

# THE CULTIVATOR

NEWS FROM THE CORNUCOPIA INSTITUTE

SUMMER 2016

## Gathering of the Agrarian Elders

Reflections from the Country's Best Local Farmers

BY LINLEY DIXON, PHD

The “Agrarian Elders,” a group of legendary organic farmers, first formally met in January of 2014 at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, CA with the goal of sharing and preserving the wisdom from their combined 800 years of growing experience.

The Elders gathered for a second time this past January. They were joined by 13 “Youngers” to exchange ideas and information with the next generation of farmers and discuss the future of organic and sustainable farming.

Many of us are seriously concerned about the future of agriculture. However, the Agrarian Elders have already provided us with a roadmap toward a locally based, truly sustainable food system. In defiance of the status quo, they have courageously modeled their lives around hard work, a sense of place, innovation, and forward-looking ideas.

The discussions at their meetings have centered on basic social, economic, and ecological values of local/organic food production and how they relate to community engagement, transparency, collaboration, and bottom-up innovation.

The Elders have developed farming techniques that place great value on the complexity of

**"I'd say every one of us is feeling great trepidation at the prospect of authentic organic farming now having to fight for its survival against the unholy alliance of USDA and corporate special interests which have bought their way into the organic industry."**  
—Jim Gerritsen (right)

natural systems, using years of environmental observations and intuition to drive their production practices.

With many of the Elders now either in retirement, or close to it, they're wondering “What has it all meant?”

History has yet to reveal whether mainstream society will embrace and expand on the Elders' dreams of a critical mass of farmers directly feeding their communities from diversified farms.

Is the combined life's work of the Agrarian Elders, and others like them, a blip among the seemingly inevitable economic forces that drive agriculture commodification and increased production at all costs?

Those that have a call to intimately work in the dirt and tend to the health of the soil and a diversity of farm species remain on the fringe. Is there hope for a future



PHOTO COURTESY OF LOTTIE HEDLEY

where farmers who work *in harmony* with nature eclipse the prevailing industrial agriculture complex that destroys it?

"The Agrarian Elders gatherings have been wonderful and have allowed us to discuss at great length where we are, how we got here, and where organic is going," said Maine organic seed farmer and Cornucopia

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# Organic Hooligans

Organic Farmers, Nonprofits Maligned by Government Officials/Corporate Lobbyists

I'm not sure what is worse; being dubbed an organic "hooligan" or an organic "purist."

There's no doubt that the recent semiannual meeting of the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) in Washington, D.C. was uncomfortable for many organic stakeholders present, for different reasons.

As six new members of the NOSB took their seats for the first time at a public meeting, having been screened by the USDA's National Organic Program (NOP) Staff Director Miles McEvoy and appointed by Secretary Thomas Vilsack, the question was: "Would the balance on the board continue to be skewed towards favoring corporate agribusiness, or shift towards true organic integrity?"

A voting litmus test came up quickly on the agenda following public testimony. The Cornucopia Institute, with board spokesperson

Dr. Barry Flamm (a former NOSB chairman), was a leading voice in the effort to table wholesale changes to the Policy and Procedures Manual (PPM), a document that acts as the de facto operating manual for how the NOSB conducts its business.

In the past the NOSB itself, representing the organic community, deliberated in collaboration with the public to set rules on voting and procedures.

However, during the last couple of years, Mr. McEvoy issued a number of unilateral edicts and took control of key NOSB procedures, weakening the power of the board Congress created as a buffer against corporate influence (e.g., the radical change regarding the Sunsetting of synthetic materials).

In addition to Cornucopia's leadership and investment in a whitepaper analyzing the countless

## The new NOSB Policy and Procedures Manual limits public input.

changes being proposed in the PPM (the USDA tried to bury these changes in an unintelligible document), our organization was joined by other public interest groups, all recommending that the NOSB not "rubber stamp" the hijacking of organic policy by USDA political appointees/bureaucrats.

These groups included Beyond Pesticides, Consumer Reports, Food and Water Watch, Center for Food Safety, and The National Organic Coalition.

The only industry group on the record supporting this agribusiness-friendly coup was a

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lobby representing wholesale produce distributors.

Standing with Cornucopia were a majority of the Agrarian Elders, led by iconic organic pioneer Eliot Coleman, who sent a letter (also read into public testimony by Cornucopia Policy Advisor Jim Gerritsen) urging, especially the new board members, to pay attention to Cornucopia scientists and experts, and other NGOs, when listening to the preponderance of testimony coming from corporate lobbyists.

