

THE CULTIVATOR

NEWS FROM THE CORNUCOPIA INSTITUTE

FALL 2015

Family Farming: Bucolic Myth vs. Economic Reality

Why Does Superior Food Production Generate Inferior Income?

BY LINLEY DIXON, PhD

Our diverse, small-acre vegetable farm was in its fourth year of production. Despite what appeared to be a successful venture — a thriving farmer’s market stand, 100 loyal CSA members, and established wholesale accounts — my husband and I could not make ends meet financially.

We had a tough choice to make: either quit farming or find off-farm employment to supplement the family income, thus removing one of us from the farm.

Though many small-scale local, organic farmers are highly revered and supported by their communities, the hard truth is that it is very difficult to make a living growing the kind of food everyone wants to eat. We personally know many highly skilled former farmers who quit due to financial reasons.

How is the food system going to be revolutionized when even our best local farmers are quitting due to the economics of small-scale diversified farming?

Yes, the *good food movement* has come a long way in the last 20 years. More people have come to understand that small-scale diversified farming strengthens local economies, enhances environmental stewardship, and contributes to human health.

Demand for organic, local food continues to outpace supply, yet 90% of small farms depend on outside income to survive. Here are three ways to start turning the problem around.

Consumers have come to demand pesticide-free, just-harvested, nutrient-dense food, and they want to know that environmental sustainability, human and animal welfare, and local prosperity come with it.

In addition, many scientists now recognize that the majority of small-scale farmers carefully manage their lands to sustain remarkably high levels of productivity despite using fewer agricultural inputs. In fact, United Nations research shows an inverse relationship between land size and productivity. Small-scale farmers across the globe, with their intimate knowledge of local ecologies, utilize innovative land management techniques to be highly productive.

However, despite the growth in the number of farmers markets, CSAs, and local food in the grocery stores, many small-scale farmers struggle financially. Like our farm, over 90 percent of small farms rely on a secondary income source to make ends meet. Despite working long, hard days and building a loyal customer base, many



Above, farmers Charlie Foster and Reid Smith harvest lettuce at Adobe House Farm in Durango, Colorado. The days begin early and often last 12 hours throughout the season.

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Is the Organic Label Worth Saving?

Big Food/USDA Collusion Undermines the Seal, But the Fight Continues

COMMENTARY BY MARK KASTEL

We are getting more correspondence from our farmer-members, and consumers, asking whether it's time to give up the fight to save the integrity of the organic label from corporate plunderers and their all-too-accommodating federal regulators. Many suggest that it's time to create an alternative label and/or an alternative certification system.

My standard reply to this suggestion is: "Too many good people have worked too hard, for too many years, to grow organics into a marketplace force with real economic value (now \$40 billion/year) to hand over the label to a pack of corporados out to make a quick buck."

Although many people around the country have access to local food that is produced under organic manage-

ment, most citizens still need a reliable retail alternative to the dominant, toxic agricultural paradigm that is conventional food.

We thought that the USDA organic seal would equate to a *Cliff Notes* version of ethical food research. Sadly, it's just not good enough anymore. The USDA has sat back and greased the skids for corporate agribusiness to redefine what organic farming means.

That's why Cornucopia has created several in-depth reports and associated scorecards rating the ethical approach brands take to creating organic dairy products, eggs, soy foods, breakfast cereal, yogurt, and more. In a few weeks we will release a major update to our *Scrambled Eggs* report and scorecard.

We are also in the process of creating similar resources investigating meat chickens and organic

"Organics has become a bifurcated industry. On one side you've got ethical organic farmers and processors; on the other, agribusinesses that are betraying the original values."

beef. These reports will distinguish between the brands that depend on family farmers, whose animals are respected and live rich lives, and those that source from factory farms and imports.

The scorecards should not be necessary. You and I are already paying taxes for the USDA to assure, as charged by Congress, that it will protect the organic marketplace for ethical farmers, and the processors

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Cornucopia board president Helen Kees and her family operate Wheatfield Hill Organics, a fifth-generation, diversified farm in west-central Wisconsin. She was one of the state's first certified organic beef producers.

they partner with, and the authenticity of organic food for consumers. It shouldn't take the tireless work of a public charity, The Cornucopia Institute, and the thousands of members who financially support the organization, to get the job done.

But that's not the case today. The USDA needs to step up and do their job!

If we succeed in our efforts to turn around the USDA, the scorecards will change. Instead of a 1-5 scale, there will only be the top two tiers: certified organic, complying with the minimum requirements of the law, and the heroes in this industry that are going "beyond organic."

