

THE CULTIVATOR

NEWS FROM THE CORNUCOPIA INSTITUTE

FALL 2018

Protect Your Family from Fraudulent Imports

Identifying Brands of Milk, Eggs, and Poultry Fed Only U.S. Grain

BY ANNE ROSS, JD

In June, Cornucopia released a landmark report chronicling how a small number of large Eastern European agribusinesses came to dominate the U.S. organic grain industry. The report outlines how the USDA's National Organic Program (NOP) has failed to stop questionable organic grain imports from flowing into the U.S.

Negligent oversight and regulatory loopholes have created a porous supply chain, vulnerable to fraud and organized crime. The economic damage to U.S. organic grain producers has been staggering.

Organic corn and organic soybean farmers in the United States lost an estimated \$400 million between 2015 and 2017 as the increase in dubious "organic" grain skyrocketed.

To date, there have been woefully inadequate law enforcement resources dedicated to investigating organic grain fraud. Cornucopia is continuing to apply pressure.

But the USDA is only now, after tremendous damage to domestic farmers and the reputation of the organic label, implementing reforms to tighten supply chain controls.

Historically, the U.S. has been notoriously slow in addressing food fraud of any sort, conventional or organic, compared to our European counterparts. In the E.U., fighting food fraud is an international, cooperative priority where law enforcement often takes initiative in investigations.



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Unlike U.S. authorities, the European Union took prompt action in 2015 to close its borders to fraudulent imports when widescale improprieties were discovered.

For example, the E.U. established the Food Fraud Network, an info-sharing database where member countries provide updates about investigations and enforcement actions. The E.U. also requires electronic certificates for organic products.

These cooperative efforts are important tools to fight transnational organized crime. And when the E.U. enacted tougher protocols, the lax system in the U.S. welcomed importers seeking less burdensome trade controls to try our market.

The U.S. Department of Justice has tackled food fraud, but most often when importers have illegally avoided tariffs or the fraud results in an acute, documented health threat.

One of the largest criminal cases of food fraud in the U.S. involved

conventionally produced honey which originated in China. Chinese producers were known to treat bees with antibiotics banned in North America. When low-priced honey began infiltrating the market in the early 2000s, U.S. beekeepers on the verge of economic failure started asking questions.

The E.U. had already banned Chinese honey, and the U.S., rather than ban it outright, responded by imposing a tariff on Chinese imports.

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Cornucopia Cofounder Steps Back

Fantle Moves to Part-time After 14 Years

Will Fantle, Cornucopia's cofounder, has retired from day-to-day organizational responsibilities. Fantle helped launch the watchdog organization in 2004 along with Mark Kastel. He has been serving as Cornucopia's codirector and research director since that time. Beginning this past April, Fantle moved to part-time with a new title of Emeritus Director.

"I have reached a point in my life where I want to take advantage of my relatively good health to engage in other activities that I might not be able to do in the not too distant future. My wife has retired and we are looking at more travel and other opportunities," says Fantle. He adds, "Cornucopia is in a sound financial position, which makes the decision easier to scale back and be less involved."

"Still," he says, "there is no shortage of issues and work for Cornucopia to

address pertaining to organic agriculture and authentic food. Our organization is truly needed and one of the few voices speaking out about protecting organic integrity from fraud, cheating, and rapacious profiteering."

Fantle, during his work as a writer, met Kastel in the early 1990s, when he was assigned a story discussing the controversy surrounding the first genetically modified material widely introduced into food production, Monsanto's Bovine Growth Hormone (rBGH).

The two struck up a friendship and subsequently collaborated on a variety of agriculture- and food-related work before cofounding Cornucopia.

Prior to joining Kastel in a consultancy working for some of the organic industry's then-largest businesses and doing political work on behalf of family-scale farmers, Fantle was a longtime, award-

winning, nationally published writer, mostly focused on environmental issues.

"We were jointly working on consulting projects during Cornucopia's development in 2003, when it became obvious to us that a corporate takeover of organics was unfolding in organic dairying. Factory farms were just entering the scene, and we could see storm clouds gathering that would threaten the livelihoods of organic family farmers across America," said Fantle.