And the vote? When the dust settled, only two of the 15 NOSB members voted against the new PPM that undermines their own authority and minimizes input from the public (both were farmers: new board member Emily Oakley and Francis Thicke).

New public interest representative Dan Seitz asked challenging questions during the debate and ended up abstaining because of the complexity of the issue and compressed timeframe.

Zea Sonnabend, a scientist directly compensated to sit on the board by CCOF, the country's largest certifier, abstained because she felt her financial relationship with CCOF could be viewed as an unethical conflict of interest under the new language (other than her personal entanglements, she expressed no reservations with the document).

So where do hooligans come in?

It's a new pejorative being used by the agribusiness sector to describe Cornucopia staff members and their ilk. "Hooligans" became public in a blog post by Melody Meyer, chief lobbyist for multibillion-dollar organic distributor United Natural Foods, Inc. and former chair of the Organic Trade Association, the industry's powerful lobby group.

Previously, corporate bigwigs accused us of being "organic purists." Now let me ask you, how pure do you want your organic food?

However, in this case, Ms. Meyer and others didn't like our challenge of the new government-corporate leadership running the USDA program. While Cornucopia has called for Secretary Vilsack to remove Mr. McEvoy, other powerful forces (some at his encouragement) have written public and private statements of support. One prominent certifier said, "It's the best NOP we've ever had!" We can see how they like the current trajectory.

Not only did Meyer have the arrogance to coin a new pejorative in an effort to demean farmers and consumers who hold fundamentally different views of what constitutes true "organic integrity," she also insulted and denigrated the Agrarian Elders and other senior organic growers who came out to testify.

She stated it "raised her dander" that they would come in and testify and not stay for the entire meeting (many stayed for two of the three days and others for many hours).

She obviously discounted the fact that these working



farmers drove into Washington, D.C. during the height of the spring planting season so they could petition our government.

NOSB member Tom Chapman, an employee of Clif Bar, championed the new corporate-friendly PPM in an extended, well-prepared presentation. Like Meyer, they both have their expenses paid and receive salaries from their respective employers, enabling them to attend a full week of meetings (the "deal" the USDA negotiated on hotel rooms cost almost \$300 a night).

And why are so many certifiers and nonprofits involved in organics silent when the corporate-government hijacking of organics is so apparent? Could that have anything to do with the millions of dollars that are coming from prominent donors that wouldn't want anybody to upset the organic applecart (e.g., Clif Bar, WhiteWave Foods, Farm Aid, UNFI, etc.)?

Mr. McEvoy himself, at the USDA, has a slush fund, and has handed out hundreds of thousands of dollars to organic certifiers and NGOs to help him with "research and education" as well. Better not bite the hand that feeds you!

So I, for one, will be proud to stand with other hooligans, those hard-working farmers who get their hands dirty for a living and crack a sweat, who dug into their own pockets to attend as much of this past NOSB meeting as they could afford. After the disrespectful way they have been treated, and the dishonor their perspective garnered by board members ignoring their passion and appeals, it shouldn't be any surprise that the number of working farmers attending these meetings has dwindled over the years.

I will be back, along with other Cornucopia staff members, because it is our job. But look to our organization to shift some of our resources into more industry product sector reports and scorecards. If the USDA is not willing to protect ethical industry participants or the interest of consumers who want superior, authentic organic food, we will differentiate organic brands between the true heroes in organics and the charlatans.

- MARK KASTEL



# Undisturbed Ecosystems Benefit Everyone

## Why Not to Convert Native Land to Organic Management

BY MARIE BURCHAM, JD

Industrial-scale agriculture is one of the primary causes of ecosystem and biodiversity losses. Driven by higher demand, there is increasing pressure to convert even more land for use in food production.

As consumers become more educated about the strain conventional agriculture places on human and environmental health, the organic market is also facing an increase in demand.

This land use, combined with increasing environmental pressures from climate change, pollution, and population growth, has a cumulative effect on the environment. Wild spaces are being lost at an unprecedented pace due to these pressures.

A native ecosystem is one that is largely undisrupted by human hands. In other words, it has not been tilled, logged, or significantly altered from its original character.

These native ecosystems are more than just wild spaces; because they remain undisturbed environments, they are treasure troves of plant and animal biodiversity, and may even be vital to the survival of some species. Wild spaces also provide “ecosystem services,” including flood control, water filtration, and carbon sequestration, benefitting the public as a whole.