In the meantime, we have been asked to create an alternative certifi-

cation, or certification on top of the USDA credentials. But if we did so, Cornucopia would run into the same inherent conflict of interest that current certifiers have. The farms and processors pay the certifiers for their blessing—and the larger the factory farm or business, the bigger the payday for the certifier.

Today organics has become a bifurcated industry. On one side you've got certified organic farmers who attend farmers markets, run CSAs, and sell directly to co-ops and other local stores. They are joined by a handful of ethical companies, some of them very large, like Nature's Path, North America's largest organic cereal manufacturer; Eden Foods, a diversified organic food company; Nutiva, maker of organic "superfoods"; and Dr. Bronner's (don't drink their soap, but it *is* made with certified organic oil).

These large companies, still controlled by the founding families, are truly walking their talk, proving that you can sell 100 million dollars' worth of products and *not* betray your values.

On the other end of the spectrum are large agribusinesses that primarily sell conventional food, that have invested in organic brands (see Dr. Phil Howard's *Who Owns Organics* infographic at cornucopia.org). They are either betraying organic consumer goodwill, sourcing from giant factory farms or dubious imports from China and elsewhere, or they are operating in secrecy, with the blessing of the USDA, and we just don't know the true pedigree of their food.

The organic farmers who comply with the spirit and the letter of the law, and their high-integrity certifiers, are doing so because they are honest

and ethical—not because there's a high likelihood of the USDA sniffing out improprieties. The majority of organic farmers, the smaller family-scale operations, really do believe in the mission.

Who owns the organic label anyway? *We all do.* Large and small farmers, large and small businesses, and especially customers, who are willing to pay a premium for food produced to a different ethical standard.

In this world of massive corporate corruption, where government regulators have been "bought and sold" (think FDA oversight of Big Pharma or USDA assurance of GMO safety), why should organics be any different? *Because we said so!*

Congress enacted a damn good law in the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990. It set up the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) as a multi-stakeholder independent body to advise the Secretary of Agriculture and create a buffer between corporate lobbyists and the regulators. That law has been grossly disrespected and violated under Democratic and Republican administrations, but it has never been more undermined than it is right now.

So, stay tuned. If we need to shift gears, you will be the first to know. In the meantime, we are going to continue to fight like hell, in Washington, in the federal courts, and in the court of public opinion, to save the organic label. After 30 years of a loving farmer/consumer partnership in building this viable marketplace alternative, it's worth the effort.

Cornucopia's consumer reports and scorecards rate brands on their adherence to the letter and spirit of organic standards. They are available at cornucopia.org.



USDA Seeks Dismissal of ‘Sunset’ Lawsuit

Formerly Approved Synthetic Ingredients Now Harder to Remove from Organics

BY WILL FANTLE

Last April, The Cornucopia Institute and 14 other organic stakeholders sued the USDA over radical liberalization of the process used to approve synthetic and non-organic materials allowed for temporary use in organics. Cornucopia and the other stakeholders contend that the changes to the “sunset” process were consequential, arbitrary, and failed to provide an opportunity for essential public input.

In June, the USDA moved to dismiss the federal lawsuit. The USDA’s action is, in one sense, typical in that it likely preceded a challenge to what lawyers call “standing,” or the right of a party to bring a lawsuit due to harm or likely injury. In another sense, it also indicates that the USDA refuses to recognize the meaningful nature of the changes to the sunset process unilaterally invoked by the agency in September 2013.

“While the USDA’s move to dismiss is disappointing, it’s not entirely unexpected,” says Cornucopia’s Codirector Mark Kastel. “The agency has displayed no remorse or hesitation over efforts to facilitate the growing corporate domination of organics while, at the same time, tightly controlling decision making by what we thought Congress intended to be an independent National Organic Standards Board (NOSB).”

Indeed, the USDA did move to challenge the standing of the 15 organic stakeholders. Their line of attack characterized stakeholder injuries as generalized grievances that lacked sufficient substance to warrant judicial consideration.

Lawyers at the Center for Food Safety (CFS) have been representing the 15 plaintiffs. Responding to the



Left: USDA building in Washington, D.C. Previously, approved synthetic and non-organic materials automatically fell off the National List every five years unless reappraised by two-thirds of the National Organic Standards Board. Now, non-organic materials stay on the list unless two-thirds of the board votes to remove them.

USDA, they coordinated the gathering of evidence from each of the parties supporting our claims of specific harms brought by the changed sunset process and its deleterious impact on our involvement in the organic sector.

One Cornucopia member who helped outline her “injury” from the sunset change is Chicago resident Joan Levin. In her declaration in support of the lawsuit, Levin asserted that the change “violated my interest in ensuring that adequate procedures are in place to protect the integrity of organic food.”

