

THE CULTIVATOR

News from The Cornucopia Institute
Summer 2012

USDA-Agribiz Collusion Puts Organic Label at Risk

Organic Watergate White Paper Calls Out Corruption, Questionable Synthetics

By Mark Kastel

The organic label may be regulated by the federal government, but it is owned by us all. Organic pioneers built this movement as an alternative to industrial-scale, chemical agriculture that has proven ruinous to family-scale farming, the environment, and human health. The organic market has seen such dizzying growth over the past 30 years precisely because farmers and consumers believe in the core values of the organic movement — not only healthful, wholesome food but also regenerative agriculture, responsible land stewardship, humane animal husbandry, and economic justice for family-scale farmers and farmworkers. Millions of people are willing to pay a premium because they believe the organic label still delivers this vision. The integrity of the label matters above all.

Yet as this market nears \$32 billion in annual sales, some corporate players, and their minions in government, are recklessly jeopardizing the organic label. The corporations that have gobbled up most of the pioneering organic businesses are relentless in their shortsighted pursuit of profit. Forget about the “story behind the food” that consumers crave. Pretty pictures on labels that hide



Cornucopia's investigation finds an “unholy alliance” between corporate agribusiness and the USDA National Organic Program.

the reality of factory farms or anonymous Chinese imports are becoming all too common. Now even risky chemicals are being approved for use in organic foods. Corporate interests are gambling with consumer trust in the organic label and competitively injuring ethical industry participants.

Enough!

The Cornucopia Institute is challenging the conspiracy between the USDA and corporate agribusiness interests that has allowed these assaults on organic integrity. Our new, 75-page white paper, *The Organic Watergate*, details violations of federal law and the ignoring of congressional intent that have created a climate of regulatory abuse and corporate exploitation.

Who Benefits?

In order to create a level playing field and organic integrity, the organic community came together in the 1980s and requested that the government regulate our industry. How many other industries have actually asked the federal government for tough regulations and enforcement?

When Congress passed the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) of 1990, it set up an *WATERGATE* continued on page 6

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Monsanto's Gene Patent Lawsuit Appealed

Family farmers and public interest groups like Cornucopia are appealing the dismissal of a lawsuit challenging Monsanto's patents on genetically engineered seed technologies. The lawsuit, *Organic Seed Growers and Trade Association et al v. Monsanto*, was dismissed by Judge Naomi Buchwald in late February.

Cornucopia's board of directors then met with lead attorney Daniel Ravicher of the Public Patent Foundation and unanimously approved continued participation in the lawsuit. "We need the courts to protect farmers and consumers from genetic trespass and pollution of our food chain," said Steve Sprinkel, Cornucopia's board president and an organic farmer in California. "Our board clearly understands how critical this lawsuit is to the future of organic food and agriculture."

Monsanto's harassment of family farmers is well known in farm country; the biotech seed and chemical giant has one of the most aggressive patent assertion agendas in U.S. history. Between 1997 and 2010, Monsanto has acknowledged filing 144 lawsuits against America's family farmers, while settling another 700 cases out of court for undisclosed amounts and imposing gag orders on farmers.

During the recent court proceeding Monsanto refused to provide a legally binding covenant not to sue in the future, signaling the cor-



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The biotech giant acknowledges filing 144 lawsuits against family farmers between 1997 and 2010, and settling another 700 cases out of court.

poration's intention to continue their aggressive pursuit of innocent family farmers.

But fears have also been raised that should the patent lawsuit fail, Monsanto may then seek to recover its attorney fees from the appellants who brought the lawsuit. Ravicher thinks the odds are low that Monsanto would go after the appellants for their legal costs, but hundreds of thousands of dollars are potentially at stake. To protect themselves, the dozens of appellants involved with the appeal have created a mutual defense agreement, and pledged to collectively raise funds if needed to cover the cost of potential retribution by Monsanto.

"Farmers are under threat," said Jim Gerritsen, owner of Wood Prairie Farm in Maine and President of the lead appellant, OSGATA. "We're not asking for one penny from Monsanto. Ultimately, our fight is for justice and is waged to defend the right of the people to have access to good and safe food."

Oral arguments on the appeal are expected to occur later this year or in early 2013. ■

—Will Fantle

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Report: NOSB Spring Meeting

New Vilsack Board Appointees Approve Most ‘Big Organic’ Requests

While the debate over the use of questionable additives like carrageenan and DHA in organic food has occupied considerable attention at recent National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) meetings, the latest meeting in Albuquerque, in May, also covered a number of other important matters.

The board unanimously approved a letter to USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack expressing their concerns about the threat of genetic engineering to organics. The USDA’s actions in addressing the issue have been “insufficient,” according to the NOSB letter, adding, “We feel the developers of the GMO technology should share the burden that organic farmers now assume in mitigating the gene flow between farms and should compensate organic farmers for genetic drift.” The management at the USDA’s National Organic Program had attempted to dissuade the board from lobbying the Secretary on this important issue.