"Mark and Will are both perceptive observers. They forecasted the impact the industrialization of organics would have on economic promise for the honest family farmers," said Pete Hardin. For almost 40 years, Hardin has published *The Milkweed*, an important dairy industry monthly.

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“Will has been an astute tactician in helping steer Cornucopia’s policy and communications work and leading the organization’s legal strategy,” Hardin added.

Another industry journalist who has observed Fantle’s work over the years is Max Goldberg, publisher of an influential industry newsletter and blog, *Organic Insider*. “There’s never been a time when the organic movement has needed watchdogs more than now, and Fantle has been instrumental in creating an absolutely critical organic industry watchdog,” stated Goldberg.

Trudy Bialic, director of public affairs for PCC Natural Markets, the largest consumer-owned retail grocer in the nation, adds of Fantle, “With his roots in news reporting, Will was in the habit of asking more than the usual questions. That ensured better transparency in food production—and that may have made some food industry giants uncomfortable. Will is committed to the facts, wherever they may lead, and he helped shape a generation of thinking for progressive agricultural policies that will not be suppressed in the long run. Will is a changemaker who enabled us to think of what is possible.”

“The organic community has been lucky to have Will’s long-term dedication to environmental and social justice,” said Cornucopia’s cofounder, Mark Kastel. “His continuing involvement with the organization’s fiscal management, and his perspective on issues impacting organic food and agriculture, will prove useful to our future course.”



Weeding the Garden, Ferreting out Corruption

New Guide Will Separate Hydroponic (Soil-less) “Organic” Produce from the Real McCoy

BY MARK KASTEL

Cornucopia is slated to release a report on “organic” hydroponics, exposing a rapidly accelerating trend in organic fruit and vegetable production: the shift to growing produce in industrial settings, with nutrients primarily from liquid fertilizer solutions instead of rich, fertile soil as required by federal law.

In addition to the report, Cornucopia will also publish a mobile-friendly, companion buyer’s guide, lifting the veil on the brands that clandestinely market hydroponic produce as organic.

Hydroponic produce is explicitly prohibited from being labeled as organic in Canada, Mexico, and most other developed countries. The E.U. recently voted to close a loophole permitting a few northern states to label hydroponics as “organic.”

Many countries where growers are prohibited from marketing hydroponic produce as organic, such as Holland, are major exporters to the U.S.

With hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of venture and equity capital being invested in industrial-scale greenhouses the size of football fields, parking lots filled with thousands of containers with drip irrigation, or ‘vertical farms’ in cities, consumers and wholesale buyers need a way to discern which certified organic fruits and vegetables are truly nutrient-dense and produced according to the law.

Currently, there are no federal or state regulations requiring labeling or signage in grocery stores to differentiate conventional or organic hydroponic products from those grown using traditional farming practices, in soil.

Just as an emerging body of scientific



A growing amount of our food is being produced in sanitized, artificial environments.

literature is identifying the importance of a healthy and diverse gut microbiome, much of which is introduced through our diets, a growing amount of our food is being produced in sanitized, artificial environments.

This is especially egregious in the production of organic food, as consumers are willing to pay a premium based on published research indicating true organic management practices result in nutritional superiority and flavor.

There are currently no standards in the USDA organic regulations specifying how hydroponic or aquaponic producers should operate. Some of the largest third-party organic certification agents are, literally, just making up the rules on their own.

In contrast, many other organic certifiers read the law and interpret it the same way Cornucopia does: Congress included a prerequisite in the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA), passed in 1990, requiring careful soil stewardship, maintaining or improving fertility, before a farm’s produce could qualify for organic status.

At the time, the Organic Trade Association (OTA) backed the soil requirement. However, as corporate

agribusiness heavily invested in organic hydroponics over the ensuing years, the OTA changed its stance and became one of its strongest proponents.

The largest organic certifier in the country and a major OTA contributor, California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF), publicly disagreed with the NOSB-recommended prohibition, then made a quiet deal with the USDA to start certifying hydroponics. Other certifiers, attracted by big dollars changing hands, have since followed suit.

Thousands of organic consumers have downloaded and signed proxy letters addressed to the CEOs of major retailers of organic produce in this country asking them to create in-store signage to help them choose what produce to buy. Cornucopia is currently in discussions with officers at some of the retailers, including Costco, Target, Safeway, Kroger, and Walmart.