An organic consumer long before the development of federal standards, Levin further explained that “the new sunset review process constitutes a step backwards to the ‘old days’ when consumers like me had to investigate products on a case-by-case basis. The new sunset review process reduces my trust in the certified organic label.”

As a result of the sunset change, Levin says she will have to go back to spending more time researching and only purchasing foods from farmers and sources whose food production methods she trusts. “Such efforts cost my time and energy, and hurt my

choice as a consumer to shop and purchase organic foods,” she explains.

According to Paige Tomaselli, the lead attorney for CFS, the USDA wants to “paint the revised sunset review process as nothing more than a ‘clarification of the agency’s and the NOSB’s duties.’” Pointing to the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 (OFPA), the law that federalized the organic sector, Tomaselli notes that the USDA is minimizing “the significant substantive changes contained in the revised process, and the environmental, economic, and public health impacts the new sunset process has and will have.”

The legal jousting continues, as attorneys work on filings representing and responding to claims made by each side. A hearing on the matter will be held on September 2 in federal court in San Francisco, with a decision expected sometime later in the fall. Should the USDA’s move to dismiss be rejected, then the substance of the legal case will move forward.

Learn more under the “Projects” tab at cornucopia.org.



Are Your Children Roundup-Ready?

Use of the Herbicide Glyphosate Has Skyrocketed Since the 1990s

For thousands of years, children ate the same food their parents ate when *they* were children.

In the United States today, this is no longer the case. Most dramatically, the proliferation of the use of the herbicide glyphosate, made possible by genetically engineered (GE) foods, is subjecting our children to a large-scale science experiment.

Children born today are repeatedly exposed to genetically engineered (GE) foods. GE crops include soybeans, corn, canola, alfalfa, and cotton, with wheat under development. GE ingredients find their way into many processed foods — unless they are certified organic. Beverages, candy, baked beans, and many other products are sweetened with corn syrup or sugar from GE sugar beets. Salad dressings, crackers, and chips are made with canola oil, corn oil, or soybean oil, and unless certified organic, all are likely GE.

Most of the corn grown in the U.S. today is genetically engineered for either insect resistance, herbicide resistance, or both. Children are most likely exposed to significant amounts of GE food when they eat corn-based dry cereals, like corn flakes or corn puffs, and snack foods that are corn-based.

Glyphosate was brought to market in the 1970s. Since then, its use has increased exponentially. Today, glyphosate is the active ingredient in the most heavily used herbicide in the world: Monsanto's Roundup.

Children in the 1980s were exposed to only trace amounts of glyphosate because it could not be sprayed on a crop without killing it. That all changed with the advent of genetically engineered crops in the 1990s. By 2010, "Roundup-Ready" crops — plants designed to tolerate

repeated applications of the herbicide — had come to dominate conventional agriculture. Dangers from GE foods include both the unknown effects of novel DNA, as well as the known effects of high doses of herbicides.

Today, children are exposed to much higher amounts of glyphosate than their counterparts even a decade ago. Since the Roundup-Ready trait for glyphosate resistance is the most common GE trait, the spread of GE crops has caused an increase in the levels of glyphosate in food. Glyphosate may be applied several times to GE crops, each time being absorbed and stored in the tissues. The residues cannot be removed by washing, and they are not broken down by processing, such as freezing or drying. When humans or animals eat the herbicide-treated foods, they ingest the herbicide.

Feeding herbicide-tolerant GE corn and soy to children gives them a dose of glyphosate with every bite. Glyphosate is often portrayed by the manufacturers as safe for human exposure while being deadly to weeds. However, scientific research indicates that the herbicide is not as harmless as it has been portrayed. Rather, evidence shows that glyphosate may be the most important factor in the development of multiple chronic dis-



Nearly 90% of U.S. corn is treated with glyphosate. The typical American child's diet includes dozens of corn-based processed foods.

eases and conditions now prevalent in Westernized societies.

Scientists now know that glyphosate effects are long-term. These effects include interfering with fundamental biochemical reactions in the human GI tract, depleting essential amino acids, and predisposing us to obesity, depression, autism, inflammatory bowel disease, Alzheimer's, and Parkinson's.

There is a great need for additional studies to verify the effects of glyphosate consumption over a human life span, in particular its effects on bacteria in the GI tract, especially when fed to young children.

As the number of herbicide-resistant crops increases, so too does the use of glyphosate use and its presence in our food and our environment. GE crops and the toxic agrichemicals used to grow them are expressly prohibited in organic production. Feeding your children organic foods is one sure way to minimize their exposure to glyphosate, avoiding harmful exposures that could potentially affect them for the rest of their lives.