GMOs also appeared again during deliberations on use of genetically modified vaccines in livestock. It’s currently difficult, due to manufacturer reluctance to fully disclose formulations, to determine whether or not a vaccine is genetically altered. GMO vaccines may be allowed, but first they must be individually reviewed and approved (a blanket approval was sought). The NOSB tabled the issue needing a fuller picture of the various GMO and non-GMO vaccines available in the marketplace.

The NOSB approved several other materials for use in organic food. Both synthetic nutraceuticals choline and inositol were approved for use in infant formula and for individuals with severe medical nutritional

needs (enteral). These again were contested votes with a narrow approval provided by the agribusiness voting block on the board.

Although two board members noted that farmers are able to grow both curry leaves and Kaffir lime, *Citrus hystrix*, (including leaves and fruit), manufacturers do not believe that a sufficient organic supply is available so the NOSB approved the use of non-organic versions in organic food formulations.

The policy committee of the NOSB shared their work on several matters, including communications with the public between NOSB meetings, limits on public testimony, and conflict of interest provisions regarding integrity of the voting process. The conflict of interest issue was on prime display. Prior to each vote, board members were asked to disclose potential conflicts. NOP staff then ruled whether or not the disclosure was significant enough to preclude the individual from voting.

The practice exposed a lot of warts. For example, one board member—a full-time employee of Organic Valley—disclosed prior to the carrageenan vote that her employer manufactures products containing the material. Left unsaid by the board member was that Organic Valley representatives publicly spoke to the NOSB lobbying for use of carrageenan. Also unsaid (according to NOSB members) was that the CEO of Organic Valley had been calling individual board members before the meeting and urging them to vote for carrageenan. Does all of this comprise a conflict of interest preventing a vote on the material by the employee of Organic Valley? The NOP staff said no.

Similarly, a board member and full-time



Has ‘Organic’ Been Oversized? So asks *The New York Times* in a July 8 feature in the Sunday Business section. The story includes discussion of Cornucopia’s “Organic Watergate” report and the composition of the National Organic Standards Board.

employee of Whole Foods Market that sells products containing carrageenan (and also manufactures its own private label products containing carrageenan—something he failed to publicly disclose) was likewise determined not to have a conflict of interest by NOP staff.

And then there is the issue of a new board member, who occupies a farmer seat on the board but is not an “owner or operator” of an organic farm, as the criterion for that position is delineated in federal law.

All three of these individuals cast deciding votes favoring carrageenan (one less vote for the material and it would have failed approval); they also cast critical votes for the use of choline, inositol, and other synthetic materials.

Looking ahead, the fall meeting of the NOSB will cover such topics as the use of mutagenesis in organics, revisit aquaculture, examine the poultry omnivore diet and synthetic amino acids in pet food, and discuss a guidance document on space requirements of beef and swine. ■

—Will Fantle

NOSB Approves Risky Ingredient

Potential Carcinogen *Carrageenan* Allowed in Organics

By Charlotte Vallaeys

If there were ever a poster child for an ingredient that should not be in food—any food, let alone organic food—carrageenan would be it.

Carrageenan is a highly processed seaweed derivative that serves no nutritional function. It is added as a stabilizer or fat replacer in certain dairy products, dairy alternatives like soymilk, and other foods.

Carrageenan, as an ingredient in food, has been controversial since the late 1960s, when scientists first found that it leads to serious gastrointestinal inflammation. Inflammation is concerning in itself, but more so because the condition is associated with over 100 human diseases, including colon cancer.

Since 2002 Dr. Andrew Weil has been cautioning people to avoid foods with carrageenan. This has put the carrageenan industry on the defensive.

The carrageenan industry claims that carrageenan used in foods is different from low molecular weight (degraded) carrageenan. Carrageenan with a low molecular weight is classified as a “possible human carcinogen” by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (of the World Health Organization). But when the industry tested its products for contamination with degraded carrageenan, they found that not a single sample could claim to be free of degraded, carcinogenic carrageenan. The testing was done in response to a 2003 ruling by the European Commission’s Scientific Committee on Food, which stated that food-grade carrageenan should contain no more than 5% degraded carrageenan. The industry’s own testing results showed that one sample



PHOTO BY THE CORNUCOPIA INSTITUTE

Physician-scientist Joanne Tobacman, MD, testified before the NOSB that carrageenan is unsafe and should be removed from all foods, a position based on her decades of NIH-funded research.

contained as much as 25% degraded carrageenan.

At Cornucopia, we think that 0% should be the accepted level of known carcinogens approved for use in organic food.

Furthermore, since the early 1980s, scientists have reported that food-grade carrageenan likely transforms to the degraded version in the human gastrointestinal tract, thereby raising further concerns about the carcinogenicity of this common food ingredient.