The largest hydroponic brands in the country, like giant berry producers Driscoll’s and Wholesum Harvest, with football field-size greenhouses of tomatoes in the desert Southwest and Mexico, say nothing about their production practices on their cases or product labels.

“Sadly, the only way consumers can currently know if they are getting true organic produce will be to consult Cornucopia’s buyer’s guide while shopping,” said Dave Chapman, a longtime soil-based greenhouse grower in Vermont. “Hopefully, in the future, responsible retailers will start identifying true organic produce. Right now, with the corruption between industry interests and the USDA, the operative term is *caveat emptor*, or buyer beware.”

Cornucopia Strengthens Leadership

New Policy Advisory Panel Members

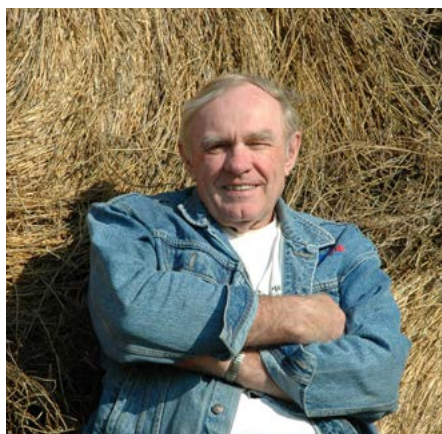
The Cornucopia Institute is pleased to announce the election of three influential leaders in the organic community to serve on the organization's Policy Advisory Panel. All are distinguished professors, growers, and former members of the USDA National Organic Standards Board.



DR. JENNIFER TAYLOR currently serves as an associate professor in the Florida A&M University (FAMU) College of Agriculture and Food Sciences, where she coordinates the Statewide Small Farm Program. Under her guidance, this initiative has assisted and equipped underserved growers and their families by providing access to knowledge about sustainable agricultural production and conservation management practices. The program has built a network of small producers and helped market products in urban markets, schools, and rural communities.

Taylor owns and operates Lola's Organic Farm in Southern Georgia. Named after her grandmother, who purchased the land with money earned as a sharecropper, Taylor grows certified organic fruits and vegetables and hosts workshops throughout the year.

From 2011-2016, Taylor served on the NOSB and held positions as a member of the Policy Development Committee and chair of the Materials Committee. She is a board member of the Organic Farmers Association and the Real Organic Project.



DR. FREDERICK KIRSCHENMANN is a longtime national and international leader in sustainable agriculture. He is a Distinguished Fellow at the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University, where he is a professor. Kirschenmann earned a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Chicago.

A pioneer in organic farming systems, Kirschenmann manages a diverse crop rotation on his family's 3,500-acre farm in North Dakota, which has been certified since 1976. His farm has been featured in numerous publications, including *National Geographic*, *Business Week*, *Audubon*, *The LA Times*, and *Gourmet Magazine*.

A prolific writer on ethics and agriculture, his collection of essays, *Cultivating an Ecological Conscience: Essays from a Farmer Philosopher*, traces the evolution of his ecological and farming philosophy.

Kirschenmann served on the NOSB from 1995-2000, including a year as the chair. He is the current board president of the Stone Barns Center for Sustainable Agriculture and a member of the advisory board for the Real Organic Project.



DR. JOAN DYE GUSSOW is known by many as the matriarch of the organic, locavore, and small-farm movements. A professor at Columbia University, Gussow created the legendary course *Nutrition Ecology*. She is currently the Mary Swartz Rose Professor Emeritus of Nutrition and Education at Columbia's Teachers College and the former chair of their Nutrition Education Department.

She has been a life-long, avid organic gardener, which is chronicled in her numerous books, including *The Feeding Web*, *This Organic Life*, and her most recent, *Growing Older: A Chronicle of Death, Life, and Growing Vegetables*.

Gussow is a founding member of Just Food and was past chair of the boards of the National Gardening Association and the Society for Nutrition Education. She served on two boards of the National Academy of Sciences, the FDA's Food Advisory Committee, the NOSB, and the advisory board of the Center for Food Safety. Gussow currently sits on the advisory board of the Real Organic Project and, in 2017, received a James Beard Leadership Award.