This article is adapted from the report *Protecting Children's Health: Choosing Organic Food to Avoid GMOs and Agricultural Chemicals*, under the "Reports" tab at cornucopia.org.



True Colors

Surprising Facts about Colorings and Other Non-Organic Ingredients in Organics

BY JÉRÔME RIGOT, PhD

Colors?!? Why would organic food need color? In fact, the original colors in prepared foods are often modified or destroyed during processing; thus, food manufacturers feel the need to add colors to their products to ensure their appeal to customers.

As an example, let's look at certified organic Strawberry Cobbler Multigrain Cereal Bars, manufactured by Health Valley Organic, which is owned by industry giant Hain Celestial Group, Inc.

Many people know that when you cook strawberries, their color changes to a dark reddish brown — the natural color may not be eye-poppingly appealing. But customers certainly want a vibrant strawberry-red color like the one on the package, don't they?

So what to do? There are at least two options. One is to use the cooked strawberries as is (unthinkable!). Another would be to add color — in this case it would have to be a "natural" color because artificial colors are prohibited in organic products. If you look at the ingredients list (above), you will see that red cabbage extract was added for color. Red-cabbage-colored strawberry cobbler...what a feast!

But all humor aside, this is cause for concern. The red cabbage extract used for color is derived from *conventional* cabbage grown with toxic agrochemicals. Yet it appears on the National List, the itemization of all synthetic and non-organic substances allowed in organic production. Why? Because at the time it was petitioned to be added to the National List, there was no commercially available red cabbage extract in organic form.

Red cabbage extract: is it so bad?



Read package labels carefully to spot non-organic colors and other ingredients in organic processed foods.

Let's look at the health and environmental effects of cultivating red cabbage conventionally. A database maintained by Beyond Pesticides indicates that there are 49 pesticides with established toxicity used for growing cabbage: 32 are acutely toxic, creating a hazardous environment for farmworkers; 47 are linked to chronic health problems (including cancer); 15 contaminate streams or groundwater; 44 are poisonous to wildlife; and 25 are considered toxic to honey bees and other insect pollinators.

Another cause for concern is that pigments derived from agricultural sources are highly concentrated. They are also most often extracted from parts of fruits or vegetables likely to contain the highest levels of pesticide residues. Examples include grape skin extract, beet juice extract, purple potato juice extract, and red cabbage extract, all commonly used for color in processed foods.

Why do people want organic food? Because producing it has minimal negative impacts on the environment and human health, and there are demonstrably lower pesticide residues.

INGREDIENTS: ORGANIC STRAWBERRY FILLING (ORGANIC CANE JUICE, ORGANIC APPLE POWDER, ORGANIC STRAWBERRIES, ORGANIC RICE STARCH, NATURAL FLAVOR, PECTIN, CITRIC ACID, RED CABBAGE EXTRACT FOR COLOR), ORGANIC FLOURS (ORGANIC WHEAT, ORGANIC OAT, ORGANIC CORN), ORGANIC CANE JUICE, ORGANIC EXPELLER PRESSED CANOLA OIL AND/OR SUNFLOWER OIL AND/OR SAFFLOWER OIL, ORGANIC OAT FIBER, ORGANIC WHEAT GLUTEN, ORGANIC WHEAT BRAN, ORGANIC INULIN, NATURAL FLAVORS, ORGANIC HONEY, BAKING SODA, ORGANIC NONFAT DRY MILK, ORGANIC BUTTER FLAVOR, CREAM OF TARTAR, ORGANIC ACADIA GUM, SOY LECITHIN, SEA SALT

Is this what you, the concerned customer, are getting when you purchase processed organic foods that contain "natural" colors or flavors?

To avoid potentially toxic color in your food, one of the most effective approaches is to stay away from any form of processed food. Home-cooked meals made from scratch are so satisfying. But if you must use processed foods, look at the label carefully. Only organic colors, which are becoming more readily available, should be listed. When possible, avoid organic food that lists a vegetable extract without specifying whether it is organic or not.

Other Allowed Ingredients

Colors are only a few of the highly questionable and controversial ingredients, synthetic or "natural," allowed for use in organic processed foods.

The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) looks poised to keep many of these ingredients on the National List, even though, in many cases, they are not essential to the

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Consumer demand has prompted conventional food giants like Kraft, Kellogg and Panera to drop certain ingredients from their products. Yet food colors derived from toxic sources remain on the National List of materials allowed in organics.

KRAFT, General Mills, Hersheys, Nestlé, Kellogg, Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, Papa John's, and Subway, among others, have announced that they will remove a number of artificial ingredients, preservatives, and food processing aids from their products.