Recently, research funded by the National Institutes of Health successfully identified the particular biological process by which food-grade carrageenan causes inflammation, and found it to be similar to the way certain pathogenic bacteria, such as Salmonella, cause harm.

While scientific research indicates that carrageenan causes inflammation for everyone, some individuals experience debilitating gastrointestinal symptoms every time they consume foods containing carrageenan. Anyone fighting irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), spastic colon, or other undiagnosed gastrointestinal symptoms

should certainly consider discontinuing the consumption of foods containing carrageenan, for a period of time, to determine if carrageenan is the culprit.

Organic foods, by law, should not contain ingredients that have a harmful effect on human health. So what is carrageenan doing in organic foods? When it was first reviewed for use in organic foods in the mid-1990s, the three scientists performing the technical review failed to alert the National Organic Standards Board members of the vast body of scientific literature raising concern. Two of the scientists were employed by corporate agribusiness; the third, an academic, has gone on to publish studies defending GMOs.

But even if a harmful ingredient is added to the National List of approved substances, whether by negligence or intentionally, the organic law provides a relatively simple way for ingredients to be removed. Every ingredient has to be reviewed and relisted by the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) every five years. This is called the “sunset review” process.

Carrageenan was up for sunset review at the last meeting of the NOSB, this spring. The nation’s leading independent carrageenan expert, Dr. Joanne Tobacman, a physician-scientist at the College of Medicine at the University of Illinois–Chicago, presented her research findings and answered questions from Board members. Dr. Tobacman authored a review of scientific

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The Cornucopia Institute’s guide to
AVOIDING CARRAGEENAN is available
at www.cornucopia.org.



FARMER JANE

An Interview with Temra Costa

PHOTO BY BART NAGEL



The connection between women and food is as natural as, well, Mom and apple pie. Historically it's been "women's place" to peel the potatoes, can the pears, tend the garden, pluck the chicken, cook the meals. (And wash up after.)

Today, women's role is to stir the pot, food activist Temra Costa discovered. Says the author of *Farmer Jane: Women Changing the Way We Eat* (Gibbs Smith, 2010), "Women are driving the sustainable food movement."

How? As farmers, for starters. Even as the number of agricultural producers has dwindled to less than 2% of the population, the last ag census showed that women represent the fastest-growing demographic of producers in the U.S. Women are now the principal operators of 14% of the nation's 2.2 million farms, nearly triple the number some 30 years ago, according to the Women, Food and Agriculture Network (see sidebar).

Although there are women involved in industrial-scale, conventional agriculture, especially cattle ranching, in general "women are farming in a way that respects the earth more," Costa says. Women tend toward hand labor versus mechanized production, she explained, hence they are leading the small-scale, grassroots local, direct market, and CSA movements.

Costa's own path veered toward sustainability when she was a student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the 1990s. The hypocrisy of U.S. ag policy—"such as banned pesticides like DDT being shipped for use in South America and Africa"—made her abandon international ag development as a career choice. Costa's "aha moment" came, she says, when she became aware of the impact of GMOs on the food system. She started organizing in 1998 and hasn't stopped since.

It was during her more than six years working with Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) in California that Costa began to notice women's involvement in the food movement, "from mothers who care about what their children and communities are eating, to the fact that women are responsible for 85% of food purchases," she said. Costa also found that of the leading sustainable ag nonprofits, women comprise 60% of staff, and 61% of these are executive directors.

Yet despite these numbers Costa also noticed women's relatively low profile compared to male food movement mavericks. From this gap *Farmer Jane* was born. A call to Costa's national network produced a flood of nominations of agrarian mavens to profile in the book.

Culling the total to 30 wasn't easy. *Farmer Jane* features organic pioneers such as Gloria Decater of Live Power Community Farm in California (profiled in the Spring 2012 *Cultivator*); attorney Claire Hope Cummings, an advocate for indigenous land rights; Marion Kalb of the National Farm to School Network; Native foods historian and chef Lois Ellen Frank in New Mexico; Erika Allen, director of Growing Power Chicago; and Mily Treviño-Sauceda, founder of the Organización de Líderes Campesinas, a support network for women farmworkers and a voice against racism in the food system. Notes Costa: "Paying someone so little that they have to live in their car is not that different from slavery."

Costa's next book is tentatively titled *Farmer Jane's Kitchen*. In it women are sure to be cooking up change, one plate at a time. ■

—Elizabeth Wolf

Seeding Sisterhood

Iowa farmer—and firebrand—Denise O'Brien, featured in Costa's book, founded the Women, Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN) to provide resources and empowerment to the growing number of women entering more formalized leadership roles on their farms. In its 15th year, WFAN's projects include "Women Caring for the Land" educating women landowners on conservation methods and "Harvesting Our Potential," an on-farm apprentice program. Now that the sustainable ag movement is becoming more mainstream, writes WFAN Executive Director Leigh Adcock, women "must continue to guide and shape it at all levels of society, from the farm to the halls of Congress." Learn more at wfan.org.