Protecting the Heart and Soul of Organic Food

The Connection Between Microorganisms, Soil, and Our Health

BY HELEN KEES

Below is an excerpt from a speech written and delivered by Board Chairperson Helen Kees to the Cornucopia staff.

One of my earliest memories consists of a distinct odor: well-fermented haylage combined with the earthy smells of our dairy barn.

During the winter, our little red dairy barn housed 22 milk cows, a breeding bull, less than a dozen calves, and six to eight larger heifers.

However, I was completely unaware that it also housed a trillion microorganisms that were doing the work of digestion in those cows, and that the microbiome of their digestion systems was so complex that PhDs were, and would continue to be, built on the study of the rumen, one of the most densely occupied habitats on Earth.

This orchestra of microscopic life is responsible for the biological and chemical processes of fermentation, digestion, decomposition, and soil building—arguably, Earth's most important cooperative agreement.

The United States Department of Agriculture National Organic Program (USDA-NOP) was created to protect the integrity of a system of food production in symphony with the sacred world of micro life in the soil. However, there is a rot spreading at this level of government, making The Cornucopia Institute's work more critical than ever.

Cornucopia's dedicated voice must be steadfast. For you see, conventional agriculture drops



Conventional farming destroys soil carbon, while soil-less production systems result in food that is a husk compared to food grown in complex soil.

a bomb into the ballroom of the soil. Conventional farming destroys soil carbon, the building block of organic matter, while soil-less production systems result in food that is a husk compared to food grown in complex soil.

The Cornucopia Institute's staff is a full-time diplomatic corps that works daily to protect the integrity of food produced under Earth's most important cooperative agreement.

My father's conservation plan for our farm, drafted by the USDA's Soil Conservation Service the year I was born, has a separate sheet titled "Soil Organic Matter."

It reads, "The topsoil is your most valuable possession. The topsoil is valuable because it contains organic matter, or humus. It keeps plant foods available, so the plant can get at them. It serves as a storehouse for fertilizer by helping to keep your fertilizer from being washed out of the soil. It increases the ability of the soil to hold water. Organic matter holds 5 to 6 times its weight in water.

Long rotations which include legumes and grasses is one of the best ways to build up your soil. Spreading barnyard manure on the field is very good, too. The plowing under of green manure crops and crop trash is also good."

This plan, this contract between a farmer and his government, was drafted nearly 70 years ago, when we clearly knew how to build soil.

The nutrients of the plant or plant products that we consume can only be as complex as that of the soil in which they were grown. Our health, and that of all

living creatures on Earth, is directly dependent on the vitality and complexion of the soil rhizosphere. A lack of proper crop rotations and the use of pesticides and fertilizers has depleted our soil.

Research by Newman et al, published in *Science of the Total Environment* in February 2016, reveals that the use of glyphosate, brand name Roundup®, caused shifts in the rhizosphere bacterial community.

Scientific American cited a Kushi Institute analysis covering the years from 1975 to 1997 which found that the average calcium levels in 12 fresh vegetables dropped 27%, iron levels 37%, vitamin A levels 21%, and vitamin C 30%.

It's not all bad news. I think it is joyful to consider the soil bacteria *Mycobacterium vaccae*. In 2007, the journal *Neuroscience* reported that, when researchers at the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom fed

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mice *Mycobacterium vaccae*, the mice produced more serotonin, the mood-regulating neurotransmitter.

Inhaled soil dust or ingested soil particles containing *Mycobacterium vaccae* positively alter brain chemistry. Further studies have reported that mice fed the bacterium showed “a reduction in anxiety related behaviors.” This bacterium has an antidepressant effect. It’s no wonder we love being in the soil!

The owner of the organic seed company High Mowing believes that organic seeds are the most powerful vehicle for change in the world.

If he is right, then The Cornucopia Institute’s staff is entrusted with those seeds. I pray that they will protect the seeds of hope, plant the seeds of information and activism, champion the seeds of investigative curiosity, guard the seeds of truth, secure the seeds of cooperation, and give

sanctuary to the seeds of change until the sun comes out again.

The potency and potential encased in one tiny seed is metaphysical. When treated to the right conditions, this genetic package explodes into a vibrant and vigorous field of energy. People, like seeds, thrive when conditions are favorable to the expression of their individual genius.

