

THE CULTIVATOR

NEWS FROM THE CORNUCOPIA INSTITUTE

SUMMER 2013

State of Fever

Monsanto's GMO Policy Infecting All Levels of Government

BY WILL FANTLE

From the USDA to foreign policy, Congress, state governments, elections and the courts, the feverish politics of genetically modified foods (GMOs) have infected decision making and dramatically tilted policies towards the desires of Monsanto and the Biotech industry.

Candidate Barack Obama in 2008 promised change. However, when he came to Washington he appointed former Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack as USDA Secretary. The one-time award winning Biotech Governor of the Year has presided over a rapid roll out of new GMO crops and foods. Change he implemented included a series of agency adjustments designed to speed up the approval process for GMOs. Under Vilsack's watch, the agency has never denied the approval of one GMO crop.

Yes, the USDA also brought more attention to the National Organic Program (NOP)—professional, knowledgeable management, more staffing, more resources. But it's small potatoes compared to the attention afforded Biotech. And Vilsack's team has pushed hard for the organic community to swallow a policy of *co-existence*, the strange view that pollen and DNA recognize fence rows, that rain, winds, birds, insects and other natural forces will refrain from carry-



Photo source: Sustainable Pulse

The USDA has denied not a single patent for genetically engineered crops under Ag Secretary Vilsack, former “Biotech Governor of the Year.” Yet the GMO empire is facing a growing global, vocal citizen challenge.

ing GMO contaminants to non-GMO plants and crops.

Millions of Americans are suspicious of GMO foods for assorted health and environmental reasons. Polling conducted last year by the Mellman Group indicated that nearly 90% of Americans would like GMO foods labeled so they can make a choice about what kinds of foods they purchase in the marketplace. Sixty other countries require such labeling.

But Vilsack says no, telling the

Farm Bureau at their annual meeting in January: “I know of no health reason connected to GMOs that would require labeling under our current labeling philosophy.”

Monsanto and the Biotech industry allies spent mightily to narrowly defeat last November's state referendum calling for the labeling of GMO foods

sold in California. While labeling advocates decried the misleading and deceptive advertising conducted against the referendum, they were unable to weather the deluge of dollars. Still, the seeds of discontent are spreading. Washington state's voters will have a labeling referendum on the ballot later in 2013. Vermont has

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When Companies Choose Profit Over Your Health

EDITORIAL BY CHARLOTTE VALLAEYS

In 2012, The Cornucopia Institute unearthed a vast body of scientific literature, spanning four decades, pointing to serious harmful health effects from consuming an additive common in food marketed as organic and natural. Carrageenan, the science revealed, contributes to intestinal inflammation, ulcerations in the colon, and even colon cancer in laboratory animals. Derived from seaweed, carrageenan is used as a thickener and stabilizer in many types of foods.

After Cornucopia shared this science with organic food manufacturers, we were struck by the variety of reactions and responses. Some CEOs immediately ordered a reformulation of their carrageenan-containing products.

Eden Foods was one of the first companies to immediately commit to removing carrageenan; now it is down to only two products containing the additive. Oregon Ice Cream, which has one flavor of Julie's ice cream remaining with carrageenan, vowed to have it reformulated by fall 2013. Turtle Mountain is currently in the taste-testing phase of its newly formulated, carrageenan-free So Delicious coconut milk line. And Stonyfield Farm committed to reformulating its Oikos caramel yogurt and Squeezers, which are marketed specifically to children.

Regional companies working to remove carrageenan in-

clude Kalona Supernatural, Natural by Nature, and Clover Stornetta.

All these companies should be applauded for their decisive response protecting the health of their customers.

On the other end of the spectrum are a handful of companies, Whole Foods Market and WhiteWave (Horizon and Silk) chief among them, that staunchly defend the additive using sound bites taken straight out of the carrageenan lobbyist's playbook—outright lies.

Would you buy food from a farmer who sprays a pesticide known to be harmful? If you are a Cornucopia member, your answer is almost assuredly NO.

In the same light, conscientious eaters should hold organic food processors to the same standards we expect from the farmers we trust and support.

We hope that consumers will factor in a company's position on carrageenan when making purchasing decisions. Let Whole Foods Market and WhiteWave know how you feel about their continued attempts to mislead you about this dangerous additive. Above all, support the companies that have shown they care about your health more than their own convenience and profit.

For an in-depth update, report and online buyer's guide on carrageenan, visit www.cornucopia.org.



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Antibiotic Use in Organic Orchards to End

NOSB Votes to Disallow Material in Apple and Pear Production After 2014

BY PAMELA COLEMAN, PhD

The headlines predicted a “Food Fight” over the use of antibiotics in organic agriculture at the spring meeting of the National Organic Standards Board in Portland, Oregon. Some orchardists who wanted the option to use antibiotics for plant disease control squared off with consumers and public interest groups that want fruit grown without antibiotics.