Organic agriculture should, ultimately, attempt to “do no harm” by conserving and even rehabilitating biodiversity, building good soil, and decreasing chemical inputs.

Unfortunately, the organic regulations do not protect native ecosystems from being converted to organic farmland. In the current organic regulations,

**Native ecosystems help farmers by supporting beneficial insects and wildlife, providing water and air filtration, and imparting natural buffers.**

land being converted to organic production must “[h]ave had no prohibited substances... applied to it for a period of three years immediately preceding harvest of the crop...”

Because native ecosystems are pristine, farmers can plow up native grassland, forest, scrubland, and riparian zones and immediately start farming them “organically.” In an unpredictable economic climate, this loophole can be attractive to farmers or large corporate agribusinesses wanting to expand quickly.

While organic farms support a much higher level of biodiversity than do conventional farms, native ecosystems provide far greater

benefits to plants, animals, and the human environment. Once pristine lands are lost, they are gone forever.

Overall, disincentives for the conversion of native ecosystems are necessary to prevent organic production from doing more harm than good. With hard work, the regulations that unintentionally catalyze the conversion of pristine lands can be revised.

In the meantime, certifiers, farmers, and consumers should be educated about the benefits native ecosystems provide to everyone, so as to help discourage continued conversion. These areas help farmers by supporting beneficial insects and wildlife, providing water and air filtration, and imparting natural buffers.

Farmers can obtain conservation easements to offset the economic burden of leaving land undisturbed. Finally, consumers can help shape how policy is made and interpreted by following Cornucopia’s work and making their voices heard.



# Cornucopia Sues USDA

## Corporate Hijack of Organic Industry Governing Board

BY WILL FANTLE

**T**he Cornucopia Institute has filed a lawsuit in federal court challenging the USDA's appointment of non-farmers to positions reserved by Congress for organic farmers on the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB).

Cornucopia alleges that two of the board's four positions reserved for farmers are actually occupied by agribusiness executives.

The 15-member NOSB was created by Congress with passage of the Organic Foods Production Act. Specific seats were set aside for various stakeholder interests. In addition to farmers, Congress reserved NOSB positions for consumers, food handlers, a retailer, environmentalists, a scientist, and a certifying agent.

Two organic farmers joined Cornucopia as plaintiffs in the lawsuit. Both farmers applied for NOSB appointments and were passed over in favor of the corporate executives. The Institute for Public Representation at the Georgetown University Law Center filed the lawsuit on Cornucopia's behalf.



"These illegal appointments are part of a pattern of actions taken by the USDA to make the NOSB better serve the needs of big business," says Mark A. Kastel, Cornucopia's codirector. "Not only are farmers being denied their right to participate in organic decision-making, but statistics illustrate these corporate representatives are decisively more willing to vote for the use of questionable synthetics in organics, weakening organic standards." (Cornucopia's NOSB voting scorecard can be viewed under the projects tab at [cornucopia.org](http://cornucopia.org).)

"I have applied three times over the

years for one of the four seats reserved by Congress for organic farmers on the NOSB," said Dominic Marchese, a certified organic grass-based beef farmer from Ferndale, Ohio and one of the farmer-plaintiffs on the lawsuit. "I am angry at how anyone at the USDA thinks that an agribusiness executive can represent my decades of experience working with the land and animals."

Carmela Beck, appointed to one of the farmer seats, is a full-time employee of the giant berry producer Driscoll's. She works as a "grower liaison," coordinating relations with Driscoll's contract berry growers. The company itself does not grow any of its organic fruit. Ashley Swaffar is the other agribusiness executive sitting in a farmer seat. At the time of her appointment, she was a corporate compliance officer at the Arkansas Egg Company.

Again this year, Cornucopia has formally renewed its call to the USDA to make the NOSB appointment process open and transparent, revealing the list of all applicants prior to a selection, so that all voices and perspectives in the organic community can be heard.

## Hydroponics Task Force Update

**T**he April NOSB meeting in Washington, D.C. included an update from the Hydroponics Task Force, a group of experts in both hydroponic and soil-based greenhouse growing.

Members of the task force are expected to release a report this summer on whether competing technologies and practices used in the greenhouse industry align with the organic regulations.

The panel, unlikely to reach consensus, heavily favors hydroponic industry stakeholders. The task force is divided into two groups; one is expected to recommend

that hydroponics, aquaponics, and container growing be considered organic, and another expected to recommend that growing in soil, connected to the earth, should be the only type allowed as organic in greenhouses.