Farmer Jane profiles 30 women involved in sustainable food, from farmers and chefs to activists and policymakers. Join the community at farmerjane.org.

Organic Watergate

Continued from page 1

independent advisory panel, the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), that, uniquely, has statutory power. Any synthetic input or ingredient used in organic farming or food production must be reviewed by the NOSB to assure that it is not a threat to human health or the environment and that it is “essential” to organic production. The NOSB also makes recommendations on animal welfare standards and other agricultural practices.

We understand the risk of this public discussion to the organic label. But silence only aids and abets those individuals and entities that, in short-term pursuit of profit, are willing to exploit the trust of organic consumers and competitively injure ethical organic farmers and businesses.

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of organic consumers and competitively injure ethical organic farmers and businesses.

In order to placate concerns of federal involvement in the nascent organic industry, Congress specifically earmarked the majority of the 15 seats on the board for independent farmers, consumers, scientists, and environmentalists. This was seen as a way to balance the power of commercial interests involved in organic food manufacturing, marketing, and retail sales.

Many in the industry generally thought this system of shared power, with regard to synthetics in organics, was working—until we received a jarring wake-up call at the NOSB meeting late last year in Savannah.

At the meeting a \$12 billion Dutch-based multinational, DSM/Martek Biosciences,

partnered with the nation’s largest dairy processor, Dean Foods, to muscle through approval of DHA/ARA synthetic nutrient oils. The additives, derived from genetically mutated algae and soil fungus, are processed with petrochemical solvents, grown in genetically engineered corn, and formulated for use in infant formula, dairy, and other products with a host of other unreviewed synthetic ingredients.

“All these elements of the Martek Biosciences products, along with outstanding safety and efficacy concerns, made them inappropriate and illegal in organics,” explains Charlotte Vallaey, Cornucopia’s Director of Food and Farm Policy. “After witnessing this travesty, we decided to take a closer look at how other synthetic additives have been approved for use in organic foods in the past.”

What our investigation found is disturbing

to many organic industry stakeholders.

Biased Technical Reviews?

The NOSB was constituted by Congress to represent diverse industry stakeholders, not to be a scientific body. To assist the board with expert advice, federal law requires outside impartial scientists to review synthetic materials petitioned for use in organics by processors and then to share their findings with NOSB members.

Our investigation found that a small handful of scientists, *working for corporate agribusiness*, were often the experts supplying the “independent” analyses to the board. In one case, an executive for Beech Nut, Dr. Richard Theuer, authored 45 of 50 techni-

cal reviews during a two-year period in the 1990s.

As a case study Cornucopia used the food ingredient carrageenan, a stabilizer and thickening agent, that was initially approved for use in organic food in the mid-1990s. Theuer and two other agribusiness-related food scientists reviewed carrageenan without emphasizing its impacts on human health and the environment. Carrageenan has been widely used in conventional foods for decades. Despite being a known inflammatory agent and possible human carcinogen, its use in organics was re-approved at the last NOSB meeting, in May in Albuquerque. (See related story on page 4.)

Just as troubling, one of the newest contractors to fulfill the technical review function is The Organic Center, the nonprofit offshoot of the Organic Trade Association, an agribusiness lobby group.

The Organic Center’s board is chaired by Mark Retzlaff, President of Aurora Dairy, a giant factory farm milk producer bottling private-label (store brand) organic milk for Walmart, Costco, Safeway, and Target. Aurora was found by the USDA in 2007 to have “willfully” violated 14 tenets of federal organic law.

The rest of The Organic Center board reads like a Who’s Who of giant corporations involved in organics, including four individuals associated with Dean Foods and their WhiteWave division (Horizon and Silk).

“Over the years, The Organic Center board members have worked for some of the very companies seeking approval for use of synthetics in organic food,” notes Cornucopia’s Vallaey. “This is the proverbial fox watching the organic chicken coop.”

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Cornucopia’s ORGANIC WATERGATE

75-page white paper is available at

www.cornucopia.org.



“Stacking” the Board?

Cornucopia’s report charges the USDA with “stacking” the NOSB with agribusiness executives who all too often have sold out the interests of organic farmers and consumers. In flagrant violation of congressional intent, this is an illegal practice that has stretched over the past three administrations.

“We have seen the USDA, in the past, appoint an executive from General Mills, as an example, to a consumer slot on the board,” notes Cornucopia Codirector Will Fantle. “This gross scoffing at the law Congress passed as a safeguard against corporate domination needs to end.”

Cornucopia expected better from the Obama administration. Yet one of the newest appointees to the board, an executive at the giant berry producer Driscoll’s, was placed in a farmer slot—that is, the slot Congress reserved for an individual who actually “owns or operates an organic farming operation.” In a letter to USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack, Cornucopia demands that this individual be removed from the board.