The USDA organic regulations currently allow the use of streptomycin and tetracycline antibiotics in organic apple and pear orchards, but this allowance is scheduled to expire on October 21, 2014. At their spring 2013 meeting, the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) considered a petition to extend the use of tetracycline until October 21, 2016. Antibiotics are not allowed in organic food production except for this one instance—apples and pears.

Antibiotics have been allowed for use in apples and pears ever since the national standards came into effect. This meeting could change that. With the pressure, would the NOSB vote to extend the allowance for antibiotics?

The Back Story

The antibiotics are used to control a bacterial disease called fire blight on apple and pear trees. The bacteria that cause fire blight can infect apple and pear flowers, and the infection must be controlled, otherwise it can spread and kill the tree itself.

Typically, synthetic materials such as antibiotics are prohibited in organic production, but the NOSB can vote to make an exception to this rule. Any synthetic that is allowed must be reviewed every five years and is subject to a vote of the NOSB. Synthetic



materials are allowed only if they are essential for organic production and they cause no adverse impacts on humans or the environment.

In the months before the board meeting, Cornucopia staff evaluated the essentiality and impacts of tetracycline. Initially, I believed that the antibiotics might be essential, because my training in plant pathology taught me that fire blight can be devastating. I was also concerned about the orchardists—as a former organic inspector in Washington, I visited many orchards and have seen the growers’ commitment to organic practices. Like any scientist, though, I researched the issue, which led me to reevaluate my original opinion.

Ultimately, Cornucopia’s decision to oppose antibiotics was based on a clear understanding of the many preventative measures available, and the knowledge that many farmers have been able to grow apples successfully without antibiotics when the market demands it.

Scientists have studied fire blight for decades, and many university ex-

Human pathogens have developed resistance to antibiotics used in agriculture. If this happens, streptomycin and tetracycline will no longer be effective as human medicines.

tension publications explain traditional preventative measures. The threat of fire blight can be minimized by using resistant varieties,

resistant rootstocks, natural materials, and biological controls.

Organic growers are expected to use cultural controls and natural materials before resorting to synthetic materials such as antibiotics. According to a nationwide survey conducted by Cornucopia, 56% of the apple growers who responded do not use antibiotics. Some of those orchardists have been growing organic apples for 20 years or more. The survey results clearly indicated that antibiotics are not essential for organic apple production.

Conversations with orchardists verified that fire blight in apples can be controlled without antibiotics, although they admitted that it was more challenging, and sometimes more expensive. Pears, however, being naturally more susceptible to fire blight than apples, may need antibiotics until additional alternatives are available. For example, a new biological control is expected to be available to organic growers soon.

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Defending Organics

How Citizen Lobbyists Made a Difference at the Spring NOSB Meeting

BY CHARLOTTE VALLAEYS

At the most recent National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) meeting, The Cornucopia Institute helped force a careful review that resulted in blocking the approval for use in organics of every petitioned synthetic and conventional food additive or food processing aid. We even managed to help turn the unanimous subcommittee approvals of barley betafiber and sugar beet fiber into rejections by the full Board.

Barley betafiber is a supplement that can be added to processed foods and beverages, giving the food manufacturer a marketing advantage by allowing a health claim (“Now With More Fiber!”). One of Michael Pollan’s food rules is “never buy a food that makes a health claim.” Not only does it usually mean the food is highly processed, but the ingredient that allows for the health claim is often itself a highly processed—and not necessarily a healthy—additive.

Barley betafiber is produced by the conventional agribusiness giant Cargill, which produces the fiber supplement from conventionally grown barley and petitioned for its use in certified organic foods. Conventional barley is often sprayed with toxic pesticides in the field and treated with harmful fumigants in storage.

Should conventional barley betafiber be allowed in certified organic foods? To meet the legal criteria for approval, it needs to not be harmful to human health or the environment, consistent with organic farming and handling, and ‘essential’ for the production of organic foods.

We certainly did not think it met the legal threshold; but to our dismay, the NOSB’s Handling Subcommittee voted—unanimously, with one abstention—to recommend to the full board that conventional barley betafiber be permitted in organic foods.

The Handling Subcommittee also unanimously, with one abstention, recommended approval of conventional sugar beet fiber, another heavily processed fiber supplement from a conventionally grown and processed crop. The petitioner of sugar beet fiber even admitted, in writing, that its sugar beet seed is treated with a neonicotinoid pesticide—neonicotinoids are extremely toxic to honeybees and are believed to be largely responsible for the rapidly declining health of critical pollinator populations. At publication, European regulators had just banned this class of dangerous pesticides.