Both sides are gearing up for the battle; container growers formed a lobby group, the "Coalition for Sustainable Organics," whereas many of the founders of the organic movement, including many Agrarian Elders, have united to form "Keep the Soil in Organics." Visit Cornucopia's website for additional information.

# Will Carrageenan Remain in Organic Food?

Removal of Carcinogenic Substance Uncertain Due to Industry Lobbying

BY LINLEY DIXON, PHD

**T**he FDA is responsible for ensuring the safety of more than 9,000 food additives used in conventional foods, a number that former Deputy Commissioner Taylor admits is beyond their capacity.

Evaluating the continued use of food additives in organic food, however, is the responsibility of the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), which sets a much higher bar according to the regulations set forth in the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA).

This year, assessing the safety of carrageenan for continued use in organic foods is on the NOSB's agenda. Carrageenan is commonly found in dairy products, deli meats, salad dressings, toothpaste, pet food, and vegan products.

Carrageenan, derived from red seaweed, is considered a "synthetic substance" due to its extraction process and is mandated for an NOSB review by Congress every five years.

Carrageenan's use as an emulsifier and thickener is highly controversial, because independent research indicates it is a potent trigger of inflammation and a possible carcinogen.

To remain on the National List of materials allowed in organic production, carrageenan must meet all three of the following OFPA criteria: 1) essential to organic products; 2) safe to humans and the environment; and, 3) compatible with organic practices.

After assessing written and oral public comments at two semi-annual meetings, the NOSB will vote this fall to determine whether carrageenan



should remain on the National List.

Cornucopia, along with several farmer and consumer groups, including the National Organic Coalition, Consumer Reports, Center for Food Safety, and Organic Consumers Association, testified at the spring NOSB meeting that carrageenan does not meet the OFPA criteria.

Decades of independent research demonstrate its role in inflammation, colitis, cancer, and diabetes. A number of labs around the world have studied the inflammatory effects of carrageenan, and approximately 10,000 references occur in PubMed when "inflammation and carrageenan" is searched.

Several groups that profit from carrageenan, including carrageenan manufacturers, food processors, and hired lobbyists and scientists, lined up for public comment to assure NOSB members that food-grade carrageenan is safe, and that those stating otherwise were citing bad science and "fear-mongering."

There was not one scientist or industry representative that testified in support of the safety of carrageenan that doesn't stand to profit from its use.

In reality, the carrageenan

used in thousands of inflammation studies is high-molecular-weight and extracted by the same processes used to obtain food-grade carrageenan. The distinctions the industry makes between food-grade carrageenan and the majority of the carrageenan used in inflammation research are unfounded.

Various companies that either produce carrageenan or that receive funding from the industry have aligned in a group called "United 4 Food Science." They include FMC Corp., Cargill, International Dairy Foods Association, International Food Additives Council, Marinalg International (an industry lobby group), and many others.

Nearly all studies demonstrating the safety of carrageenan can be traced back to the members of United 4 Food Science.

The industry is leading a coordinated effort to discredit public research. These tactics resemble those of the tobacco and fracking industries and must not go unchallenged.

In contrast, Cornucopia and other non-profits attempted to let consumers know that quality, peer-reviewed, published research exists that demonstrates the mechanisms by which carrageenan can cause harm to human health.

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**Cornucopia's NOSB voting scorecard can be viewed under the "projects" tab at [cornucopia.org](http://cornucopia.org).**





Several studies show harm in normal human colonic epithelial cells resulting from consuming amounts less than those in the typical diet, based on an average carrageenan consumption of 250 mg/day.

Unfortunately, the industry-disseminated propaganda was repeated in the summary on carrageenan presented by Zea Sonnabend, the NOSB member leading the carrageenan review.

Ms. Sonnabend repeated the industry line that public research had not been repeated, despite Cornucopia's written and oral testimony citing published work (e.g., Korea University's College of Medicine study on the effects of high-molecular-weight carrageenan on insulin resistance and inhibition of insulin signaling).

The published research on carrageenan was again presented to the NOSB as "split," meaning that there are just as many studies pointing to its safety as there are those indicating harm.

However, Ms. Sonnabend failed to point out that there is not one study demonstrating its safety that isn't funded by the carrageenan industry. Whereas, there are thousands of studies done by independent labs using high-molecular-weight carrageenan to cause inflammation.