Cornucopia’s letter to Secretary Vilsack



LOIS BALDWIN, NEBRASKACLOTHESPINSBLOGSPOT.COM

Congress mandated four slots on the NOSB to individuals that “own or operate an organic farm” to help steer the National Organic Program. Currently two of these are held by organic agribusiness executives, neither a certified organic farmer when appointed.

states that the industry needs a truly impartial and representative board, and the board needs truly impartial expert technical advisors. The letter calls on Vilsack to reform the selection of independent scientists reviewing synthetics in organics—and Cornucopia has threatened to sue if the illegal abuses continue.

Organics Still the Gold Standard

Despite these problems, Cornucopia’s report is bullish on organics and hopeful that the situation at the USDA can

be turned around. There are fewer than 300, mostly benign, non-organic and synthetic compounds that have been approved for use in organics. That number is dwarfed by the many thousands of chemicals used in conventional food production, many of them highly toxic and carcinogenic.

We understand the risk of this public discussion to the organic label. But silence only aids and abets those individuals and entities that, in the short-term pursuit of profit, are willing to exploit the trust of organic consumers and competitively injure ethical organic farmers and businesses.

We implore consumers not to reject organics because a handful of corporations have acted recklessly and the USDA has failed to do their legally mandated job. Organic farmers, and their ethical processing partners, need your support now more than ever, and health-conscious families deserve authentic organic food.

Cornucopia is collecting signed proxies, downloadable from www.cornucopia.org. We ask organic industry stakeholders to sign the proxy and join in the demand that the USDA operate the organic program legally. ■

Risky Ingredient

Continued from page 4

literature on carrageenan, published in the official journal of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). The NOSB must, by law, review available information from NIEHS when debating the appropriateness of ingredients like carrageenan. In the decade since she published the review, Dr. Tobacman has collaborated with other physicians and scientists, such as the chief of gastroenterology at the University of Chicago’s School of Medicine, and she is convinced that carrageenan is not safe.

While some Board members were interested in learning from Dr. Tobacman, others were clearly focused, like corporate agribusi-

ness, on discrediting her work and her arguments. These Board members employed the arguments fed to them by carrageenan industry lobbyists, who were present at the meeting. These arguments and tactics are practically identical to those used by the biotech and tobacco industries to discredit independent scientists who raise legitimate health and environmental concerns.

After an aggressive lobbying campaign by carrageenan manufacturers, their agribusiness customers, and the Organic Trade Association, the Board decided to keep carrageenan as an allowed ingredient in organic foods, by a one-vote margin.

Organic foods should provide a safe haven from dangerous ingredients like carrageenan. Consumers should send a strong message to companies that defend the use



Essential? The Board’s vote is particularly questionable given that, for every food that contains carrageenan (ice cream, chocolate milk, soy creamer, deli meat, etc.), there is at least one reputable organic brand that manufactures its products without it.

of carrageenan in organic foods, and lobbied the NOSB to keep it in organic foods—like Organic Valley, Stonyfield (Group Danone), and Horizon and Silk (Dean Foods/White-Wave)—and let them know that dangerous ingredients like carrageenan have no place in organics. ■

AMA Weighs in on GMOs

After the Indiana State Medical Association and the Illinois State Medical Society submitted resolutions earlier this year asking the American Medical Association (AMA) to support the mandatory labeling of genetically modified foods, the institution known for promoting medical and scientific advancement for more than 160 years has finally issued its opinion on the matter: Trust but verify.

The response from the AMA claims that genetically modified foods appear to have “no proven human health risks,” citing research from a 1987 National Academy of Sciences white paper—which predated the onslaught of genetically modified foods introduced to our food supply in the last two decades. However, the ruling said a pre-market mandatory “safety approval process” would be a wise move to ensure human health.

In addition to the resolutions submitted by the state medical groups, the AMA took public comments through June 3. Recent polls show that 91 percent of Americans—across all party affiliations—want the labeling of genetically modified foods so that they can make informed decisions for themselves and their families. So why didn't the AMA support the overwhelming voice of the people?

It seems that the AMA is split down the middle. Some members insist there's no harm in labeling, while others contend that the lack of scientific evidence of any human health risk makes labeling unnecessary—despite the fact that the United States is the only developed country in the world that does not have a national policy on GMOs. ■

—Jill Ettinger

Farmers Wary about Organic Check-off

The Organic Trade Association (OTA), an industry trade lobby group, is promoting a national check-off program designed to encourage consumption of organic foods. Funding for promotion, marketing campaigns, and research projects would come from assessments on participants in the organic industry. The OTA is seeking funding for a USDA feasibility study of the organic check-off scheme in the 2012 Farm Bill.

Others, notably farmers, are not terribly excited about the plan. “I just don't think generic advertising has ever been proven to work,” says Jim Goodman, a longtime certified organic dairy producer from Wonewoc, Wisconsin. While advertising can help capture market share for branded products, like Coke or Pepsi, Goodman thinks it's not efficacious for generic commodities like fluid milk. “Most people who buy organic know what it is in the first place,” Goodman explains. “Word of mouth seems to be best” for persuading others, he adds.