In many ways, these two fiber supplements epitomize the reason why consumers are turning to organics: as an alternative to foods with highly processed yet entirely un-

necessary ingredients that have been sprayed and fumigated with toxic pesticides. Yet members of the Handling Subcommittee, including the NOSB members who are employees of Whole Foods Market, Driscoll’s and Earthbound Farm, apparently thought it would be appropriate to allow these conventional ingredients to be added to certified organic foods.

The organic movement rose from holistic thinking that rejects quick-fix solutions to nutritional deficiencies, in deference to nutrient-dense food production rooted in the soil rather than the factory. Yet some NOSB members appear to have adopted a severely reductionist approach to the organic industry with “market growth” as their predominant mantra. They seem to believe that the organic industry must grow, grow, grow—at any cost. In the conventional food business, nutraceuticals like barley betafiber are a current fad. They allow for health claims that can, and often do, boost sales.

Sadly, some corporate-affiliated NOSB members seem to apply the same thinking to the organic industry. But organics has grown because it offers an alternative to highly processed foods, which all too often mislead consumers with unproven health claims that boost sales rather than health.

Since unanimous subcommittee recommendations generally turn into approvals by the full Board, we took the task of fighting for the rejection of these materials very seriously. We asked our Portland-area members to help win this fight by volunteering to speak during the meeting and present their personal perspective while adding their voice to Cornucopia’s testimony.

Shari Sirkin, a farmer at Dancing Root Farm, 18 miles south of Portland, spoke against allowing conventional sugar beet fiber—treated with neonicotinoids—in organic foods. Organic consumer Charlotte Uris, who called herself the “canary in the coal mine,” because her body reacts strongly to exposure to pesticides and fumigants, spoke passionately about the importance of keeping conventional ingredients out of organic foods, especially Cargill’s betafiber, which is likely fumigated in storage with toxic pesticides and processed with genetically engineered enzymes.

And when the vote came down, NOSB rejected the petitions for barley betafiber and sugar beet fiber. In fact, the



Shari Sirkin, of Dancing Roots Farm, spoke on the issue of sugar beet fiber.

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Pull GMOs Out of Infant Formula?

Abbott Laboratories Shareholders Vote 'No'

Shareholders of Abbott Laboratories voted April 26 on whether the company should adopt a non-GMO policy for its products, which include one of the nation's leading infant formula brands, Similac.

Cornucopia initiated a petition drive prior to the vote, in support of As You Sow, the shareholder activism group that filed the resolution, to collect signatures urging Abbott to remove GMOs from its infant formula. In just a week's time, nearly 15,000 signatures were collected. Thank you to all who signed the petition.

Andrew Behar, CEO of As You Sow, presented these signatures at the shareholder meeting prior to the vote.

What was the outcome of the vote? A paltry 3.21% of Abbott Laboratories shareholders voted in favor of the non-GMO policy. "While this might appear to be a low vote, historically resolutions on GMOs take time to build momentum," said Behar.

"At As You Sow we have seen first-year shareholder campaigns with low votes," Behar explained, "and we know that with persistence these votes have increased over time and have led to lasting change. It is our task to continue to educate shareholders and management about the risks associated with company practices," he said.

In other words: this campaign is far from over.

Nobody should be eating GMO foods, especially not babies. GMOs have not been adequately tested for safety, and results from a number of animal studies point to potential harm. What is especially troubling is that long-term safety tests are non-existent.

Given that 92% of soybeans used in processed food is now GMO, soy-based infant formula is extremely likely to contain GMOs. And dairy-based formula contains soy oil, also



Non-organic soy-based formula is very likely to contain GMOs.

likely derived from GMO soy. A sure way to avoid GMOs in infant formula is to buy organic brands—GMOs are prohibited in organics.

Until infant formula makers like Abbott Laboratories stop using GMO ingredients, hundreds of thousands of newborns and infants will be unwitting participants in a huge, uncontrolled experiment with the health of the next generation. We will continue the fight to make sure that all formula-fed babies are protected from the potential harm of GMOs.

—CHARLOTTE VALLAeYS

ORGANICS

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petition for sugar beet fiber was rejected unanimously—quite a turnaround from the unanimous approval by the subcommittee just weeks earlier.

Cornucopia—our staff and our volunteer-members—were an important counterbalance to the numerous corporate executives, lobbyists and consultants at the meeting.

The Board also rejected petitions for a synthetic and toxic antimicrobial compound to disinfect meat in slaughterhouses, a plant hormone that stimulates root formation, and the continued use of tetracycline, an antibiotic, on tree fruit.

In further good news, Cornucopia had earlier demanded a correction when we discovered that many of the non-organic ingredients approved for use in organics contain unapproved synthetic ingredients such as sweeteners, stabilizers and preservatives. In a major turnaround, the NOSB voted affirmatively to perform future reviews of all

minor ingredients to ensure they meet the Organic Food Production Act's criteria.