Over a dozen industry-funded scientists and representatives presented testimony in-person at the meeting. Some individuals testified that those sounding the alarm on carrageenan are simply confused between poligeenan and carrageenan.

Both carrageenan and poligeenan are extracted from red seaweed, but poligeenan is produced by subjecting carrageenan to acid and high temperatures, and has a much lower average

**There is not one study demonstrating carrageenan's safety that isn't funded by the carrageenan industry. Thousands of studies done by independent labs use carrageenan to cause inflammation.**

molecular weight. Cornucopia pointed to research showing that food-grade carrageenan always contains a percentage of the harmful, carcinogenic low-molecular-weight form.

The industry doesn't readily admit that the higher "average" molecular weight of food-grade carrageenan does not preclude the presence of smaller amounts of harmful low-molecular-weight forms. The term "average" in various publications would, by definition, obscure the presence of small amounts of harmful low-molecular-weight carrageenan.

The presence of this low-molecular-weight carrageenan in food-grade carrageenan is confirmed by studies that are both publicly and industry-funded. Many labs around the world continue to investigate the effects of these low-molecular-weight forms in the diet.

Over the last three years, Cornucopia has gathered information from over 1,300 individuals, sharing medical details regarding better health after removing carrageenan from their diets.

To read our full, updated report on carrageenan, along with a scorecard identifying safe organic foods without carrageenan, or to respond to our medical questionnaire, please visit: <http://tinyurl.com/carrageenan>.



## Avoid Toxins

### Choose the Safest Toothpaste

As an extension of its report on natural toothpastes, The Cornucopia Institute has published a scorecard that ranks organic, natural, and some mass-market toothpastes (for comparison's sake).

The scoring is based on the ingredients contained in the formulation, over all the toothpastes marketed under a brand name.

From the maximum score of 1200, points are subtracted if a toothpaste contains fluoride, carrageenan, potentially dangerous, synthetic surfactants, artificial colors, sweeteners, and flavors, chemical preservatives, PEGs and polypropylene glycol, and triclosan.

Ratings included the potential for contamination with toxic chemicals and GMO-derived ingredients.

Brands that contained a high percentage of organic ingredients receive bonus points, and additional points if they were third-party certified.

The top scoring toothpastes include:

- **Dr. Bronner's All-One**
- **Happy Teeth by Poofy Organics**
- **Miessence by Organic and Natural Enterprise**
- **Mint Sweet Orange by Made Simple Skin Care**
- **Green People**
- **Weleda**

Policy Advisor Jim Gerritsen. "I'd say every one of us is feeling great trepidation at the prospect of authentic organic farming now having to fight for its survival against the unholy alliance of USDA and corporate special interests which have bought their way into the organic industry."

These esteemed men and women have demonstrated that small organic farms can feed the world in sustainable perpetuity better than corporate industrial agriculture.

During their time at both gatherings, they discussed specific techniques used on their farms, many quite economically successful, to increase biodiversity, soil fertility, and organic matter, while conserving water and fossil fuels.

Despite many cumulative awards and wide recognition, these farmers share humility, agreeing that humans are just scratching the surface in our understanding of farming with nature's complex systems.

They acknowledge weaknesses, including a desire to move completely away from tillage and fossil fuels.

All agreed that the way to continue to improve comes from collaboration, a sharing of ideas and scientific research that is transparent, open-sourced, holistic, and supportive of organic practices.

Both meetings have gone beyond the practical "how to" of organic farming, into more theoretical discussions. They confronted each other with important questions:

- Are we going to make a long-term difference?
- What is our role in carbon mitigation, social justice, and articulating the links between genetic modification technologies, dwindling genetic diversity, and food sovereignty?
- How do we balance our ideals with the economic constraints of making a living?

Against the odds, the Elders do have hope for the future. They especially see that hope in the next generation of educated and motivated young farmers who have continued to inspire consumers to join them in a larger "food justice movement."

They acknowledged the benefits

that their farms, and others like them, have brought to communities in terms of jobs, biodiversity, education, and recreation.

The Agrarian Elders came together with a sense of urgency, in hopes of supporting and increasing the number of diversified organic farms that will carry their innovative practices forward. In conjunction, they expressed the need to continue to engage the public on these complex issues.

Their end goal: a future where communities with healthy economies almost completely feed themselves based on their local food systems.

As aging farmers, the Elders recognize their limited personal capacity to accomplish these goals and have expressed a desire to connect with strategic partners who can.

There is no doubt that there is power behind their stories. Their lives were spent practicing what they've preached. It is now our job to pay close attention to their words and amplify their voices.