Soil, the medium in which seeds thrive, is so complex that it is still being explored and cataloged. There are more living microorganisms in a spoonful of healthy soil than there are people on earth.

Biodiversity, in the soil as well in our human counterparts, must be respected and cultivated. It is the secret to vibrant production. When seeds, or people, manifest their genetic genius, the product is rarely perfect, but always nourishing and unique.

Biodiversity, whether in a field, garden, pasture, or office, leads to a vibrancy and vigor of the ecosystem

that cannot be found within cloning or monocropping.

I am honored by Cornucopia’s effort, honored to have a small role in the work they do, honored by the complexities of their lives. I respect their visions and champion their input on strategy and plans. Every staff member is valued and sacred.

I have heard it said that Cornucopia works to protect the integrity of organic production. That is true, but I believe it is also dedicated to protecting the integrity of a natural system so complex and interdependent that it may be the face of God.

While we wait for the political winds to change, with corporate money infecting both parties, we can busy ourselves with adjusting our sails while remembering the words of anthropologist Margaret Mead: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Plant-based Beverages: How Do They Compare?

Sales of non-dairy, plant-based beverages are skyrocketing. Choices range from soy to almond, flax, cashew, oat, and even banana “milks.” These beverages come in an assortment of flavors and combinations.

Although primarily conventional, many of these product brands have organic options. But how do these products compare nutritionally to milk?

At a glance, the variety of ingredient labels is confusing and reads like a “who’s who” of faddish additives. Upon further inspection, it is clear that many of the nutrients contained therein come from synthetic supplements.

Added ingredients like carrageenan (a potent inflammatory agent), synthetic flavors, vegetable oils, emulsifiers, and gums are often present. Many products are highly sweetened and advisable to avoid.

While dairy alternatives may provide useful options for consumers who are lactose intolerant or allergic to cows’ milk, pasture-based cows’ milk is a better option for most consumers, given its high protein, healthy fats, and vitamin profile.

But large consumer package goods (CPG) companies are investing a tremendous amount in marketing to convince consumers that these alternatives are “better-for-you” options. And since many of these products are mostly water, they are much more profitable than milk from cows, goats, or sheep.

Cornucopia is preparing a report and web-based buyer’s guide to help consumers sort out how plant-based brands compare to one another based on their nutritional profiles, and how they

compare to traditional, nutrient-dense organic milk.

Whether dairy alternatives or tried-and-true cows’ milk, Cornucopia is objectively rating brands to assist consumers in making informed choices.



To avoid questions about prohibited Chinese production practices and tariffs, the corrupt actors set up a system of affiliated companies that choreographed the importation of Chinese honey, some of which they misrepresented as originating in Singapore, a country which produced no honey at that time.

It was only after Australian investigators intercepted a shipment of mislabeled Chinese honey that the U.S. investigators applied pressure to recover millions the U.S. lost in tariffs at the hands of the conspirators. The U.S. Department of Justice ultimately indicted several multinational companies and their principals.

This story of honey fraud will sound familiar to U.S. organic grain producers, but not in the sweetest of ways. China is a major exporter of “organic” commodities to the U.S.

Lack of judicious efforts on the part of the USDA leaves conscientious consumers and ethical businesses to police the market themselves and enforce standards through purchasing power.

To give consumers the tools they need to “take the law into their own hands,” Cornucopia is releasing a web-based buyer’s guide. Enabling consumers to use their hard-earned dollars to vote in the marketplace will shift demand and incentivize more U.S. family-scale farmers to enter organic grain production.

The guide showcases organic brands you can trust, identifying poultry, dairy, and egg brands that exclusively use domestically grown organic grain in their livestock feed. Cornucopia’s companion guide for farmers highlights where to source feed made from North American-grown organic grain.

Consumers must create the requisite marketplace pressure to swing the pendulum back to ethically produced organic food—doing your homework will pay dividends to your family and society.

If you are a shopper purchasing organic eggs, dairy, beef, or chicken, please seek out the brands identified in Cornucopia’s new buyer’s guide. One trusted brand of organic chicken is Bell and Evans, based

in Fredericksburg, Pennsylvania. Bell and Evans is a family-owned poultry producer that distributes chicken throughout the eastern half of the U.S. The dairy section of the scorecard includes venerable and highly rated yogurt brands like Butterworks in Vermont, Hawthorne Valley in New York, and Seven Stars in Pennsylvania.