We are grateful to our members who volunteered. By the end of the meeting, 15 Cornucopia members had presented testimony, including farmer Rick Walsh, who drove four hours (each way) to help make sure that Cornucopia's research findings were presented. When the NOSB decided to cut public comment from up to ten minutes for public interest group representatives to a mere three minutes (it has since been increased to four minutes), Cornucopia decided to draw on the passion of our members to help us present our testimony. Even though Cornucopia's policy staff has grown over the past year, our focus on preserving the integrity of the organic label truly remains a grassroots and collaborative effort.

A big "thank you" goes out to all our members who took time out of their busy schedules to present testimony on behalf of the organic community. Thanks, too, to the 1,300 Cornucopia members and supporters who submitted comments to the USDA—your voice made a difference!

Agrarian Revival

Young and Beginning Farmers Plant Roots of Sustainability and Community

BY ELIZABETH WOLF

Over the past century, the total number of American farmers has plummeted to less than 1% of the U.S. population. For each individual farmer under the age of 35, there are six over 65. And while the average age of an American farmer is 57, it is just 34 for organic growers. Over the next 20 years, 70% of the nation's farmland will change hands.

"The question is, who is going to take over that land?" asks Lindsey Lusher Shute, director and co-founder of the National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC). Will it be corporate ag and urban developers? Or will a new generation of farmers take back the land to renew American agriculture?

The good food movement is inspiring many young people, both from farming and non-farming backgrounds, to choose a career in agriculture. These farmers have the potential to offset the numbers of retiring farmers and keep family farms active, but barriers to entry are steep.

In a survey of 1,000 farmers across the U.S., the NYFC found the top two challenges were lack of capital and access to land.

When Zoë Bradbury was denied credit by the USDA's Farm Service Agency, the Oregon farmer financed her first season farming with a credit card. Thanks to a good growing season, she was able to pay it off before the 18.9% interest rate kicked in.

NYFC president William Powers, 31, dreamed of inheriting his grandfather's farm in Ohio. It didn't happen. So he and his wife Crystal, an extension engineer for the University of Nebraska, went loan hunting.

"The loan officers didn't know what to do with us because we wanted to have a grass-fed dairy," says Powers,



National Young Farmers Coalition advisory committee (front, l to r): Tess Brown-Lavoie, Lindsey Lusher Shute, William Powers, Adam Stofsky, Sean Stanton, Benjamin Shute, (back, l to r) Michelle Hughes, Avery Anderson, Alex Bryan, Tierney Creech

who is also the director of the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society (HealthyFarms.org). "Apparently it's simpler to have a feedlot, or raise corn and soy," Powers says. The couple has owned Darby Springs Farm, in southeastern Nebraska, since 2009.

The cost and availability of farmland to lease or purchase are also major challenges for aspiring farmers, many of them saddled with student loans. Between 2000 and 2011, national per-acre farmland values doubled.

"Land is crazy expensive," Lindsey Shute found when it took her husband, Benjamin, and her ten years to buy land in New York state, where they now own Hearty Roots Community Farm. The 25-acre farm produces vegetables and eggs for a 600-member CSA serving the Hudson River Valley and New York City.

William Powers saw irrigated cropland go for \$24,000 an acre at

"It shouldn't be the pattern that you go work on Wall Street until you have enough money to farm. We want people to choose farming as a first career."

—Lindsey Lusher Shute

auction in Iowa last year. Astronomical land prices mean large farms get larger; non-ag investors push values even higher. Corporate control over food and agricultural production has intensified: out of a total of less than 3 million farmers, a little over 190,000 of them produce 75% of our food.

"The structural environment we as farmers are working in today is essentially the same one that's been driving farmers out of business for decades," Shute explains.

Encountering these types of chal-

lenges led the Shutes and colleague Severine V.T. Fleming to found the National Young Farmers Coalition in 2010 (YoungFarmers.org). The membership-based organization is dedicated to the success of the next generation of American farmers. The national hub provides technical assistance, policy work, and advocacy while cultivating a network of state/regional chapters to encourage local community building.

There are 15 chapters so far. Farmers in the Hudson Valley formed a cooperative buying club to bring down the exorbitant cost of non-GMO and organic animal feed, trucked in from the Midwest. Now, more of the area's farmers can offer meat, dairy and eggs to their markets.

Collaboration also fuels NYFC's Farm Hack project. A community of farmers, engineers, programmers,



Riding in a backpack, baby Aiden helps his dad, William Powers, with chores on their Ceresco, Nebraska, farm.

designers and other allies, Farm Hack develops open source technology and tools to help solve farmers' problems in the shop and in the field. The project ditches mainstream ag's top-down, chemical-intensive inventions for

“The loan officers didn’t know what to do with us because we wanted to have a grass-fed dairy. Apparently it’s simpler to have a feedlot.”

