Institute is a non-profit group based in Wisconsin and working on food and farm policy issues concerning sustainable and organic agriculture. We depend upon our members and readers like you for support. Please visit our website at <http://www.cornucopia.org/> for more detail about our activities and how you can become involved or email us at cultivate@cornucopia.org.

cultivate@cornucopia.org P.O. Box 126 Cornucopia, WI 54827 608-625-2042 ©2008