## Rural Sociologist to Lead Cornucopia's Communication and Development Team

**T**he Cornucopia Institute has hired Jennifer Hayden as its Communications and Development Director.

Hayden holds a Ph.D. in rural sociology from Penn State, where her doctoral research focused on how farmers make soil management decisions.

Hayden's research interests dovetail with her experience in non-profit development and communications, helping to tell the story of the changing landscape of organic agriculture, while ensuring that organic farmers and eaters have the information, networks, and support needed to help uphold the integrity of the organic standards.

Her interest in agricultural issues stems from a deep concern for the relationship between soil health, environmental health, and human health. In addition to

her academic work at Penn State, Hayden holds an MS in human geography from Oxford University, where she studied the interconnection between local and global food systems, as well as how consumer-members experience CSAs.

Hayden's prior experience includes consulting and development work for various clients, including organic pioneer Rodale Institute, and Garrison Institute's Climate, Mind, and Behavior program.

"We are very pleased that Jennifer has joined our staff at Cornucopia," says Cornucopia's Codirector Will Fantle.

"She brings a sharp mind and strong sense of commitment to issues impacting environmental sustainability, the quality of life in rural America, and the *good food movement* in general."





# What is a Rural Sociologist?

Q&A with Cornucopia's Newest Staff Member Jennifer Hayden

## **Q: What is a rural sociologist?**

**A:** I love to tell people that, at least in my case, it's pretty much the same as being a 'human geographer.' Of course, that's not so helpful! These are both social sciences that address people in relationship to their environments. They are *rooted* social sciences. Rural sociology, as an academic discipline, differs from sociology mainly in its directive to be practical, to address the real needs of rural communities.

This discipline is particularly concerned with the 'social' aspects of agriculture. Now, clearly, agriculture is always a social-environmental amalgam; you can't separate the two. However, as anyone who has spent time around scientists knows, it's hard to do science without separating things, and universities are structured around this division (a whole other intriguing conversation).

Rural sociologists have concentrated on the influences that shape agriculture and rural communities. These influences range from government policy, to social and familial norms, gender, race and class privilege, religion, economic interests and power, and to the influence of the land itself.

## **Q: What has your research been about?**

**A:** The kind of rural sociologist I align myself with conducts research *with* farmers, rather than *on* or *for* farmers. I think that's sounds obvious, but it's an important distinction. For too long we've seen a lot of Extension and university research—good research—wasted because it doesn't engage with

farmers until the end, when the research is 'disseminated.'

That outdated model has caused some trouble. For instance, there's a fair bit of research that shows how conventional farmers tend to be much more accepting of science and agribusiness claims, whereas organic farmers are more likely to trust their own observations and shared conversations.

In my doctoral research, I found that this has a real impact on the land. Trusting your own observations and sharing them with other farmers actually supports soil health, while



**"The kind of rural sociologist I align myself with conducts research *with* farmers, rather than *on* or *for* farmers." —Jennifer Hayden**

the model where farmers accept the dissemination of science and agribusiness claims often does not. This is true regardless of whether we're talking about organic or

conventional operations, at least among the farmers I worked with.

I could probably go on for hours about that particular research project but in the end I found that there are ten overlapping influences on soil health in the Chesapeake Bay region where I was working. Right now, I'm working on a project in the Upper Midwest, looking at barriers and opportunities around integrating crops and livestock.

## **Q: Why have you come to work at The Cornucopia Institute?**

**A:** I think it's important for scientists of all stripes to bridge the world of academic research with action on the ground. In the past this view would have been heresy. But there is a dawning realization that science can never really divorce itself from the society within which it's embedded, try as scientists might!

I've studied with a lot of really astute people, and excellent work is happening in rural sociology that thinks through the big food system questions we are dealing with. Yet, little of this ever gets out. So, I came to Cornucopia because I want to be a bridge between researchers, farmers, and grassroots efforts. I've also got a background in program planning, grant writing, and outreach, so it's a really good fit.

I've already found that there is such a knowledgeable and passionate base of Cornucopia supporters—farmers and eaters—and I'm just thrilled to be in a position to get to know our members, and to help make connections for the sake of moving this work forward toward the ultimate goal of a truly sustainable and equitable food system.

# You Asked for It!

## Cornucopia Clarifies What Organics *Is* and What It *Isn't*

BY MELODY MORRELL

**T**he Cornucopia Institute is proud to represent thousands of members within the *good food movement*. Our research and educational efforts support the integrity of the organic label.