—William Powers

solutions that fit the scale and ethics of sustainable farms.

NYFC successfully influenced the USDA's Farm Service Agency to develop a microlending program for beginning farmers. Currently they're lobbying for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act of 2013. NYFC is, Shute says, “doing what we can to create a permanent home for independent, sustainable, diversified and organic farmers in the U.S.”

Their goal? A million new farmers.

Investing in the Future

The 500,000 farmers expected to retire in the next 20 years represent not only a food security issue but also “a brain drain of knowledge about agriculture,” as farmer-author Joel Salatin, 55, has put it. Many gray-hairs are stepping up to pass on the practical tips and hard-won wisdom they have garnered over a lifetime of farming.

One of them is fourth-generation farmer Dave Minar, owner of Cedar Summit organic dairy in Minnesota. A Cornucopia board member, Minar mentors a young dairyman with a small herd a few miles up the road.

But not all beginning farmers are in their 20s and 30s. Minar also advises a nearby couple in their late 40s. The wife, a marketing professional, is embarking on a second career in farming, aided by her physician husband and their four growing children. Recently the family bought 40 acres, then 40 more. “I’ve been helping them with pasture design and what kind of hogs they should get and how to rig milking equipment in their barn. Lots of things,” Minar says.

Notes the dairyman, 72: “They’re in it for the kids.”

City folk can also support the agrarian revival. After Wisconsin business owners and Cornucopia members

Anna and David Smith (not their real names), sold some stock in their education technology company, they declined a financial advisor's suggestion to invest in fracking. Instead, the Smiths purchased a farm to resell to a young couple with organic farming experience and business savvy, but no capital (see profile on page 11).

“We combined our lifelong support of organics with a respectable interest return, eventually,” explains David, 59. Interest payments are deferred for the first five years to bring the farm to full production. “Plus it’s secured by land,” he notes. “It’s a very competitive investment. We are not sacrificing here.”

“It’s also an interesting investment,” says Anna, 59. “It’s really uplifting to see an energetic, idealistic young couple making their dreams come true.”

The Smiths think the model has legs. No big bucks to invest? David and Anna suggest people get together and pool their resources. Creative possibilities abound.

Says NYFC's Lindsey Lusher Shute, “We need experienced farmers and consumers of all ages to join with us to help young farmers succeed.” Fortunately, there are lots of things we can do to help.



GMO POLICY

Continued from page 1

passed GMO labeling legislation; Connecticut's Senate overwhelmingly did so as well. Nearly 20 other state legislatures have similar proposals in the works.

"To try to oppose this state by state, that is unsustainable," says Cathy Enright, the executive vice president for food and agriculture for the Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO), of which Monsanto, DuPont, and Dow Chemical are members.

Seeking to douse the prairie fire, Monsanto—which spends about \$6 million annually on lobbying—and its allies are working the fields in Washington, D.C. Their target? The nation's reauthorization of the Farm Bill. Currently winding its way through Congress (as of this writing), an amendment attached to the House Agriculture committee's version, and authored by Rep. Steve King (R-IA), would strip the rights of states to enact labeling laws. The Farm Bill is an essential piece of national legislation that is reauthorized every five years. Once an item gets in the bill, it becomes very difficult to remove. The House and Senate will reconcile differences in their bills, but it is far from certain that either will consider the amputation of state's GMO labeling rights a deal breaker.

Monsanto and their allies also prevailed in a vote in the Senate on an amendment by Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), who wanted to make it clear that states "have the authority" to require the labeling of foods produced through genetic engineering. Sanders' amendment failed 71-27.

While some of the No-votes in the Senate may have come from officials who believe that a national-level regulation is more appropriate, the effort to have the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) do just that is mired axle deep in the muck. The FDA has

already said that genetic modification does not materially change the food. But when the deadline passed last year for the agency to respond to a petition requiring GMO food labeling—a petition that contained the signatures of well over a million citizens—their response was that they needed more time to study the matter. Fourteen more months have since passed.



Big Ag treats farmers as "serfs," says Jon Tester (D-MT), the Senate's only certified organic producer and on-the-ground agriculturalist. The third-generation farmer takes Washington staff calls while out plowing his fields of wheat and barley near Big Sandy, Montana. While 71 senators voted in May to oppose states' rights to label GMOs, Tester was among the minority (27) who voted yes.

And just so no stone goes unturned, Monsanto is actively pushing state-level legislation in Oregon and elsewhere to override any labeling laws passed by county and municipal governments.