If these name brands are not available to you, please ask your grocery retailers to carry them. Alternatively, you can contact the owners and managers of your favorite organic brands and tell them the sourcing of all-domestic feed is an important purchasing criterion. Refer them to the companion guide to identify feed suppliers that only market domestically grown organic grain, like Central Plains Organic Farmers Association, a bargaining cooperative with members in Kansas and bordering states.

Shifting to trusted livestock product marketers feeding only domestically produced grain is the best way to eliminate the enormous human, economic, and social costs inflicted by imported products of questionable organic authenticity.

Oil and Gas Wastewater Used in Organic Production

Wastewater from oil and gas production is currently being used on agricultural crops. This activity is especially prevalent in California.

Scientists and policymakers are unaware of the exact cocktail of toxic chemicals present in wastewater from oil and gas extraction. Regulators allow energy companies to protect this “proprietary” information and have refused to release it. This makes it difficult to properly test for chemicals that could be dangerous to humans, wildlife, or the environment.

For those chemicals and distillates that we do know are present in oil and gas wastewater, such as heavy metals, a significant portion are shown to have carcinogenic, toxic, reproductive, developmental, and other negative health impacts. These substances are not considered safe for human consumption and would be

disallowed in organic production if scrutinized. However, under current law, once wastewater has been “treated” it

can be used to irrigate organic crops. In addition, tests show that treating oil and gas wastewater does not remove all of the harmful additives and dissolved substances.

Treated water has been shown to contain endocrine-disrupting chemicals, carcinogenic substances, and radioactive elements. In addition, it is impossible to accurately test the purity of treated water because many of the chemical components may be unknown.

With so many uncertainties and documented risks, the potential for contamination is beyond concerning.

Cornucopia is urging the USDA to step up and protect organic consumers by changing the rule to prohibit any use of oil and gas wastewater.



Factory "Organic" Causes Dairy Surplus

Making It Hard for Small Family Farms to Survive

BY MARIE BURCHAM, JD

Patty and Brian Wilson own a 600-acre farm in Vermont where, with the help of family, they have milked a small herd of dairy cattle for 23 years. The Wilson Farm made the transition to organic dairy 15 years ago. The transition was an easy one, because they were already dedicated to grazing as much as possible and using few inputs associated with conventional dairying (e.g., frequent use of antibiotics).

After years of financial stability, the Wilsons have now put their dairy herd up for sale. While still milking approximately 45 cows, they fear their future as a family dairy may be coming to a close.

With the recent surplus of organic milk on the market generated by large industrial-organic dairies, small, exemplary grass-based dairies like the Wilsons are coming up short.

Patty spoke frankly about their situation and the problems family farms are facing in the current dairy crisis: "When greed entered the market in the form of large farms, it became hard for small farms to survive."

Patty noted that her farm has always prided itself on raising high-quality animals. In the past, they even showed some of their animals in competition.

Like many family-scale farms, the Wilsons also have a strong bond with their cattle, even considering them part of the family. The natural side effect of this exceptional care is longevity and health in their dairy herd.

With such healthy animals, the calves born on the farm are often considered surplus. Historically, the



Switching to organic production was supposed to be the cure for American dairy farmers.

Wilson Farm always made ends meet by selling their high-quality replacement animals to other organic farms. Unfortunately, as larger dairies have moved into their area, that source of income has dried up.

Large industrial dairies do not buy healthy calves from farms like the Wilsons', nor do they raise their own. Instead, these operations purchase cheap, conventional cattle raised on medicated milk replacer containing antibiotics and, potentially, other banned pharmaceuticals.

After weaning, these calves are fed conventional GMO grains and hay treated with chemicals prohibited in organic agriculture. These animals are being raised conventionally until their first birthday. Sometime during the second year of life, approximately one year before they start producing milk, they are "transitioned" to organic management.

Meanwhile, baby calves on the Wilson Farm, and the preponderance of organic family dairies, receive the same quality of organic milk you would find in the grocery store and consume certified organic feed for the balance of their lives. This much more

expensive process leaves ethical organic producers competitively disadvantaged.

While this animal cycling should be illegal, the USDA has refused to act either to enforce the current standards or to provide guidelines which would require certifiers to weed out bad actors in the dairy industry.