A major hurdle facing OTA's plan is that it would cut across all commodities. No allowance exists for a multi-commodity marketing program under current USDA rules. Christine Bushway, the executive director of OTA, acknowledges the barrier. Congressional action would be needed to remove the limitation. The OTA, according to the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance, has already dropped \$50,000 on the Podesta Group, a high-powered Washington lobbyist, to help build congressional support for OTA's Organic Research and Promotion Order (ORPO).

Should the multi-commodity barrier be removed, it would immediately expose farmers currently not involved with any check-off program, like organic vegetable

producers, to potential program fees. But details on funding of the organic check-off program remain murky.

Mark Kastel, Cornucopia's senior farm policy analyst, warns that “farmers need to hang onto their wallets.” Historically, he says, “commodity check-off promotional funds have been little more than economic Robin Hood-in-reverse programs.”

“If they were to set something up that's voluntary, some farmers may very well want to participate,” adds Kastel. “Or if the manufacturers and major retailers want to tax themselves and invest in a fund for promotion, I don't think farmers would have any objection. But a USDA-sanctioned promotional fund that's mandatory will almost certainly generate loud, vigorous protest.”

“Most farmers know that regardless of where the check-off is collected along the value chain, it will eventually be passed down to us,” observes Mary-Howell Martens, a New York state organic grain producer. “This is why,” she adds, “it is absolutely critical that farmers are integrally involved in the process now as the check-off is being framed, so we will have a ‘seat at the table’ and a vote in the process and the administration of the check-off.”

Richard Mathews spent more than 11 years providing oversight to similar USDA check-off programs. “You can also be assured,” Mathews notes, “that the USDA will not allow any promotional or information program, project, or activity that can be viewed as disparaging to conventionally produced products.... So those who think they are going to be able to sing the praises of organic as compared to conventional had better begin rethinking their position.”

OTA is now holding electronic webinars and “town-hall-style forums” across the country to drum up support. Interestingly, at the OTA forum held in Albuquerque in May, the box lunch provided to participants contained no organic items. ■

—Will Fantle

Kashi GOCLEAN?

Company Vows to Go Non-GMO and 70% Organic in 2015

A photo that went viral of a sign explaining why Kashi cereal products were pulled from the shelves of a natural foods grocer caused such a consumer backlash against the Kellogg's-owned company that it publicly pledged to go non-GMO by 2015. Many consumers, however, are not convinced.

The sign appeared in the aisles of the Green Grocer, based in Providence, R.I. Owner John Wood read The Cornucopia Institute's *Cereal Crimes* report, which exposed the presence of GMO ingredients and pesticide residues in Kashi's popular—and pricey—GoLean products, among



Green Grocer in Providence, Rhode Island, pulled the product from its shelves.

other breakfast cereals named in the report.

In late April images of the sign went viral on the web

(there were 11,000+ “shares” from just one of many Facebook pages) causing a public furor. Angry consumers deluged Kashi with phone calls, emails, and Facebook comments expressing outrage at being misled by the company's “natural” claim.

Kashi posted a video on its Facebook page claiming Cornucopia's information was “scientifically inaccurate and misleading because it was not based on actual testing of Kashi products.” This statement is false. In preparing the *Cereal Crimes* report, Cornucopia staff purchased a readily available box of Kashi's GoLean cereal from a Whole Foods store in the Boston

area. A sample was sent to an accredited national lab for testing, finding that the soy in the cereal was 100% GMO.

Bowing to consumer pressure, in May Kashi's general manager, David DeSouza, announced that by the end of 2014, all existing Kashi GoLean cereals and Chewy Granola Bars will be Non-GMO Project Verified. Beginning in 2015, all new Kashi foods introduced into the market will contain at least 70 percent organic ingredients and will also be Non-GMO Project Verified.

Yet many met the company's pledge with skepticism. One person commented on Cornucopia's Facebook page, “Instead of waiting 3 years, we are in the process of phasing out Kashi from our pantry and future purchases; thanks for the heads up on yet another GMO product disguised as health food.” Another fumed, “Why the hell are they waiting till 2015 to stop using GMO's? What's wrong with TODAY?!”

Indeed, compare Kashi's answer to consumer backlash with Eden Foods' recent stance at the National Organic Standards Board meeting in May regarding a controversial food additive. After hearing expert testimony on the dangers of carrageenan, a food stabilizer, CEO Michael Potter pledged on the spot to remove the ingredient from all Eden Foods products—despite carrageenan's approval for use in organics.



Angry consumers deluged Kashi with emails, phone calls, and online outrage after learning that the company's “natural” GoLean products contain 100% GMO soy and pesticide residues, revealed in Cornucopia's *Cereal Crimes* report. A Cornucopia staffer spotted the product deeply discounted at a local grocery store in June. Coincidence?