The suppression of dissent in the fertile ground of Washington, D.C. yielded another reward for Monsanto when they snuck a policy rider into an essential appropriations bill earlier this year. Dubbed the *Monsanto Protection Act*, it swatted down the ability of Monsanto's pesky critics to use judicial review as a brake on questionable regulatory decisions. It allows full speed ahead on the unrestricted

sale and planting of genetically modified seeds even when a court finds that they were not properly examined for their impact on farmers, the environment, and human health.

Senator Roy Blunt (R-MO), from Monsanto's home state of Missouri, authored the controversial rider and then blocked efforts by Senators Jon Tester (D-MT) and Jeff Merkley (D-OR) to remove it from the critical governmental operations funding bill.

Tester later told a reporter: "Not only does this ignore the constitutional idea of separation of powers, but it also lets genetically modified crops take hold across this country, even when a judge finds it violates the law." He added that giant multinational agribusiness corporations are treating farmers as "serfs."

Perhaps it should come as no surprise that Monsanto's power at the federal level is so pervasive. As a recent Food and Water Watch report detailed, board members from the \$12 billion company "have worked for the EPA, advised the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and served on President Obama's Advisory Committee for Trade Policy and Negotiations." Company staff and former employees enjoy a revolving door relationship with jobs and advisory positions in the federal government, at public universities and with trade groups. Even one sitting Supreme Court justice, Clarence Thomas, once worked for Monsanto.

Their reach extends far beyond America's shores. Again, according to Food and Water Watch, the State Department works with trade officials to promote GMO crop exports and to force unwilling nations to accept GMO crops and foods. The State Department has engaged in pro-GMO lobbying campaigns in foreign countries, promoted foreign cultivation of GMOs, and targeted foreign opinion-makers and reporters with junkets and public events.

Yet signs of cracks in the GMO empire are visible. On May 25, two million people joined March Against Monsanto rallies that were held in more than 400 cities in 52 countries. The growing consumer awareness of GMO foods and crops in the U.S. has sprouted vigorous labeling campaigns across the country with widespread public support for labeling. Even though 90% of all corn and soy grown in the U.S. is GMO, with a variety of other crops in the ground or under development, much of the rest of the world has yet to fall under the influence. In fact, just five countries account for 90% of total GMO crop production—the U.S., India, Canada, Argentina and Brazil.

The USDA also recently reversed itself and decided to conduct a full environmental impact statement assessing the health and environmental impacts of the next generation of GMO crops. These include, as proposed by Dow and Monsanto, 2,4-D-resistant corn and soybeans and Dicamba-tolerant soy and cotton crops. Still, notes the Center for Food Safety's Andrew Kimbrell, "it remains to be seen whether the agency will undertake the required hard-look analysis of the environmental and economic impacts of these crops."

Reflecting on the importance of a true choice in the marketplace for consumers, Cornucopia Codirector Mark Kastel says that "organic food and agriculture offers the only available and verifiable alternative with regulatory oversight from seed to table prohibiting genetically modified organisms in farming and food production." Adds Kastel: "Given the astounding influence of Monsanto and their GMO allies on all aspects of our government, it makes Cornucopia's work protecting the integrity of the organic label even more imperative."

Opposition to GE Salmon Mounts

Public Comments to FDA Total 1.5+ Million

Nearly 1.5 million citizens have registered their opposition to the FDA's proposal to approve the commercialization of genetically engineered (GE) salmon. Cornucopia was among the many groups organizing individuals to contact the U.S. Food and Drug Administration before the April 26 public comment deadline.

AquaBounty Technologies, the developer of the fish, has engineered a variant of Atlantic salmon that is reputed to grow twice as fast as its natural counterpart. The company inserted a growth hormone gene from Pacific chinook salmon and another promoter gene from ocean pout into the Atlantic salmon.

In its review of the GE salmon proposal, the FDA assumed that there was no substantive difference between conventional and GE salmon. Approval by the agency would make GE salmon the first genetically engineered animal allowed for human consumption.

Opposition has been fierce. In addition to the unprecedented volume of public comments, 2,500 grocery stores have pledged not to sell GE seafood. More than 250 chefs, at the urging of the Chefs Collaborative, have also jointly indicated their opposition.

Critics allege that the FDA has not considered the potential ecological and economic impacts of GE salmon. Salmon is an integral part of the ecosystem, a staple food for many other fish species and marine mammals. Scientists warn that the accidental—and likely—escape of GE salmon could devastate wild salmon populations. These impacts would be irreversible. The National Academy of Sciences wrote that release of transgenic fish is "of immediate concern."

Washington and Maine are the two

states that currently allow ocean fish farming. Washington state, in 2002,

enacted a ban on the rearing of GE fish in state waters, according to Anne Mosness, a Washington state resident who has captained salmon fishing boats in Pacific waters. She serves as a Food and Community Fellow at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.