One of the most notable examples of this corporate responsiveness is Panera. In May, the popular bakery-café chain published its “No No List” identifying all of the ingredients it refuses to use or plans to remove from its food by the end of 2016. Surprisingly, some of the ingredients Panera has banned from its products are currently on or being petitioned for addition to the National List! (See sidebar at right.)

It is obvious that the corporate organic food industry

manufacture of the food or organic alternatives exist.

Ironically, unlike the USDA's organic program, a number of corporations that manufacture and sell conventional processed foods are listening to their stakeholders—that is, their customers.

is pressuring the USDA to keep ingredients in organic processed food that should not be there. That is why Cornucopia's policy and scientific staff will be at the next NOSB meeting, October 26–29 in Stowe, Vermont. You can count on us to keep you informed as to when your voice — farmers and consumers together — can make a difference.

‘No No’ Ingredients on the National List

Below is the list of the ingredients, most of them synthetic, that Panera will remove from its foods that are either allowed in organic processed food or being petitioned for addition to the National List:

- *Autolyzed yeast extract*: flavor, a natural source of MSG
- *Glycerides (mono and diglycerides)*: used during drying process of potato chips, may contain trans fats
- *Sodium phosphate/trisodium phosphate*: emulsifiers and pH stabilizers in dairy products
- *Sulfur dioxide*: wine preservative
- *Sodium and potassium lactates*: meat preservatives, being petitioned

Sign the Petition: No Fracking Wastewater in Organics

The Cornucopia Institute has formally called on the USDA to tighten federal standards to prohibit the use of fracking wastewater from oil and gas drilling for irrigation in organic food production.

Research shows that the copious amount of wastewater produced in the hydraulic fracturing technique (“fracking”) is contaminated with toxic chemicals and oil. Recent reporting has indicated its use in the growing of organic food in California.

Cornucopia is also asking the USDA to ban wastewater from the nation's municipal sewage treatment systems. Solid waste produced by these same facilities is currently prohibited in organics.

Effluent from sewage plants, which comingles waste from domestic and industrial sources, can contain pathogens and drug residues in addition to heavy metals and toxic chemicals.

“Because of these potential contaminants, spreading sew-

age sludge is explicitly banned in organic production,” explains Cornucopia Codirector Mark A. Kastel.

“To keep organic food as pure as possible, it's important that we quickly promulgate regulations that will ban risky wastewater uses, as tempting as they are in drought-impacted states like California, from contaminating our food supply,” Kastel adds.

The vast majority of family-scale organic farms around the country do not use any risky irrigation water. The families that farm these operations are eating the food out of their own fields, unlike the owners of large industrial operations that typically work under contract to a major agribusiness.

—WILL FANTLE



Join the effort! Sign the petition at tinyurl.com/FrackWaterPetition



FARMING

Continued from page 1

small farmers are earning wages well below the poverty line.

Too many hardworking, highly skilled farmers quit simply because they can't afford to pay their bills. A love of the job and a passion for the cause and the quality of the food cannot sustain them for long. Lifestyle choices such as having children or owning and improving land are not viable options for many new farmers.

Consider this: the number of farmers under the age of 45 dropped 14 percent between 2002 and 2007, and the number of farmers over the age of 65 increased by 22 percent in the same timeframe. Yet, if we want the majority of our food to come from diversified small-scale, local farms, we must increase the number of young farmers rather than watch them try out farming only to move on to more lucrative occupations.

Improving the income of small-scale farmers amidst the prevailing “cheap food” mentality is a daunting task, but we can begin by addressing the underlying issues. We must:

1. Shift government agricultural subsidies away from monoculture, large-scale commodity production to diversified small-scale farms.

The top five crops subsidized in the United States are corn/feed, cotton, soybean, wheat, and tobacco. Since their inception in the 1920s, these subsidies have increasingly gone to larger farms. In the 1930s, 25 percent of the population lived on 6 million small farms across the country. But by the turn of the century, roughly only 150,000 farms accounted for 70 percent of the nation's total farm sales, which are largely commodity crops.

The artificially low commodity prices induced by subsidies economically disadvantage the farms that do not receive them—typically smaller



Above, Reid Smith strings up pole beans at Adobe House Farm. Farmers typically work six days a week to stay on top of the never-ending chores.

and diversified operations. In developing countries, local farmers are forced out of the marketplace and even off their land when subsidized goods enter foreign markets at costs that unsubsidized local farmers cannot compete with. As a result, around the world, unhealthy processed foods have become cheaper than healthy fresh foods.

Diversified farms that produce high quality fresh vegetables and grass-fed meats and milk should be subsidized rather than commodities that end up in unhealthy processed foods.

2. Reduce competition from large-scale monoculture-style operations that attempt to capitalize on the demand for ethically produced food.