In the meantime, ethical dairies are not only feeding their calves the organic milk that industrial organic producers sell to consumers, but the market for their high-quality, young organic dairy animals no longer exists.

Under these conditions, it is hard for any family dairy to survive.

Patty observed that one litmus test for industrial dairies lies in the amount of time livestock spend on grass. The current grazing requirement under organic certification is only 30% and often poorly enforced. If the provision was raised to 50% or more, and enforced, many industrial dairies would have objectionable operations.

Cornucopia policy experts advocated for these benchmarks when the regulations were rewritten. In the past, switching to organic production was supposed to be the cure for family farms in the age of industrialization. Now, the promise of organic agriculture is on tenuous footing.

Consumers invested in helping the true heroes of the organic dairy marketplace—family farms—can make discerning choices using Cornucopia's Organic Dairy Scorecard. For a greater dive into the issues facing ethical organic dairy farmers, interested readers can also check out Cornucopia's updated Dairy Report: *The Industrialization of Organic Dairy*.



THE CORNUCOPIA FARMER PROFILE

College Job Becomes Lifelong Artistry

Continuing the Legacy of Fiddler's Green Farm



PHOTO COURTESY OF DAN KENNEDY

BY GAYLE NIELSON

Jim Eldon of Fiddler's Green Farm in Brooks, California says he became a farmer by default. While attending UC Davis, one of his housemates told him about a new organic farm right outside of town.

He was intrigued. Having worked in restaurants for years, he had already started gardening, exploring square-foot growing of vegetables in raised beds. After hearing that this local farmer was looking for help on his farm, and after a week of playing phone tag, they connected. That was in 1987 and marked the beginning of 30 years of organic farming for Jim.

While being mentored on the farm, Jim was also reading Rodale's organic

farming and gardening magazines, never considering any other type of agriculture. However, most of his knowledge came from his own successes and failures at growing organic crops year-round to satisfy the demand for produce in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Under its previous owners, Fiddler's Green Farm was certified organic in 1982, making it one of the oldest organic farms in California. The owners were retired teachers of Irish ancestry who had sailed the world, inspiring the farm's name.

In Irish sailing folklore, the "fiddler" refers to the person in the boat who mans the sails and ropes and dreams of Fiddler's Green, the paradise where sailors go to "retire."

Fiddler's Green Farm has been certified organic since 1982, making it one of the oldest organic farms in California. The original owners were retired teachers of Irish ancestry who had sailed the world, inspiring the farm's name.

*At Fiddler's Green, where seamen true
When here they've done their duty
The bowl of grog shall still renew
And pledge to love and beauty*

—Frederick Marryat

Since acquiring the farm in 1991, Jim and his wife Julie have continued to tend their 30 acres organically. Jim has always believed that agricultural chemicals are both toxic and unnecessary—not just toxic in application, but in their production and disposal as well.

When synthetic fertilizer and pesticides are applied to millions of acres, they do not just go away. As his mom used to say, "There is no such place as away."

Fiddler's Green Farm began as a CSA, while Jim looked for a niche market. In 1999, a heavy frost at the end of April destroyed about 15,000 tomato plants, as well as the basil, squash, and melon crops.

The Eldons laid off half of their crew and planted greens to make up for the loss. A couple of freak June hailstorms pulverized everything. Not to be deterred by the weather, they sold the CSA customer list and focused instead

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FARMER PROFILE Continued from page 10

on selling to restaurants and at the farmers markets.

This year, they are harvesting their third crop of asparagus of the growing season. The asparagus ferns, whose roots have been in the ground since 2008, are bushy and healthy.

And good weather this year allowed the Eldons to plant spinach and lettuce a month early. These days, they produce about 30 varieties of veggies, including lettuces, baby greens, onions, and other root crops—a great crop of potatoes this year.

Jim describes himself as being among a small minority of organic farmers when it comes to stewarding the soil. He finds it very satisfying to nurture the soil through practices that have integrity.

Eschewing the abundance of chemical materials approved for use under organic regulations, he sticks with crop rotation, cover crops, and compost to build the soil. When he hears of hydroponic produce being called “organic,” he calls it ridiculous. “If organic is about feeding the soil to feed the plants,” he asks, “then where is the soil?”