Here are the answers to some of the most frequently asked questions posed on our social media:

### **Can we trust the USDA organic seal; what about local? What's more important?**

The organic label is the most stringently regulated label on foods in the marketplace. If you have access to local organic food, you can meet your farmer, learn how your food is grown, and enjoy the ultimate in freshness, nutrition, and community building!

Although Cornucopia takes issue with less-than-satisfactory oversight by the USDA, allowing “organic” factory farms to operate illegally and imports through without thorough scrutiny, we strongly recommend all certified organics over conventionally produced food.

Cornucopia recommends local, certified organic producers when possible, and we provide scorecards on our website to choose truly authentic organic brands from your market.

### **Do organic farmers use pesticides?**

Organic farmers start by incorporating management practices that eliminate the need for pesticides, including crop rotation, high in-field crop diversity, resistant varieties, and healthy soil to avoid the use of pesticides. As a last resort, in cases when there is a disease or pest

outbreak, there are a few approved pesticides that have been rigorously evaluated for their safety and impact on human health and the environment. Examples include botanical-based insecticides and soaps for insect control and copper or sulfur-based fungicides.



**When you buy organic, you are paying for superior environmental stewardship, a more humane animal husbandry model, and financially sustainable support for many more family farmers.**

### **What's more important, looking for the organic seal or the non-GMO verified logo?**

By definition, GMOs are strictly prohibited in organic farming and food production. Perhaps even more importantly, organic farmers do not use synthetic pesticides, herbicides,

fungicides, or fertilizers to grow crops or feed, and they cannot administer antibiotics, growth hormones, and many other banned drugs to livestock. They are mandated to improve soil health and allow their livestock outdoor access, resulting not only in safer food, but food of superior nutritional quality.

Non-GMO products are only verified not to contain genetically modified (GMO) ingredients. Non-GMO farmers do use synthetic agrochemicals and petrochemical-based fertilizers. They are not required to allow their livestock access to the outdoors or pasture, and are not restricted from administering a myriad of pharmaceuticals prohibited from use in organics.

### **Why should I pay the extra price for organic? Can't I just buy natural and rinse my produce?**

When you buy organic, you are paying for superior environmental stewardship, a more humane animal husbandry model, and financially sustainable support for many more family farmers.

Lacking any set of governing standards, natural products likely use many conventional farming practices.

Rinsing is not sufficient to remove all contamination from pesticides, herbicides, heavy metals, and other toxins. Some modern pesticides act systemically, and their residues can be found in every cell of the plant, not just on the surface.

For more information visit  
Cornucopia's FAQ page at:  
[www.cornucopia.org/faq/](http://www.cornucopia.org/faq/)





## THE CORNUCOPIA FARMER PROFILE

# A New Day for New Morning

BY RACHEL ZEGERIUS

A warm spring morning finds Pennsylvania organic farmer Jim Crawford where any farmer might be this time of year.... *on a bicycle trek in Germany?* Over 4,000 miles from his fields, Jim is touring the historic streets of Berlin, while apprentices zealously plant and prepare soil for what hopes to be another productive year at Crawford's 95-acre New Morning Farm.

It begs the question: How can a successful, life-long farmer evade the impulse to farm during the outset of the growing season? Not by accident. Intentional and strategic, Crawford is striving to implement a well-thought-out legacy plan.

He explains, "We're always thinking about the future of what we do." With this trip he is leaning into retirement, reaping the harvest of many years practicing patience and communication, cultivating a foundation of trust in his successors.

"If we can retire, we've created something truly sustainable," says Crawford. And, after 40 years of growing more than 60 different certified organic crops (vegetables, berries, and herbs) and training hundreds of future farmers, the Crawfords have done just that.

Together with his wife Moie, Jim has focused endless energy actualizing agricultural innovations and, perhaps more importantly, tending the relationships necessary to sustain them. "My retirement is tied to my success at managing people; getting, finding, and keeping a good crew," says Crawford.

He explains that this formula for success hinges on cooperation, imparting a sense of responsibility and partnership to his apprentices, more than 200 of whom have come through the farm over the years.



Collaboration and participatory problem solving have been tenets of New Morning Farm since its inception in 1976. "We knew at the very beginning that we were bucking the trends of the agricultural economy," says Crawford.

Early on, in 1988, the Crawfords mapped their role in the marketplace to include their loyalty to collaboration. In response to a common problem, balancing supply and demand, three neighboring farm families initiated the now hugely successful, farmer-owned Tuscarora Organic Growers Cooperative (TOGC).