In many cases, the USDA certified organic food in mainstream grocery stores comes from farms and businesses that do not provide the benefits to society that the term “organic” originally signified. What was once a movement led by small-scale, diverse, local, family farms has now become dominated by industrial-scale farms that simply substitute organic inputs into mono-cropping production systems or — even worse — cheap

imports from potentially fraudulent sources. These operations are corporate entities, distributing food nationwide, sometimes globally; their production systems do not always incorporate ecological principles or benefit local communities.

Today, the words “organic,” “local,” and “family farm” have all been co-opted by agribusinesses in an attempt to exploit the increased demand for quality food. Educating consumers to “know their local farmers” and, when locally produced foods are not available, to buy from ethical organic brands, is paramount to reclaiming original organic principles.

3. Increase opportunities for farmers to own farmland close to their markets.

Farmland close to cities is much more expensive than land further from town. Often, new farmers are forced to live far from their customer base, making marketing much more difficult and expensive.

Deliveries must incorporate time and gas spent driving into town, creating fewer opportunities to direct-market fresh produce. Some farmers choose to rent land close to town, but will never have the opportunity to own and, therefore, make long-term investments in the land.

Landlords often do not understand the low income affiliated with farming and charge too much for rent. Thus, farmland changes hands frequently.

When farmers are forced to buy land far from their customer base, consumers lose the opportunity to experience the farm.

Programs that finance and support alternative ownership of farmland close to town need to increase. For example, Equity Trust is a nonprofit that actually pays the difference between the agricultural and market values so farmers can afford to buy

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Whole Foods Brouhaha

Farmers Challenge Grocery Giant's Marketing Program

This spring, 17 certified organic produce farmers requested Whole Foods CEO John Mackey suspend the company's new "Responsibly Grown" produce labeling program. The Cornucopia Institute supported these growers, as did many other certified organic farmers and consumers around the country.

Farmers have estimated the cost to participate in Whole Foods' program could range between \$5,000 and \$20,000 for fees to comply with the program's reporting requirements and, for some, to purchase new labeling equipment. Whole Foods employed one consultant to create a list of disallowed agrichemicals to qualify for a "BEST" rating. Ironically, this list allows several toxic chemicals prohibited in organics.

Conventional producers can receive a higher rating than organic producers by scoring well on farm surveys of practices like conserving energy, limiting water and air pollution, tracking greenhouse gas emissions, and participating in third-party auditing programs to promote safe conditions and fair compensation for workers. The program requires no inspections and no third-party oversight.

The Cornucopia Institute does not deny the importance of farmers implementing good employment practices or installing solar panels, but we hold the most important practice in growing responsibly is protecting workers and their families, consumers, wildlife, and soil from exposure to toxic and carcinogenic chemicals.

Further, Cornucopia members documented numerous instances of labeling inconsistencies around the country, prompting Cornucopia to ask the Federal Trade Commis-

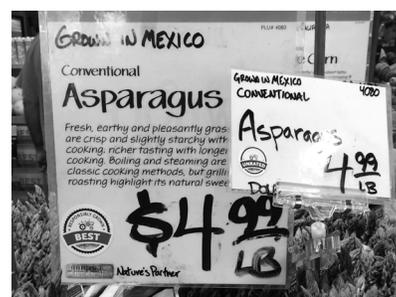
sion to investigate. One family farm's produce was labeled "GOOD," "BETTER," and "BEST" in three different California WFM stores.

Mackey admitted on his personal blog to labeling improprieties, including conventional asparagus from Mexico rated as "BEST" in a store when it should have been "UNRATED." Whole Foods has since committed to employee training and agreed to label certified organic produce as at least "GOOD" moving forward.

Consumers should remember that not everything at the iconic natural foods grocer is organic. In most of the 400+ stores, very few, if any, of the pre-cut fruits and vegetables available are organic. And nearly all items in Whole Foods' deli and steam tables are conventional.

The Responsibly Grown program is designed to convince shoppers they are receiving better value. Gauge that value for yourself, and always look carefully for the organic seal first.

—MELODY MORRELL



At one WFM store in California, conventional asparagus from Mexico was rated "Best" (above) while certified organic, locally grown asparagus ranked only "Good" (below).



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farmland that is of interest to developers and the rural real estate market. USDA subsidies for low interest loans to farmers also should be expanded. Farmers deserve the opportunity to own their own land, and to farm close enough to their market that their consumers are able to know them and their farming practices.

Educating consumers on the ethics of food production needs to continue. The benefits from sustainable production to the environment, local economies, and human health are

well studied but not reinforced in our culture. Homegrown food from highly diverse, sustainable farms can be more expensive than processed food and unobtainable for many people.