Mosness believes that the ban on GE fish farming may be overturned in her state. She says that a key problem with all salmon farming "is the method of production." Circulating ocean currents are relied upon to remove waste and other pollutants from the underwater salmon pens, which can include disease and viruses.

The National Organic Standards Board is also reviewing organic fish farming proposals, including for salmon. Questions remain to be answered about how "floating feedlots," as critics describe them, will adhere to organic practices. These include, according to Mosness, the need to "restore, maintain and enhance ecological harmony ... and balance natural systems."

After reviewing the flood of public comments, the FDA will determine later this year if it has sufficient information for approval of GE salmon or if a more in-depth environmental impact statement will be required.

—WILL FANTLE



Escaped GE fish could wipe out wild salmon, a major food source for many species.

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ANTIBIOTICS

Continued from page 3

The NOSB Vote

In the weeks prior to the spring NOSB meeting, farmers, consumers, retailers, apple packers, and representatives of consumer groups submitted written comments to the board (Cornucopia's full technical comment is available for download at www.cornucopia.org). Then these stakeholders traveled to Portland to voice their concerns in person.

The day before the meeting, board members took a private tour through organic orchards to learn the farmer's perspective on antibiotic use. The next day, NOSB chair Mac Stone



Photo by michèle molinaré, Flickr

opened the public meeting on a positive note by encouraging the board

and the audience to remain "organic friends" even when we hold different opinions.

At the meeting, instead of fighting, board members heard from a panel of experts, listened to comments from diverse stakeholders, and asked numerous questions to better understand all sides of the issue.

One member of the panel, Dr. J. Glenn Morris, director of the Emerging Pathogens Institute, was clear in his opposition to the use of antibiotics in agriculture. He explained the threat that human pathogens will develop resistance to streptomycin and tetracycline, rendering these ineffective as human medicines.

Apple and pear growers issued dire predictions of what might happen if antibiotics were prohibited: organic orchardists could lose their

trees to fire blight, they warned, or else convert to conventional production. In reality, some orchardists may decide to spray antibiotics and convert to conventional production, but they always have the opportunity to transition back into organic production—and if this new rule causes the market to tighten up they will have financial incentives to do so.

Retailers predicted that there would be a shortage of apples in the U.S., and that the only organic apples would be the mealy and tasteless varieties that are resistant to fire blight.

In reality, many popular varieties of apples, pears, and Asian pears are being grown without antibiotics, because orchardists who wish to export apples and pears to Europe must verify that they have not used antibiotics in the previous three years. European regulations prohibit the use of antibiotics on all crops.

In Washington State in 2012, crops in the European program included Braeburn, Fuji, Gala, Granny Smith, Honeycrisp, and Pink Lady apples, and Bartlett, Bosc, and D'Anjou pears. Clearly, orchardists are able to grow popular apple varieties without antibiotics, if the market demands it. Selling these U.S.-grown apples in the domestic market can minimize a shortage.

Consumer groups voiced concerns about what might happen if antibiotics continue to be allowed to be used on organic apples and pears. Retail customers might decide not to purchase organic apples, they warned, and the fallout might injure the reputation of the organic label more globally.

Throughout the meeting, board members listened closely and asked many questions of the speakers. The vote was scheduled at the end of the three-day meeting.

Once again, board chair Mac Stone encouraged a rational discussion, as he asked each NOSB member to

share his or her personal thoughts on this vote. As a result, we did not see the predicted food fight; we saw a thoughtful exchange of ideas and a careful weighing of the competing demands of farmers, consumers, and medical experts. We witnessed how difficult it was for NOSB members to make this decision, knowing that some people might be adversely affected.

At the end of this deliberation, the board voted to phase out tetracycline, meaning its use will be prohibited after October 21, 2014. Nine board members voted *yes*, to extend the expiration date, and six members voted *no*, to allow the use of tetracycline to expire in 2014. By law, a two-thirds vote is required to place or maintain any synthetic material on the list of approved substances.

The NOSB also asked the USDA's National Organic Program to investigate its authority to allow the emergency use of tetracycline for fire blight for a limited time after 2014.

During a break in the meeting, after listening to passionate pleas from both sides of the aisle, I made a point of talking to board member Harold Austin, Director of Orchard Administration at Zirkle Fruit Company in Washington State. Although we had opposing views on this important issue, I knew, because I've conducted organic inspections on his orchards, that he is committed to upholding organic principles. I asked him, "After this meeting, can we still be 'organic friends'?"

"Always," he replied, and held out his hand to shake mine.

My hope for the future is that the organic community can continue to work together to maintain the integrity of the organic label, freely expressing divergent opinions while respecting each other as colleagues and, yes, friends.