(See related story on page 4.)

Green Grocer's John Wood notes that Kashi was not the only cereal product he removed from his shelves. Barbara's (Weetabix), Peace Cereal, and Bear Naked were other brands pulled for similar concerns about product ingredients and the action explained with shelf signs. Like Kashi, these “natural” cereals also went under the microscope in Cornucopia's investigation.

Update: As this issue was going to press in early July, Kashi announced the release of two new certified organic cereals in its product line: Simply Maize and Indigo Morning. ■

—Will Fantle

Cornucopia's CEREAL CRIMES report and accompanying consumer scorecard, rating organic and “natural” brands, are available online at www.cornucopia.org.

Cornucopia Expands Membership and Staffing

We are pleased to announce that we have added to our staff Dr. Pamela Coleman, a Washington State-based agriculturalist and organic certification professional, with broad experience in vegetable and specialty crop production, in addition to federal organic policy. Dr. Coleman, who holds a graduate degree in vegetable crops from Cornell University and a doctorate in plant pathology from the University of California-Davis, adds to Cornucopia's diverse knowledge base in farm and food policy and agricultural economics.



Pamela Coleman, Ph.D.

"We are very happy to have Pam join our staff," said Will Fantle, Cornucopia's codirector. "Her expertise in looking at agronomic production, and inputs, will greatly strengthen our ability to carefully critique materials being proposed by agribusiness for use in organics."

While working with conventional onion growers in New York, Coleman said she witnessed firsthand the harmful effects of pesti-

cides on both the people and the soil, and made a commitment to work on behalf of sustainable agriculture. She studied biological control of grapevine diseases in California; then she moved to Pennsylvania to work for a grower of specialty mushrooms.

Coleman was a founding board member of Pennsylvania Certified Organic (PCO) and was an inspector for the Washington State Department of Agriculture's Organic Food Program, under then-director Miles McEvoy, the current director of the National Organic Program. In that role, she met hundreds of successful organic farmers, toured thousands of acres of Eastern Washington farmland, and saw the many benefits of organic agriculture. She has also worked for Oregon Tilth Certified Organic and Stellar Certification Services.

Most recently Dr. Coleman was the Organic Specialist at the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), where she was part of the ATTRA project. She answered questions from farmers about organic certification, and worked with the USDA's National Organic Program to write guidebooks on organic regulations for farmers and processors. Pam Coleman lives in East Wenatchee, Washington, with her husband, Alan Cooke.

Jill Ettinger, a Los Angeles-based writer and photographer, has also joined our staff. In her position as Communications Specialist, Ettinger administrates Cornucopia's Facebook and Twitter accounts, writes news articles, and performs other communications duties. Her work is regularly featured on the award-winning OrganicAuthority.com site, where she writes a daily news column on food policy and health issues. She is also the co-director of the Evolver Social Network's Los Angeles chapter. Having spent more than a decade as a sales and marketing manager in the natural foods industry, Ettinger regularly consults with and supports emerging brands and organizations in creative communications, social media, and event production.



Jill Ettinger

"We want to thank the 8,000 members, mostly certified organic farmers, who financially support Cornucopia's mission, for underwriting our staff expansion," Codirector Will Fantle added. "In these difficult financial times, we have been humbled by the 30% increase in our membership and revenue, each year, over the past two years. We will carefully invest this support to preserve the integrity of the organic label, protecting the livelihoods of ethical farmers and business people, and the trust of consumers who believe in the values this industry was founded upon." ■

—Mark Kastel

Welcome, Interns

Participating in our summer internship program are Reese Mowbray and Elizabeth Keller. These undergraduate students are providing support to our administrative, development, and food policy staff members through tasks that in return add dimension and direction to their career aspirations.

Reese Mowbray studies Economics at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. He has worked on a CSA farm, where he was exposed to the economics of a small-scale vegetable operation, and has completed other administrative internships. He is eager to learn more about how his study of economics fits with nonprofit work and sustainable food and farming.

Elizabeth Keller attends the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh where she is working toward a bachelor's degree in Environmental Policy and Values. She joined a volunteer program called Earth Care DTS where she spent a year teaching people appropriate technologies and sustainable gardening practices in developing countries such as Cambodia.

Welcome, Reese and Elizabeth. Not only do we value the help in completing our mission but also experiencing how an individual's unique background fills a niche here at Cornucopia. ■

—Lynn Buske

Agrarian Apprentices Enrich Farm

Doug and Krista Dittman, stewards of Branched Oak Farm, work the land fruitfully with sons Nelson and Andreas, as well as with the dynamic give-and-take interchange of an ever-evolving corps of young apprentices. With their fresh insights and challenging questions, along with lots of hard work, the apprentices have helped the farm grow and prosper.

The Dittmans are committed to strengthening the vitality of their 240-acre dairy farm, just north of Lincoln, Nebraska, while developing farmstead products that are healthy, wholesome, and distinguished. In fulfilling this vision with helpers from near and far, they have earned a reputation as “awesome” agrarian mentors.