Fiddler's Green Farm

Jim jokingly refers to Fiddler's Green Farm as “just a big market garden.” He maintains the highest possible quality in his produce, picking carefully chosen crops the day before sale.

Rather than growing more crops and expanding his market, he is committed to serving his current customers to the best of his ability. That focus on integrity serves him well, as about 85% of the farm's produce is sold directly to consumers at farmers markets. Local restaurants purchase much of the balance; the small remainder is sold to co-ops and other wholesale accounts.

Ten years of restaurant experience have put Jim at ease with chefs, and he has been known to sample soup directly from the stockpot. He often goes to San Rafael, taking pre-orders from about 50 chefs and

letting them know what is coming available on the farm.

Jim's relationships in kitchens have allowed him to tailor his crops to the chefs' cooking, years ahead of modern farm-to-fork operations.

What does the future hold for Fiddler's Green Farm? Picking up a new tractor and delivery van recently, Jim feels ready to forge ahead for the next year. However, with Julie retired from her education career and Jim joking that he is semi-retired, he is open to a new retirement plan. While the Eldons raised two children on the farm, neither chose to follow in their footsteps.

Catching up with Julie just before a trip to Japan, she reflected on the number of people they nourish from their small acreage, marveling, “We are blessed to farm such productive land.”

The 2018 Farm Bill Inching Forward

The farm bill is the primary legislative tool for food and agricultural policy in the U.S. Starting in 1933, farm bills have been passed every five years and have included sections on commodity programs, agricultural trade, rural development, on-farm conservation and land conservation measures, farm research, food security and nutrition programs, agricultural marketing, and organic food issues.

The organic industry has received funding in various forms through each farm bill, providing an essential backbone for the organic marketplace and its participants.

Ethical organic farmers assume expenses that their conventional rivals burden the public with

instead, like the costs of keeping public and private land free of pollution and supporting biodiversity.



Many of the conservation programs funded by past farm bills helped small farmers get some compensation for their work to protect the valuable ecosystem services we all need for clean air, water, and safe food.

Farm bill programs expire in September 2018, and Congress has been working on the next farm bill. It is important that consumers and advocates remain apprised of the situation and in

touch with their congressional representatives as the bill moves forward, as it may contain changes that harm administration of the organic program or research and conservation programs that help family-scale farmers thrive.



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

Save Your Food



Many of us founded the organic movement to save our very best family-scale farms, producing the highest-quality food. Corporate consolidation, fraudulent imports, and livestock factory-farms have put this promise in jeopardy. Knowledge is power, and our work at Cornucopia aims to empower organic farmers and consumers. Together, we can pressure the government and corporations and, most importantly, choose to vote with our dollars when we shop. Cornucopia gives you the tools to have an impact. Please stand with us and protect authentic organic food. Return the enclosed envelope or give online: www.cornucopia.org. Contact us for more ways you can support our work. We couldn't do it without you!

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NOSB 2018 Meetings

Spring Review and Fall Preview



Cornucopia spoke to organic stakeholders in April at the first of this year's two National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) meetings.

Policy experts articulated the struggles facing organic family farmers due to fraudulent imports and the increasing representation of the industrial model of production under the organic seal.

Our staff uncovered evidence of vast quantities of conventional corn and soy, primarily shipping from former Soviet Bloc countries via free-trade zones in Turkey, entering U.S. ports with fraudulent organic certificates.

Two expert panels testified before the NOSB regarding the scope of import fraud and made suggestions to improve National Organic Program (NOP) oversight. Instead of going back to the NOSB for recommendations on moving forward, as mandated by Congress, the USDA held a public webinar and proposed their own remedies.

Cornucopia staff will be at the October NOSB meeting, taking place at the end of the month in St. Paul, Minnesota. But the board action cracking down on fraudulent imports is conspicuously absent from the agenda.

What is on the agenda: the proposal to add more synthetic chemicals to the National List, sanctioning the fumigation of farmland, and treatment of contaminated livestock carcasses. These moves clearly benefit corporate agribusiness and industrial organic, instead of promoting prevention of these problems through true organic management.

You can follow Cornucopia's live coverage of the meeting on our website at <https://tinyurl.com/NOSBFall2018>.