Unfortunately, short-term savings result in long-term costs affiliated with pollution, failing local economies, and skyrocketing healthcare costs. What would the true price of processed food be if subsidies to commodity crops were eliminated, and the costs of pollution, migrant labor, and healthcare were incorporated?

Unless we, as a society, begin to tackle these issues in earnest, with

the goal of achieving a paradigm shift in our food supply system, nothing will change. Small-scale, family farmers will come and go while monoculture agriculture will continue to assail us with pollution and inferior nutrition.

All of the momentum that has built up over the past decade surrounding responsible growing and eating will mean very little if an honest effort isn't made to support the people capable of producing superior food.

Learn more at adobe-housefarm.com. A version of this article with references is available at cornucopia.org.

'Faux Farmer' Appointment Challenged

Key Organic Board Member Fails Requirement to Own or Operate an Organic Farm

One of the most troubling aspects of the USDA's management of the National Organic Program has been the appointment of unqualified individuals to sit on the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB). In particular, Cornucopia has raised concerns about several recent appointees who sit in seats designated by Congress for farmers.

The 1990 Organic Foods Production Act reserved four of the 15 NOSB seats for individuals "who own or operate an organic farming operation." The language seems clear. However, three times in the past six years the USDA has appointed individuals to the farmer seats, for five-year terms, who appear to neither "own" nor "operate" an organic farm. Instead, all of these appointees have been full-time employees of large agribusiness interests engaged in organics.

Cornucopia has complained in the past to the USDA about this, but the

agency has been unfazed by our objections.

Why does it matter that real farmers actually sit in seats designated for farmers? Cornucopia's analysis of NOSB voting records (available at cornucopia.org) reveals a significant difference in voting patterns among the board members: the faux farmers side more frequently with powerful corporate interests on controversial issues rather than stand tall for organic integrity. Some of these controversial issues were decided by *one-vote margins*. Who is voting definitely makes a difference.

The most recent example of a questionable farmer appointee is new NOSB member Ashley Swaffar. In her NOSB application (obtained by Cornucopia through a Freedom of Information Act request), Swaffar describes herself as the director of special projects at the Arkansas Egg Company, an egg production company

that contracts with farmers to raise eggs. Swaffar fails to demonstrate in her lengthy application how she meets the congressional requirements for this position—that is, owning or operating an organic farm.

Cornucopia recently filed a formal request with the USDA to reexamine Swaffar's NOSB qualifications. We are also investigating a federal court challenge to another faux farmer sitting on the NOSB, Carmela Beck, a full-time employee of the large berry producer, Driscoll's.

"The NOSB was established by Congress to help guide USDA organic policy and make decisions on materials allowed for use in organics," says Cornucopia Codirector Mark Kastel. "When board members no longer represent the broad mix of organic stakeholders, that perspective is warped and shortchanged."

—WILL FANTLE

Cornucopia Welcomes New Staff Members



Therese Laurdan

After two years of project-based work for Cornucopia, Therese Laurdan has recently become a permanent member of the team as assistant membership coordinator. With over 20 years' experience in office support, administration, and customer service, Therese spent almost a decade in executive teleconferencing with AT&T in Minneapolis.

In order to live a simpler and more sustainable lifestyle, Therese and her family moved to southwestern Wisconsin, where she owned and helped operate a green building supplies business. Therese is the proud mother of two children whom she home-schooled for their first eight years.

An active supporter of local, organic farmers and producers for over 15 years, Therese served as a chapter leader for the Weston A. Price Foundation in Viroqua, Wisconsin.



Rachel Zegerius

Our newest staff member, Rachel Zegerius joins Cornucopia as communications and development assistant, following six years as the program director at Circle Pines Center, near Kalamazoo, Michigan. There, she created a local food ordering system, produced an annual music festival, and developed programs to educate youth and adults about social justice issues, environmental stewardship, and cooperative alternatives.

A lifelong environmentalist who is passionate about good food and farming, Rachel has managed a small dairy goat herd for the past seven years. She earned a biology degree from Hope College and a master's degree in environmental resource management and administration from Antioch University New England. Rachel makes her home in Petoskey, Michigan, on beautiful Little Traverse Bay.



THE CORNUCOPIA FARMER PROFILE

Deep Roots

BY GAYLE NIELSEN

The rapidly vanishing rural landscapes in southern New Hampshire are best preserved through sustainable family farms,” says Roger Noonan, owner and steward of Middle Branch Farm in New Boston. The farm, which has been operated by Roger and Lori Noonan and family since 1989, was initially settled by the Colburn family in the mid-1700s as a subsistence farm. In Civil War times it produced apple cider and apple cider vinegar from the orchard there, as well as dairy and maple sugar. Then, around the turn of the 19th century, a rail line was built that allowed the farm to supply produce to a group of hotels in Boston.