Beginning in 2004 with a young man from Brazil, the Dittmans have welcomed over 40 people onto their farm, many of them thanks to connections made by WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms). The international organization has over a thousand participating farms in the U.S. alone (www.woofusa.org). Apprentices trade a half day of work for room and board, and priceless experience. The 2012 apprentices, who live in a separate farmhouse nearby, are raising a vegetable garden and keep cattle, hogs, and chickens.

With sweeping vistas across the rolling, cultivated hills of eastern Nebraska, and radiant fertility, Branched Oak Farm is a prairie pearl crowned by a sturdy home and work buildings that have since 1991



The farm's motto is “Eat well, be well.” The Dittmans and apprentices gather round the supper table, replenishing themselves with the eggs, milk, meat, cheese and vegetables they have cultivated. Left to right: son Nelson, Erica Ehlers, Heidi Bartlett, Krista and Doug Dittman, Rikuya Inoue, Justine Sirlin, and son Andreas.

been slowly, over time crafted by the hand of farmer Doug Dittman, with Krista, their sons, friends, and students.

By now Branched Oak Farm is a mature certified organic, grass-based dairy specializing in creating farmstead cheeses using milk from their own herd of 30 Jersey cows. Krista's Camembert and Quark, a creamy European cheese with a mild tang, have scooped up national awards.

When apprentices come for two weeks or more, the Dittmans try to give them a whole farm experience, everything from rotationally grazing the cattle, to cheese making, to farmers market sales.

After eight years of apprentices, Doug remains keen on the idea: “We learn a lot about dairy farming from our interns. They bring fresh, youthful energy and different perspectives. The apprentices have made the farm vibrant, interesting, and profitable. Beyond that, in community we also learn how to get along, or how not to get along.”

Krista, who serves on the board of the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society, says the apprentice dimension of the farm operation has worked out well. “The extra hands are definitely beneficial,” she says. “The difficult part is the separations, when the time for an apprentice is up and they are moving on.”

Apprentices, too, feel they are rewarded through their experiences at Branched Oak. One “WWOOFer” from 2011 commented, “I had the privilege of learning about the Dittmans’ excellent philosophy of everything from land

and animal management to organic production and local community-minded markets. Come ready to be open, to learn, to listen well, and to work hard.”

As any dairy farmer knows, it's hard to get away. Yet at Branched Oak, “while we stay on the farm, the world comes to us,” says Krista. “We have had apprentices from France, England, Japan, Norway, Brazil, Holland, and beyond. Everyone who comes through to work on the farm leaves something that enriches it.” ■

—Steven McFadden co-authored *Farms of Tomorrow*, the first book on CSA, and is author of *The Call of the Land: An Agrarian Primer for the 21st Century* (www.thecalloftheland.com).



BRANCHED OAK FARM
Raymond, Nebraska
branchedoakfarm.com

Krista displays a farm-fresh wheel of gouda.

PHOTOS BY STEVEN MCFADDEN



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

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Show Us the Names



The USDA announced in June it is seeking nominations for an opening on the 15-member National Organic Standards Board, for the environmentalist slot. Cornucopia has challenged USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack to make the names of all nominees public so that the organic community can ensure that the “best and brightest” are chosen. Past appointments of agribusiness executives to seats reserved for farmers and other independent industry participants have been widely criticized. See related stories inside.

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Get Fresh with CSA

Farmers engaged in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) create a partnership between grower and eater. As the owners of Dog Mountain Farm put it: “CSA is about community. Consumers and farmers work together. While the farmer tends the Earth on behalf of others, consumers share the cost of supporting the farm.”

By purchasing a portion of the farm’s harvest, CSA members share in both the risk of farming and the bounty. The typical weekly CSA box is brimming with just-picked, locally grown produce and/or other foods such as naturally raised meats, eggs, cheese, honey, or herbs. CSA is one of the hottest trends in the good food movement. From just two farms in 1986, there are an estimated 6,000 or more today.

And talk about fresh! Even certified organic produce, in much of the country, comes from California or Mexico year-round. What’s in your box from a local CSA might have been picked 5 hours ago rather than 5 days ago, or 10, or more. Every minute food is off the vine or out of the ground, it’s losing its flavor and nutritional value. As we’re fond of saying here in the Upper Midwest, “Don’t go out to the garden to pick the sweet corn until the water is already boiling on the stove!”

If you want the freshest, sweetest, and most flavorful food, with the greatest nutrient density, know that CSAs, farmers markets, and member-owned food cooperatives, which nurture a relationship with local suppliers, are some of the best options for serving your family, truly, the very best. ■

—Mark Kastel



Farmers Cindy and David Krepky run a CSA and host popular farm dinners at Dog Mountain Farm, near Seattle.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DOG MOUNTAIN FARM