THE CORNUCOPIA FARMER PROFILE

A Farm of Their Own

When young farmers Caleb and Lauren Langworthy, both 27, found a new 153-acre home for their western Wisconsin farm just as the snow started flying last winter, Lauren said, “it was just serendipity.”

The recently married couple were on a year-to-year lease and had searched for over six months to find either a long-term lease or a property to buy in order to use their organic farming practices to gain USDA organic certification and grow their business.

Now, thanks to the help of Anna and David Smith (not their real names), an older couple with financial resources, the Langworthys have a private mortgage with payments deferred for a full five years to let them get organic certification and establish profitable yields.

Caleb, who has a bachelor’s degree in sustainable agriculture, worked on a number of certified organic farms and taught organic vegetable production prior to launching Blue Ox. With a degree in anthropology, Lauren worked with the extension office in Olympia, Washington, promoting backyard gardening in senior facilities and low-income neighborhoods. They chose organic farming because “good soil and good plants make for good people,” Caleb says.

Last September, the Langworthys were connected with the Smiths through their local food co-op, Just Local Food in Eau Claire. The Smiths were looking to invest in a sustainable operation, rather than put their money in the stock market.

The two couples talked with each other at length about their goals, business practices and ethics. They discovered they had a lot in common.

“A lot of time was spent working on our business plan to ... assure the Smiths that their investment in us would be prudent,” Caleb said. The Smiths reviewed the plan and asked for some changes if they felt that things were out of reach, Lauren explained.



Caleb and Lauren Langworthy drove a hard bargain for their 1965 John Deere 4020 tractor.

The Langworthys put together their plan with the help of their Farm Business Management instructor at southern Minnesota’s Riverland Community College and Farm Beginnings, a Land Stewardship Project initiative that, according to the website, “provides participants a wide range of opportunities to learn firsthand about low-cost, sustainable methods of farming.” Caleb and Lauren had nothing but good things to say about Farm Beginnings, whose course has been modeled across the U.S. by other nonprofit farming organizations.

When the Langworthys found the perfect property just north of Menomonie, Wisconsin, the Smiths were able to buy it for them to get it off the market. With their purchasing power, they got a better price than the Langworthys could have on their own. “A lot of the land around here gets purchased by corn farmers within a month,” Caleb said.

Although this particular kind of partnership may be a way to help get young farmers onto their own land, the Langworthys were clear it’s not something to jump into lightly. Their arrangement is an investment for the Smiths, so everyone involved made sure they were on the same page.

“I think the magic of it is in the fit,” Lauren said. “I think it’s really important when developing a partnership like this to make sure that everyone has the same goals and are headed in the same direction.”

The Smiths say they are pleased with the arrangement. “While we are providing something essential, what Caleb and Lauren are doing takes skill and dedication,” says David. “We are just pledging money, they are pledging their lives to this endeavor.”

With a mortgage they can afford, the Langworthys’ Blue Ox farm will become certified organic with a five-acre vegetable garden, berries and perennial crops, hay, and pasture for the animals they’re getting next fall. These young farmers have a lot to look forward to.



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C O R N U C O P I A
I N S T I T U T E

Organics from China Under Scrutiny



Photo by Jessie Owen Elick

The USDA and FDA inspect only 1% to 2% of all the food that enters U.S. ports. Even with this small sample, “a disproportionate number of serious problems are being found with Chinese exports, including unapproved chemicals, dyes, pesticides, and outright fraud (fake food),” said Cornucopia’s Mark A. Kastel, who testified before a congressional subcommittee on food imports in May. Read the full story at www.cornucopia.org.

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Who Are the Young Farmers?

For decades young people have been leaving the family farm. But recently there’s been a surge headed back to the land. They’re apprentices and WWOOFers (Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms). They’re community gardeners and real food advocates. They’re college grads with degrees in culinary arts, community development, sustainable ag. They’re motivated by concern for the environment and a passion for really good, locally grown food.

As Caleb Langworthy, of Blue Ox Organics, puts it, “A lot of folks in our generation get into organic farming through our taste buds.” (See profile on page 11.)

“One of the big traits we see with young farmers today is people who don’t have a background in farming or rural communities,” says William Powers, 31, executive director of the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society. “They like the idea of being on the land, living sustainably. It’s very much a calling.”

With hyperinflated land prices and other access barriers, how do young people realize that dream? Entrepreneurial drive, creative partnerships, and the advocacy of organizations such as the National Young Farmers Coalition are rising to meet the challenge.

The next 20 years will be critical for organic agriculture as a quarter of American farmers retire. “It’s a race for land. It’s a race for water,” Powers observes. “The foundation of the United States is agriculture. We need to get back to that.”



Lindsey and Ben Shute, here with daughter Piper, are two co-founders of the National Young Farmers Coalition. See “Agrarian Revival,” page 6.

—ELIZABETH WOLF