The Noonans had the opportunity to purchase the Colburn place in 1999 and, in 2002, Middle Branch Farm became certified organic.

Honoring the property’s family farm tradition stretching over generations, the Noonans market directly to stores, co-ops, and restaurants, as well as to a couple of large, wholesale national accounts in New England and through a CSA co-op of which Roger is a founding board member.

Middle Branch Farm’s own CSA has drops in two of New Hampshire’s largest cities, Nashua and Manchester, as well as on-farm pickups. In fact, the CSA grew so quickly that the logistics of communicating with members and coordinating the deliveries became more time intensive than growing and packing the produce. As Roger stated regarding delivery and pickup of CSA shares, “Our philosophy is that you paid for it, we want to make sure you get it. That can be very challenging with hundreds of people juggling their busy schedules around our delivery schedules.” So the CSA was scaled back to a sustainable level that could be managed by the family.

Currently, 30 acres of the farm grows vegetables, and there is an ever-changing and diversified number of things produced and raised at Middle Branch Farm, including maple syrup, livestock, herbs, hay, and flowers. Some of the pastures ill suited to vegetable production are being slowly converted to tree and small fruit production.

One of the challenges for Roger, as for most organic farmers, is minimizing weeds and avoiding pests us-



Roger and Lori Noonan’s son, Jake, and daughter, Heather, run the family farm’s daily operations. Above, they are planting summer squash on a wet day.

ing only organically approved substances and methods, while maintaining soil health. Roger’s methods include revolving fields from cover crop, to cash crop, to fallow, or any order of these, to allow the weeds to flush out. (He jokes that his organic certification paperwork has his crop rotation penciled in as he never knows what curveball Mother Nature may throw!) He uses border plantings to host pollinators, as well as habitats for beneficial insects.

Roger also uses organically approved horticultural oils — for example, thyme oil, which acts as both an herbicide and a pesticide. He would like to see more trials research into bio-rationals (relatively non-toxic materials with few ecological side effects) for pest control and more options for organic herbicides to allow the farm to reduce tillage and cultivation.

Roger first became interested in organic farming after reading some of his grandfather’s Rodale materials and the book *Plowman’s Folly* by Edward H. Faulkner, focusing on soil depletion and its relation to plowing. He was led to organic and sustainable farming by his interest in soil conservation. Among his long list of advocacy work Roger includes executive director of the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Districts and president of the New England Farmers Union. He also sits on the National Farmers Union board of directors.

With his heavy traveling and other off-farm responsibilities, Roger welcomes the support of his daughter, Heather, and son, Jake, who have stepped up to take over the day-to-day running of the farm.

A vocal advocate for family farmers and organic/sustainable farms, Roger believes that organizations like Farmers Unions can have a tangible impact on the policies and laws that affect the future of sustainable family farms. The steward of Middle Branch Farm urges people “to know that, if you get off your duff and do more than shake your fist, you can actually make things happen.”



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CORNUCOPIA
I N S T I T U T E

Calling All Proxies



Board president Helen Kees awaits your signed proxy letter.

Have you received a letter in the mail yet from Cornucopia Codirector Mark Kastel? It explains the many reasons Cornucopia is calling to remove corrupt leadership of the USDA's National Organic Program. Please sign and return the accompanying proxy letter. We will hand-deliver these signed proxies to the offices of USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack in Washington. (The proxy can also be downloaded at tinyurl.com/NOPChange.) Show your support for organic integrity and ethics!

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Cornucopia Going Mobile

One of the current buzzwords floating around the Internet is the term “responsive.” As a growing legion of web users turn to their smartphones and tablets as their primary tool for accessing the Internet, websites are changing to accommodate the smaller viewing screens.

Wide, sprawling webpages that work on desktop computers are simply not practical for smartphone users, and can be annoying to navigate. A responsive website recognizes the type of device being used and converts into a different presentation, adapting to the smaller screen.

We know from our data logs that about half of Cornucopia’s web visitors are using mobile devices, and this trend has been increasing. To make these visits a better viewing experience, Cornucopia is upgrading our website to make it responsive. Our home page, and the assorted pieces of information on it, will now adjust to smaller viewing screens. Some of our scorecards are also responsive, and we are working to make all of them mobile-friendly in the future.

So, if it’s been a while since you’ve visited our website on your tablet or smartphone, stop back and check out our new presentation at cornucopia.org. For you desktop computer users, our webpage will remain the same for now. If there are other improvements you think we should consider, we would appreciate your feedback: email to cultivate@cornucopia.org.

—WILL FANTLE