The vision was a strategy to capture economies of scale — the classic reason for the formation of co-ops — and to overcome the barriers erected by a corporate-driven system, in this case, big agriculture.

What started with five or six growers is now stronger than ever with 50 grower-owners. TOGC serves the function of coordinating production, distribution, and marketing. Aggregating products creates efficiency for both organic farmers and their institutional buyers, mostly in the greater Washington, D.C. region.

"The co-op helps small-scale people make a living in a market

that does not favor them, but puts them at a disadvantage," explains Crawford. "If we weren't a cooperative, we would have had a hell of a lot harder time. We are a center of organic vegetable production in the region *because* of the existence of the co-op."

The model of combining food aggregation and distribution services to strengthen farmer capacity and supply markets has been gaining popularity in recent years as the *food hub movement*. But, while food hubs have potential to build stronger regional food systems, many could benefit from the co-op model that TOGC provides.

Crawford explains, "Many food hubs are cooperatives in spirit, but do not implement all of the structures. When growers cooperate as owners, they become highly committed to the process. The psychology is better, resulting in better quality of product and better service to customers."

For decades now, New Morning Farm's happy customers have flocked to weekend markets. Through the years there is no question that the Crawfords have been a powerful force behind the *good food movement*.

When asked what he has held onto throughout the years as a reason for being a grower, Crawford answers, "Among the many reasons, you are producing something that has intrinsic value, you know its high quality because it's certified organic. And, you are always learning. This type of diversified farming is intellectually challenging. Working with nature, you always have the potential to do it better."

New Morning Farm  
Hustontown, Pennsylvania  
[www.newmorningfarm.net](http://www.newmorningfarm.net)  
(814) 448-3904

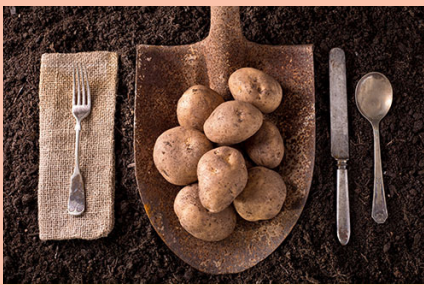






**C O R N U C O P I A**  
I N S T I T U T E

## Rewarding Authentic Organic Farmers



At your farmer's market or CSA, it's easy to find committed organic farmers and reward them with your family's food dollars. But, when you can't talk to producers directly, you can consult Cornucopia's online scorecards and buyer's guides, which rate hundreds of organic brands by criteria that reflect the true spirit of organics. Find brand rankings for organic products like:

- Eggs • Yogurt
- Breakfast Cereal • Soy Foods
- Dairy • Pet Food

These scorecards are all freely available at [Cornucopia.org](http://Cornucopia.org). Using these guides while food shopping helps to shift market share in favor of organic integrity!

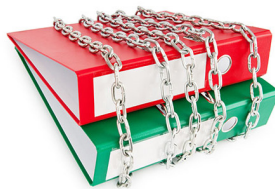
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## How Free is Information

### Cornucopia Sues USDA



**O**ne window used by Cornucopia to view how the USDA makes decisions has been Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. Originally passed in 1966 and amended over the years, the Freedom of Information Act pushes the government towards transparency, compelling federal agencies to provide the public with documents and communications.

Cornucopia has filed FOIAs to learn more about organic fraud enforcement and policy decisions. Some of the information garnered has been insightful.

Yet over the past several years, FOIA requests have become increasingly meaningless. Huge delays in response time (the government is legally bound to reply in 20 days) and excessive use of allegedly legal exceptions to "black out" pages of information have mostly clouded this window.

One of Cornucopia's unanswered FOIAs, on a factory farm enforcement issue, dates from 2008. Another FOIA response, on 2015 NOSB applicants, took eight months and failed to give any materials on four of the newly appointed board members.

National Organic Program head Miles McEvoy recently told the Organic Trade Association that they now have four full-time employees handling FOIA activities. This secretive/wasteful management is unacceptable.

Cornucopia has always viewed court challenges as the last option. In the past few weeks, Cornucopia has decided to take that step by filing a half-dozen lawsuits over FOIA issues. Stay tuned. As our lawsuits continue to cause the release of documents, we will establish a "FOIA Reading Room" on our website ([cornucopia.org](http://cornucopia.org)).

- WILL FANTLE