

THE CULTIVATOR

NEWS FROM THE CORNUCOPIA INSTITUTE

WINTER 2018

Healthy, Nutritious, or Hype? Evaluating the Hot Market for Plant-Based Beverages

BY ANNE ROSS, JD

Sales of non-dairy, plant-based beverages are burgeoning. In 2010, only one-fifth of U.S. households purchased or consumed plant-based beverages. By 2017, these beverages, commonly referred to as “milk,” had posted a 9% gain and reached a whopping \$1.6 billion in annual sales.

Supermarket shelves are stocked full of plant-based beverage options, derived from a variety of sources, including nuts, seeds, legumes, and cereal grains. These products can be found in an assortment of flavors in both refrigerated and shelf-stable packaging.

As plant-based beverages take over grocery store displays, it’s important for consumers to have the information they need to evaluate which, if any, of these beverages are right for them.

Cornucopia’s new report and the accompanying scorecard will help consumers compare nutritional profiles of plant-based beverages, while also comparing them to that of dairy milk.

Cornucopia’s report rates over 300 products from 49 brands, making it the most comprehensive examination of plant-based beverages available.

The ratings show that nutrient density of plant-based beverages varies widely and within types, depending on the amount of plant material used, the processing methodology, and the addition



of other ingredients, such as sugar and oils.

USDA certified organic plant-based beverages and those containing organic ingredients received higher marks on the scorecard than their conventional counterparts because of concerns over contamination from agrichemical residues.

Products manufactured with carrageenan or other thickeners and stabilizers received lower marks, as did products containing vegetable oils.

Consumers can also use Cornucopia’s web-based scorecard to check the sugar content of each product. Astonishingly, some of these beverages advertised as “healthy” alternatives to real milk have a sugar content equal to, or greater than, many soft drinks.

The World Health Organization recommends limiting added sugar to 5% of your daily calorie intake, which amounts to about 25 grams (six teaspoons) of sugar per day. Sugar has been linked to obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

Added sugar content can vary widely among plant-based beverages, some containing over 20 grams (five teaspoons) of sugar per cup.

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Who Needs the Organic Label

Is It Really Worth Fighting For?

BY MARK KASTEL

My mother is proud to tell me that, 64 years ago, she bucked the trend by breastfeeding me for a whole week or two. God knows what the comparative quality was of infant formula back then. We now know how it compares to breastmilk—it doesn't.

Subsequently, I lived a typical American childhood, downing an occasional Coca-Cola® (with real sugar instead of high-fructose corn syrup) after a grilled “cheese” sandwich of Kraft® Velveeta on Wonder Bread.®

By my 20s I was low-energy, and by my 30s I had a legitimate health crisis. Fortunately, I saw a progressive physician-allergist who suggested I eat all organic food (by then I already had a pretty healthy,

whole foods diet—long before there was any store by that name).

After decades of eating, gardening, farming, and advocating for organics, my health is excellent. Having recovered from pesticide poisoning/environmental illness, I'm very protective of my diet. I need organic food!

Many people, like me, come to organic food because of what it doesn't have: agrichemicals, drug residues, and novel foods that have never been part of the human diet, GMOs. But what might be organic food's greatest attribute, and what may have saved my health, is its comparable nutrient density.

I owe my health to billions of microscopic organisms that break down organic matter into usable plant nutrients in truly healthy soil, something missing in “organic”

produce grown without soil in industrial hydroponic operations, fed by liquid fertilizer solution.

Organic dairy products, eggs, and meat from animals confined to feedlots or giant buildings on “factory farms” are also missing something—important nutrients, like omega-3 fatty acids and conjugated linoleic acid (CLA).

In addition to being required by organic regulations, grazing provides the nutrients for livestock to produce nourishing food. Please see the scorecards on our website to choose the very best, nutritionally dense dairy products and eggs (and soon poultry).

Babies and Children Need Authentic Organic Food

Science is just beginning to recognize that some synthetic chemicals mimic

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the effect of naturally occurring hormones in our body in minute doses. This phenomenon can be devastating, especially in utero and for developing children.

The agrichemical contamination of most of our surface water, and the effect on the sexual development of amphibians, should have long ago been our alarm bell.

Are the Cheerios® served to children at breakfast contaminated with the herbicide glyphosate? Does the milk contain drug residues or genetically engineered growth hormone?

For parents not willing to allow their precious children to be used as lab rats, organic is the only alternative.

Anyone Who Drinks Water Needs Organics

Conventional agriculture pollutes both surface water and groundwater. By switching our diets to domestically produced organic food, we are providing the economic incentive for farmers to convert more acres, preventing exposure to toxins.

Wild Critters We Love and Share this Planet with Need Organics

From bees, eagles, and sandhill cranes, to creatures who live in the rain forests in jeopardy of being burned down to produce cheap conventional crops for export—organic protects their health and habitat. We invest in their well-being each time we choose organic food at the grocery store or co-op.

The Animals in Our Food System Need Organic

By law, organic livestock cannot be continuously confined and have to have access to the outdoors. Ruminants must be pastured. Livestock are required to have the



opportunity to display their natural instinctual behaviors. That makes for a respectful life which includes joy—something animals ensnared in the conventional production model are deprived of.

Family Farmers Need Organics

We worked hard to commercialize organic farming in the 1980s, in part, to serve as an economic-justice vehicle for farmers who were being squeezed off the land by industrialized, corporate-controlled agriculture. Now that organics is a \$50 billion business, most of the giant agribusiness

conglomerates have invested. They have lobbied the USDA to weaken the standards and look the other way in terms of enforcement.

Please! Please use Cornucopia's scorecards to reward the true heroes in this movement and to procure truly safe and nutrient-dense food for your families. You will be protecting the livelihoods of our very best farmers by doing so.

Farm Workers Need Organics

If we don't accomplish anything else for society or our own families when we invest in organic food, we are, at a minimum, protecting the lives and health of farmers, farm workers, and their children who, all too often, live right next to the fields. As they go out to harvest conventional fields, they are being exposed to high levels of toxins. Farmers and farm workers have some of the highest levels of specific cancers and chronic diseases.

Local and NonGMO: Do Not Accept Substitutes!

Authentic organic food is worth fighting for and going out of our way to do the homework to find. How about local? Although it certainly might be fresher and help our local economies, there's no reason why you can't have local and organic simultaneously.

And how about non-GMO? That's only one element in what makes organic worth it. