

# THE CULTIVATOR

NEWS FROM THE CORNUCOPIA INSTITUTE

FALL 2016

## Toothless GMO Food Labeling Bill Becomes Law

Corporate Elites Betray Organics

BY WILL FANTLE

The looming July 1 implementation date for Vermont's first-of-a-kind, historic GMO food ingredients labeling law pushed Monsanto and other corporate giants in retailing, biotechnology, and agribusiness into overdrive as they ramped up pressure on Congress to negate the state law.

Labeling opponents wisely identified Michigan Senator Debbie Stabenow, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Agriculture Committee, as the key to crafting what they described as a "compromise" bill. Stabenow's bill was able to move enough Senate Democrats to join with an already solid block of Republicans to muscle through its swift passage.

Ardent GMO backer, Senate Agriculture Chair Pat Roberts (R-Kansas) called it "the most important agriculture vote in 20 years." When signed into law by the President in late July, it preempted Vermont's new law, mandatory GMO seed labeling requirements in two states, and dozens of related local ordinances.

But what has been rightly called the DARK Act would not have been possible without the behind-the-scenes machinations of the Organic Trade Association (OTA), a few of its most powerful members, and two corporate-funded non-profit organizations - Just Label It (JLI) and the Environmental Working Group (EWG).

**The DARK Act would not have been possible without the behind-the-scenes machinations of the Organic Trade Association, a few of its most powerful members, and two corporate-funded non-profit organizations - Just Label It and the Environmental Working Group.**



JLI, founded by Stonyfield Yogurt chairman Gary Hirshberg, and the EWG signaled their support for an agribusiness-supported alternative to actual GMO labeling, Quick Response (QR) codes, those inscrutable Rorschach-like images found on some product packaging.

The scanning of these speckled black squares with a smart phone and the appropriate app can provide more product information. These QR codes were sold as a solution to food labeling requirements and became an integral part of the Stabenow Bill. Millions of Americans are now discriminated against by not having smart phones and/or sufficient data plans.

The full Senate vote was only made possible when its backers invoked an obscure procedural gimmick that hadn't been used in more than 40 years to push it forward.

Its next hurdle would be a cloture vote, a 60-vote threshold required to halt a filibuster and debate on a bill and force a final vote on the Senate floor. By early July grassroots organic and pro-labeling forces were mobilizing to fight the cloture vote.

The nation's largest consumer organization, Consumer Reports, along with the Organic Con-

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# Cornucopia Asks Regulators to Block Merger

Groupe Danone/WhiteWave Would Dominate the Organic Dairy Market

BY MARIE BURCHAM, JD

The French dairy giant Groupe Danone (Dannon in the U.S.) has announced the proposed acquisition of WhiteWave Foods for approximately \$10 billion.

The deal would combine the world's largest organic yogurt brand, Stonyfield, with Wallaby, a rapidly growing yogurt label, and Horizon, the nation's largest brand of organic milk.

Cornucopia has formally challenged the acquisition based on the serious erosion of competition it would create in the consumer marketplace and the negative economic impact it would have on U.S. organic dairy farmers.

WhiteWave brands are the top sellers in their categories. Horizon organic milk controls nearly 25% of the organic milk market, while their

Silk brand is a leader in plant-based beverages. Danone will be taking control of a bigger piece of the organic dairy market than has ever been controlled by a single company.

With this acquisition Danone will easily be able to beat out competition by lowering prices beyond what farmstead and more moderately sized dairies can withstand.

Dairy has long been the first food consumers associate with the organic label. In many households organic milk is among the first foods introduced to children. As such a key part of the organic market, it is vital that competition remains open.

Cornucopia made this argument in letters calling on the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission to treat this merger as suspect. In addition, a petition drive was launched at

[Cornucopia.org/Danone2016](http://Cornucopia.org/Danone2016) to push for a full investigation of the proposed merger by federal regulators.

The market for organic dairy already has less competition than other agricultural sectors and is more susceptible to monopolization.

The anti-competitive implications of this deal for organic dairy should be considered as distinct from Danone's nonorganic market share.

These are important considerations for determining whether this acquisition violates the Sherman Act and the Clayton Act for anti-competitive and anti-trust reasons.

Danone is already a majority shareholder of Stonyfield, the largest organic yogurt brand in the U.S. Adding WhiteWave's Wallaby and Horizon Organic brand yogurts to Danone's existing market share

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will allow the dairy conglomerate to control a sizable slice of the U.S. organic market.

Mergers like this one could eventually reduce options and raise prices for consumers without any positive impact on the quality of the products they are buying.

With less competition, big companies commonly underpay independent farmers for their products, undermining the economic viability of small, family-scale farms.

We should be very wary of this particular acquisition, as it could seriously erode wholesale competition in other less obvious, but potentially ominous, ways.

The number-two brand of organic milk in the marketplace, Organic Valley, is produced by a member-owned farmer cooperative that has been the longtime raw milk supplier to the Stonyfield yogurt brand. If, after its acquisition, Danone decides to dump Organic Valley, a Horizon competitor, as a supplier, it could leave only one major purchaser of organic farm milk in some regions of the U.S., like New England.

Complicating the matter, one of the other leading brands of fluid milk, marketed under the Stonyfield label, is actually produced and distributed by Organic Valley.

Stonyfield built its reputation and brand on its imagery of supporting family-scale dairy farms, predominantly in the Northeast. Conversely, a substantial percentage of the milk used in Horizon products comes from “organic” factory-dairies in the West, many milking thousands of cows each.

Cornucopia is currently investigating reports of new giant organic dairies, each milking 2,000-5,000 cows, springing up in Oregon, Idaho, and Texas. Many of these operations milk three to four times per day, rather than twice, which is the standard on farms that move their cattle to pasture each day.

In addition, state regulatory documents indicate some of these dairy operations have as many as 10 cows per acre, whereas previous polling done by Cornucopia indicated the national average for organic producers was one cow per acre.

Which production model dominates in the new merged entity will have a great impact on the future financial viability of family dairy farms in this country. If the management and infrastructure at Horizon takes charge, many smaller dairy farms will become expendable in favor of cheaper milk, produced on industrial-scale dairies. This merger truly represents a clash of cultures.

Peter Hardin, perennial industry observer and publisher of *The Milkweed*, a dairy publication, sees this merger as a bad deal for dairy farmers. “Dairy farmers commercialized the organic industry, starting in the 1980s, because of the oppressive control of the



PHOTOS TAKEN BY THE CORNUCOPIA INSTITUTE

Photos: Certified Organic Factory Farms (Above) Hilltop LLC, Boehning Dairy in Earth, Texas. (May 17, 2014). (Below) No evidence of cows on pasture at Horizon Dairy in Kennedyville, Maryland (Sept. 27, 2014).

conventional milk market by an increasingly concentrated group of companies allegedly manipulating the market.

Ironically, Dean Foods, the original parent company of WhiteWave, was long viewed as the consummate industry ‘bad actor’ and was under scrutiny by the Justice Department for market manipulation. The corporate kingpins that run the company are still making billions at the expense of hard-working dairy families,” says Hardin.

If this merger is allowed to go through, it may very well exacerbate the illegal and unfair competition being condoned by the corporate-friendly regulators overseeing the organic industry at the USDA.

# A REAL Apple a Day

## Why to Purchase Local AND Organic This Fall

BY LINLEY DIXON, PHD

**F**all, in most regions of the U.S., means an abundance of local apples. They're likely not as big or picture-perfect as the apples in the grocery store, but local apples, organics especially, pack a taste that is often sweet, tart, and more complex than their conventional counterparts.

Below are just a few of the many reasons why you should buy organically grown apples from your local farmer this season.

**1)** Escalating concerns about conventional apple farming include reliance on non-renewable resources, reduced biodiversity, water contamination, chemical drift, toxic residues in food, soil degradation, and health risks to farm workers.

A study published in the journal *Nature* concluded that organic apple production systems have higher soil quality and lower negative environmental impacts than conventional systems.

Organic production systems also produced sweeter apples, had higher profitability, and were more energy efficient. Choosing organic gives you a safer, better product and also protects the environment and the people producing your food.

**2)** More than 7,500 varieties of apples are known to exist. However, only 15 varieties account for more than 90% of the apples commercially produced in the U.S.

Your local, organic farmer is much more likely to grow rare or heirloom varieties that have been selected over the ages for taste and local conditions, rather than qualities that favor mechanical harvesting, shipping, and long storage life.

These unique, local varieties are also much more likely to be naturally

resistant to insects and diseases, reducing the need to spray pesticides.

Many local organic orchards are situated in unique microclimates. Cold nights, hot sunny days, and reduced dependence on irrigation produce concentrated flavors that will knock your socks off.

**3)** The Environmental Working Group (EWG) rated apples #1 in their 2015 "Dirty Dozen" (conventionally grown fruits and vegetable to avoid due to pesticide contamination).

Pesticide contamination was found on 98% of the 700 apples tested. Common among the residues detected were organophosphate insecticides.

These neurotoxic chemicals were banned for use in homes by the EPA because they are known to cause harm to humans and are linked to low IQ and ADHD in children of farmworkers. In 2016 apples were ranked #2 on the "Dirty Dozen" list, just behind strawberries.

**4)** Surprisingly, the U.S. imports apples, while apples grown in the U.S. sometimes go unharvested, primarily due to pricing fluctuations and lack of profitability. Though China also exports fresh apples to the U.S., most apples arrive here as concentrates for juice – from a country with

widespread pollution and an abysmal food safety record.

A 2014 survey by China's government found that one-fifth of the country's farmland was polluted with heavy metals, including mercury, arsenic, cadmium, and nickel. These heavy metals are known to accumulate in produce.

**5)** Apples are an affordable fruit when bought locally and in-season. Many areas have pick-your-own options, reducing the cost even more and enabling drying or preserving.

**6)** Buying directly from apple farmers supports local farming families and a diverse local agrarian landscape. Farmers often net a better price when they cut out the middleman and sell directly to consumers, allowing money to stay in your community.

Knowing your farmer creates community, provides the opportunity for production questions, and may even allow for visits to the farm.

The next time you see a smaller or unique-looking apple at your local farmers market, don't be so quick to judge it by its cover. There's so much more that its purchase will support beyond the delight to your taste buds!



**Unique, local varieties are more likely to be naturally resistant to insects and diseases, reducing the need to spray pesticides and fungicides.**

# Beneficial Wildlife

## The Unsung Heroes of a Balanced Farm Ecosystem

BY MARIE BURCHAM, JD

As any organic farmer knows, balancing on-farm biodiversity with agricultural production can be a constant challenge. Luckily, a wildlife-friendly approach to farming can support animals that provide services to enhance, and even increase, food production.

Familiar “services” provided by wildlife include pollination and predation of crop pests. Bees, wasps, butterflies, beetles, and even bats and hummingbirds are well known for their benefits to agriculture as pollinators. However, there are some animals that are often overlooked, their roles as beneficial wildlife misunderstood by farmers and the public.

One of the biggest benefits wildlife provide to organic farmers is natural pest control. Organic farmers cannot use common poisons for rodent and insect control, and trapping can be both inhumane and labor-intensive. Many animals are useful to balance predator and prey populations within existing farm ecosystems.

Native bird species play an important role in insect control and may keep weeds in check by feeding on their seeds. For example, the nests of barn swallows can cause a mess and contaminate buildings, but if given a safe place to rear their young, they are beautiful and efficient insect hunters.

While many farmers consider coyotes pests in their own right, they should be respected for their beneficial role in the ecosystem and on the farm. The majority of a coyote’s diet consists of destructive rodents and, in a properly balanced ecosystem, they keep rabbits and burrowing animals at sustainable



**Organic farmers can rely on the complex relationships among wildlife for many production benefits.**

levels. When coyotes are removed, their prey populations often explode, leading to the need for greater pest control measures.

Learning to coexist with these opportunistic hunters means being diligent with containment systems and farm management practices, but the benefits of having these clever hunters around farmland is clear.

Other animals that deserve respect for their role in a healthy organic farm system are native snakes. Snakes are a valuable component of most ecosystems, playing complex predator and prey roles. Snakes have particular value to farmers, as many species help keep pest populations in check without the use of chemicals or more labor-intensive controls.

Garter snakes feed on slugs and insect pests, while gopher snakes are one of the larger non-poisonous species that takes care of rodent and burrowing animal pests, able to hunt the animals within their own burrows and tight spaces.

Wildlife can provide benefits beyond pollination and pest control.

Small burrowing mammals, including moles and mice, are a surprising example of these benefits. These species are often considered “pests” in agricultural systems, but they have surprising benefits to pasture and open space.

Their activities help to decompose and incorporate organic matter, aerate the soil, and allow better water and root infiltration. In a balanced system, where wild predator and prey are healthy, burrowing mammals provide these valuable services without overrunning or degrading open land.

Another strategy to boost beneficial on-farm services is to provide habitat for transient wildlife. When farmers flood their grain fields after harvest, it can have a dramatic benefit for both wildlife and the farmer. Flooding attracts and provides habitat for migratory waterfowl. While foraging in these fields, the waterfowl dramatically increase the decomposition of straw, even to the point that the farmer may not need to till their field before the next planting. This practice is already popular, even on conventional rice farms.

In a country of increasing agricultural industrialization, organic farmers can rely on the complex relationships among wildlife for many production benefits.

Wildlife needs organic farms too; buffers and wild verges provide valuable habitat and biodiversity to support a balanced ecosystem.

Organic food embodies the philosophy that it is possible to live in harmony with all wildlife. With an experienced eye, you can see how even the most misunderstood animals provide essential benefits to our nation’s farms.

# Preserving Organic History

An Archival Collection of the Organic Movement

BY ROGER BLOBAUM  
AND JENNIFER  
HAYDEN, PHD

Personal papers, reports and proceedings from early organic farming meetings and conferences, early newsletters, and other materials of historic interest are being collected and archived in a new national organic and sustainable agriculture history collection at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

These documents tell the story of how the organic movement was built by farmers who shared information about its values and principles, adopted practices that assured plant and animal health, helped develop organic standards, voluntarily had their farms inspected and certified, and responded to consumers' organic integrity concerns.

They also help tell how organic farmers overcame federal government and agriculture establishment opposition and disrespect.

The materials being preserved document the history of organic certification, state organic programs, state and regional organic farming organizations, the enactment and implementation of the 1990 Organic Foods Production Act, the National Organic Standards Board, the National Organic Program, and continuing efforts to mobilize public support for organic research, education, and extension.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY



**Organic materials of historic interest are being collected and archived in a new national and sustainable agriculture collection at the Wisconsin Historical Society.**

Roger Blobaum, one of Cornucopia's first formal advisory committee members, is partnering with the historical society in developing the new organic and sustainable agriculture history collection.

Jonathan Nelson, a Historical Society collections development archivist, is the director of this new national collection. The project has received generous support from the Ceres Trust.

So far, more than 20 organic and sustainable agriculture leaders and pioneers have donated papers.

The first collection was donated by Loni Kemp, a national sustainable agriculture leader for more than 25 years. Her donated materials include papers from her time serving as a founder and board member of the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture and as a board member of the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture.

The second personal collection, donated by Jim Riddle and Joyce Ford, documents the founding and early years of the International Organic Inspectors Association.

It also includes papers from Riddle's term on the National Organic Standards Board, such as a pointed critique of the first proposed organic seal, which looked not unlike a typical biohazard sign. As the primary champion of the archiving project,

Roger Blobaum's papers are also included in the collection.

Blobaum has been a leader in organic farming research, education, advocacy, and policymaking since the early 1970s.

While many of his papers have been archived in hardcopy, Blobaum has also made selected articles easily accessible on his organic history website, [rogerblobaum.com](http://rogerblobaum.com). His website offers a wealth of information on the origins of this movement.

Archivists have also collected records from FairShare Coalition, an organization of organic CSA farmers in south central WI; from Cissy Bowman, national organic policy leader, pioneer organic farmer, and founder of an Indiana organic certification organization; from F.H. King, a University of Wisconsin soils professor and chief of USDA's Division of Soil Management from the early 20th century who wrote the classic,

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*Farmers of Forty Centuries*; and from a host of other notable organic pioneers.

All of the archived materials are publicly available. Those interested in accessing the collections can visit the archive's reading room at the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison where they are stored.

The materials are also available at any University of Wisconsin campus via a free courier service. Each individual's collection has been digitally cataloged and can be viewed at <http://tinyurl.com/OrganicHistoryCollection>.

The online catalog includes descriptions and folder-level inventories that can help prospective researchers understand whether a particular collection contains what they are looking for, before making the effort to visit the archives at the Wisconsin Historical Society, where they are stored.

Readers of this newsletter who have saved personal papers and other artifacts that document the origins and evolution of the organic movement are encouraged to consider donating to the collection.

Appropriate materials will help tell the story of the development of CSAs, local farmers markets and food cooperatives, organic and sustainable agriculture organizations, and efforts to shape and enact state and national laws, regulations, and policies.

For more information about the collection, contact Roger Blobaum at [rjblobaum@gmail.com](mailto:rjblobaum@gmail.com) or Mr. Nelson at [JonathanR.Nelson@wisconsinhistory.org](mailto:JonathanR.Nelson@wisconsinhistory.org).



*The USDA Organic Seal (205.107.b) consists of a triangular outline containing 3 dark triangles with a circle with 2 arrows and the words "MEETS USDA REQUIREMENTS." Inside of that is a globe with the word "ORGANIC" contained in a slash across the earth. The triangular design reminds one of the symbol for radioactive waste and fallout shelters. The slash across the globe also looks like the universal symbol for "not" or "no" over it. Both of these images are wholly unacceptable. A much more appealing symbol has been chosen by the USDA and FDA to be displayed on irradiated food. This is a green, blooming flower. Image is important!*

**The above image and text are from Jim and Joyce Riddle's archives.** Image quality is as it appeared in the original. (Comments from the Organic Trade Association to the USDA regarding the first proposed organic seal. March 1998.)

## Cornucopia Welcomes New Board Member Cameron Molberg

Cameron Molberg has been elected to Cornucopia's board of directors. Cameron joined Texas-based Coyote Creek Organic Feed Mill & Farm in 2010 and currently serves as CEO and General Manager.

Coyote Creek is the only certified organic feed mill in Texas and operates the largest organic pasture-based chicken farm in the state. Their brand, World's Best Eggs, enjoys a 5-egg rating on Cornucopia's egg scorecard.

Cameron brings to the board an educational background that includes institutional management, animal science, and food technology. He is frequently invited to give talks on a variety of topics, including beginning and advanced poultry-keeping, GMOs in our food supply and in livestock feeds,



PHOTO COURTESY OF JANE KO

organic farming and gardening, and the organic certification processes. He's been called an "encyclopedia in blue jeans."

He previously served as treasurer of the Texas Organic Farmers & Gardeners Association (2010-2015), and he founded two organic restaurants in Austin, TX, before joining Coyote Creek Organic Feed Mill. Cameron is also president of the Texas Center for Local Food and serves as a board member of the Southeastern Sustainable Livestock Coalition.

Prior to joining the board, Cameron was a formal policy advisor to Cornucopia. In particular, his perspectives on animal welfare issues and on the organic egg sector have been valuable to the organization.

sumers Association, the Center for Food Safety, Food and Water Watch, Cornucopia, and dozens of others were publicly calling on the Senate to reject the bill, hundreds of thousands of their members flooding Senate phone lines.

Key Senators also spoke out against the bill. And the Food and Drug Administration – the primary agency overseeing food labeling – issued a damning assessment of the bill's many deficiencies.

Behind the scenes, the OTA and its leadership quietly worked for passage. This activity persuaded enough reluctant Democratic Senators to ignore what had become a loud call for rejection from fellow Senators, 286 public interest organizations, thousands of phone calls from the public, and broad condemnation by the organic community.

Along with executives from companies like Stonyfield, Organic Valley, Smuckers, WhiteWave, and Whole Foods, OTA lobbyists assured Senators that “the majority of the organic industry supported the Stabenow Bill.”

One senate staffer told the bill's opponents that OTA's lobbying convinced 15-20 senators who might have opposed the bill (and had opposed an earlier version of the DARK Act) to instead support it.

The corporate-organic industry sell-out facilitated a successful cloture vote that passed by a 65-32 margin. Senate and House passage of the actual bill followed shortly.

Aside from overriding state and local laws, what are some of the DARK Act's other fundamental deficiencies?

- There is no requirement for on-package labeling of GMO foods.
- As many as 100 million Americans lack the ability to find out product specifics by not being able to access QR codes.
- The biotech-friendly USDA – not the FDA – is charged with creating the law's actual labeling rules over the next two years.
- The bill leaves totally unclear what will be considered a GMO food and/or ingredient. According to the FDA, most foods typically thought of as being produced or made with GMO ingredients will not be covered by the bill's narrow

definition of genetic engineering.

The USDA might raise the threshold for incidental GMO contamination from the currently accepted .09% to as high as 30% while still calling that non-GMO!

• The bill suggests that the USDA harmonize its ultimate definition of genetic engineering with the organic law's definitions – something that could create a huge loophole into organic's current strict prohibitions on GMO technology.

"The passage of this law will deny, for the foreseeable future, the right of most American's to know what is in the food they are eating," observes Cornucopia's senior farm policy analyst, Mark Kastel. "It is vitally important that we double down on our efforts to protect the integrity of the organic label, the marketplace alternative to untested GMO technology."

The Cornucopia Institute and a number of our allies in this fight are researching joining forces in a federal lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of some of the aspects of this draconian piece of legislation.

## The Official Cornucopia Food Label Is Here!

In 2008 the Cornucopia Institute introduced its Organic Dairy Scorecard in an effort to identify those organic brands that meet the highest standards of organic agriculture. Since then, we have developed additional scorecards for organic eggs, soy, yogurt, and cereal.

For years, organic brands that achieve a high rating on Cornucopia's scorecards have asked us how they can use their exemplary status to promote their brands in the marketplace. Now, thanks to the continued advocacy of board member Kevin Engelbert, the Cornucopia food label for highly rated producers has been developed, and it has debuted on approximately twelve organic egg brands.

What does it mean? Cornucopia labels marked “Top Rated” indicate that the brand has achieved the highest

ranking on one of our scorecards. Labels marked “Excellent” indicate the brand has achieved the second-highest ranking. Only those organic brands who are in the top two (of five) levels, on one of our scorecards, are eligible to display our label.

How can I display the Cornucopia food label on my brand? High-quality electronic versions of the label can be obtained free of charge. Decals that can be affixed to existing packaging can be purchased at cost (about \$0.01 per label, or \$10 per 1,000).

Our hope is that the Cornucopia food label will serve to assist the very best organic brands in marketing their products, and will help consumers identify brands that meet both the letter and spirit of the organic regulations.



# Local Food Relations

## DIY Organic Certification Guide

**B**uying locally produced AND certified organic food guarantees the most authentic, nutritious, and sustainable options. But, in the absence of that binary, Cornucopia suggests asking the following questions at your market, CSA, or retailer to guide your purchasing choices towards the healthiest local food for your family and the environment.

### **“Who grew this food?”**

Producer-only farmers markets feature vendors who sell items which they have themselves produced. Other market models allow vendors to resell produce they bought wholesale.

### **“What is in season right now?”**

Some farmers may be selling produce that is not local, while others use hoop houses or heated greenhouses to bring produce to market out of season.

### **“If not certified, how was it grown?”**

Claims of “no-spray,” “chemical-free,” “natural,” or “grown using organic methods” are subjective. Synthetic fertilizers, agrochemicals, and spraying of field borders are possible. Learn about management of soil fertility and weed, disease, and pest controls.

### **“Do you use OMRI-approved products? If not, what do you use?”**

Organic Materials Review Institute products are authorized for use under the National Organic Program’s standards.

### **“How do you control pests?”**

Biodiversity, wildlife corridors, beneficial insects, proper spacing, and crop rotations all minimize pests. Organic-approved pest control products are available; ask for product names and see if they are OMRI-listed.



**In the absence of locally produced AND certified organic food options, Cornucopia suggests asking growers and retailers specific questions to guide your purchasing choices.**

### **“How is disease managed?”**

Fertile soil, rich in organic matter, managed using crop rotations, cover crops, and composted animal manures will resist diseases. Organic-approved fungicide used can be checked for OMRI listing.

### **“How do you control weeds?”**

Organic farmers will tolerate some amount of weed pressure, as long as their crop’s yield is not threatened. Organic strategies used to control weeds include using cover crops, mulching, cultivation (tilling), and/or hand weeding, in smaller operations.

### **“How is livestock managed?”**

Organic standards require access to the outdoors/pasture and prohibit confinement. Mobile coops for chickens and, for cattle, one cow or less per acre are good standards. Nonorganic grain is likely GMO and contaminated with agrochemical residues.

### **“How is animal health managed?”**

Organic production relies on disease prevention and bans most veterinary medicines and antibiotics. Many

non-certified farmers are not knowledgeable as to which alternative therapeutic approaches are acceptable under the National Organic Standards.

### **“How do you manage parasites?”**

Maintaining a closed herd, quarantining sick animals, and sanitization measures minimize exposure to disease and parasites. Sustainable stocking rates, intensive rotational grazing, and the use of multispecies grazing are helpful practices to help break the life cycles of internal parasites. Parasiticides allowed in organic production are on the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances.

### **“What is the origin of the livestock?”**

Were the animals managed organically from the last third of gestation and born on the farm, or were they purchased from an auction, a practice not allowed under the organic standards?

### **“Can I visit your farm?”**

Visiting a farm is one of the primary ways to verify that the farm is operating with integrity and meets organic standards. Some farms even offer “work for produce” exchanges, which is a great way to become more intimately familiar with your farmer’s practices.

Farmers markets and CSAs offer meaningful ways to access some of the best food in your community. These pointed questions will help you sort through the various claims made at farmers’ stands and ensure that you are getting healthy, local foods you depend on.

For more information visit:  
[Cornucopia.org/  
Certification-Guide](https://www.cornucopia.org/Certification-Guide)





# Bathed in Love at Butterworks

Organic Yogurt the Offspring

BY RACHEL ZEGERIUS

**Y**ou might not meet a more dynamic dairy duo than Jack and Anne Lazor. “I’m Mr. Giddyup and she’s Madam Whoa,” says Jack.

He notes that she’s the one with common sense who interjects reality into any situation, while she ascertains that he’s the dreamer and the charm behind the legend that is Butterworks Farm.

The Lazors have been farming in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont since the late 1970s, when they processed milk from their two family cows on the stovetop in their farmhouse kitchen. Early on, their local delivery route consisted of 35 families receiving eggs, raw milk, butter, farmer’s cheese, and – their ambrosial, signature product – yogurt.

Today, Butterworks Farm yogurt is one of the most widely recognized organic brands on shelves across the Northeast. Cornucopia has given the product its highest and most reputable, 5-spoon, rating on its yogurt scorecard, designed to educate consumers about the best and worst organic brands available. (Visit: [cornucopia.org/yogurt-scorecard/](http://cornucopia.org/yogurt-scorecard/))

Captivating more dedicated customers each year, it’s hard to pinpoint just which of Butterworks Farm’s unique characteristics makes their yogurt stand out.

It could be the heritage strains of cultures, grown weekly and used in the fermentation process. Or, maybe it’s the high content of fat and solids found in their grass-fed cows’ milk that give it the rich flavor for which it’s known. Alternatively, could it be yogurt-maker Theresa’s special skills that bring the magic?

While all of these factor are sure



PHOTO COURTESY OF JACK LAZOR

**If there is any one thing that Butterworks aims to be, it’s an alternative to corporate organics. “We are definitely marching to the beat of a different drummer,” says Jack.**

to deliver, one thing is for certain. Umbilical to Butterworks’ success is a commitment to the land itself: soil vitality.

Over the years, despite growing and changes in their farming approach, dairy production, and business practices, the one thing that has endured is a perennial commitment to balancing nutrients, trace minerals, organic matter, and soil life.

“Developing the whole farm organism is the most important thing here,” says Jack. The Lazors recognized the symbiosis early on. In the mid-1980s, with their Vermont milk handlers’ license approved

and their yogurt on shelves across the state, the Lazors invested heavily in minerals for their land.

“The payback was almost immediate,” says Jack. Diversity and yield of browse increased in the hayfields. The health and general well-being of cows improved, and milk production increased.

“Thus began my love affair with soil,” he explains. “All I needed to do was to take care of it, and it took care of us. This was such a revelation to me. I very quickly realized that balanced mineral inputs do not cost—they actually pay.”

Voilà, the terroir of Butterworks Farm, a by-product of this deep reverence and responsibility to care for the Earth. And, in turn, the Earth is taking care of them.

Butterworks Farm has sustained itself for four decades and now grosses nearly \$1.2 million each year. They currently have a total of 85 dairy cows, including 43 milkers, and this year they transitioned from a system of feeding the cows both grain and hay to one of 100% grass-fed diets for all of their adult cows.

The high levels of forage quality in their fields - diversity, high energy, and high protein - have enabled the Lazors to stop feeding grain to their cows altogether. Such grass-based systems build soil carbon and, in the case of Butterworks, may lead to no-till grain systems in the future.

Implementing innovations like



Butterworks Farm  
Westfield, Vermont  
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(802) 744-6023



these, Jack and Anne Lazor are true organic pioneers. And, as mentors in the movement, they have encouraged years of development in local production, local food, and....local competition.

Not only do giant organic counterfeit corporations pose unfair competition, but increasing numbers of small New England dairies also make it harder to succeed in today's market. "We can't complain about that though, because it's really the best thing for communities to each have their local food supply," says Anne.

But, distribution and profitability have declined over recent years. And, having been removed from the shelves of Whole Foods in the greater D.C. and New York regions as of late, Butterworks is reimagining a successful vision moving forward.

"We rode the wave and now the wave has crested," says Jack. So, the Lazors have spent the last several months doing a lot of soul-searching, digging deep to unfold the riddle of their future path – both personally and for the fate of the business.

"We grew and grew for a while,

but maybe now we're thinking one of our options is to shrink," says Anne. Strategies moving forward may include developing even more relationships and markets throughout Vermont and New Hampshire, a focus on being THE local brand.

If there is any one thing that Butterworks aims to be, it's an alternative to corporate organics. What will become of the Lazors legacy? Only time will tell.

"We are definitely marching to the beat of a different drummer," says Jack. And, in a profit-driven economy that often deemphasizes and externalizes the value of diverse ecology and sustainable natural systems, the Lazors see themselves as part of an "ascending spiral."

The unifying force that connects every living and non-living organism in their farm ecosystem takes root in Love of the Earth. "It's pretty idyllic," observes Jack.

His definition of farming? Producing food for people out of love. Jack chuckles, "The entire farm is bathed in love."

Remember that when you take your next spoonful of Butterworks Farm maple yogurt.



## Last Wishes

A Cornucopia Member Shares with Her Family and Friends

**F**ervent Cornucopia member and supporter Mary Jurmain has sadly passed away from a recurrence of cancer.

Along with her husband Rick, they not only backed Cornucopia's work, but they also helped a young couple realize their dream of farming by assisting with the financing necessary to start a farming operation.

Even in her last few months, Mary and Rick were thinking of how they could make a lasting difference.

As one of her last requests, Mary asked her friends to consider making a donation to Cornucopia as a bequest in her memory.

We are deeply honored and grateful for her enduring thoughts and support.

If you, too, are interested in committing your legacy in support of the organic movement in this way, Cornucopia would be happy to talk to you about diverse giving opportunities available.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHAWN G. HENRY

The Lazors have grown and processed their own organic grains for years. This year, however, they transitioned the cows onto a 100% grass-fed diet.



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

## Rewarding Authentic Organic Farmers



Cornucopia is updating one of its most popular reports and scorecard "*Maintaining the Integrity of Organic Milk*," to provide the safest, most nutrient dense and authentic foods for families. "While conducting the research, one change we've noticed is the market development for dairy products from cows eating a 100% grass diet," says Marie Burcham, Cornucopia's lead project researcher. Updates will include an analysis of animal welfare and origin of livestock issues. "The intent is to empower consumers and wholesale buyers to vote in the marketplace, rewarding the true heroes in this industry and sending a message to the bad actors," notes Cornucopia cofounder Mark Kastel.

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## 'Organics' Sans Soil?

Elders, Legal Observers, Diversified Farmers Say "No."



The USDA's National Organic Program (NOP) has released the report generated by its task force on hydroponic and aquaponic production. The 16-member "ponics" task force was charged with evaluating the mounting controversy surrounding the alignment of these soilless systems with current USDA organic regulations.

The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) will use the report to provide recommendations on whether the organic certification process should include "roots in water" production systems.

The report comes amidst a raging debate over whether vegetables grown in nutrient solutions are in line with the basic premise of organic production: restoring and maintaining soil fertility. Internationally, hydroponic and aquaponic operations are not allowed to be certified organic, although a few container-based exceptions apply for selling transplants, for example.

Cornucopia strongly supports the 2010 NOSB recommendation that forbade these systems, consistent with the rest of the organic world. However, the NOP has continued to allow hydroponic produce, largely from Mexico, Holland, and Canada, to be sold in the U.S. as 'organic.' Organic integrity depends on the U.S. maintaining strong and consistent organic standards internationally.

Pioneers of the organic movement are leading a "Keep the Soil in Organics" campaign. They argue that organic farming is entirely centered on the biological complexity found in properly maintained, fertile soil. They have garnered signatures from many diverse national and international organizations, representing over two million farmers and consumers, calling for a moratorium on all organically labeled hydroponic produce in the U.S.

**LINLEY DIXON, PHD**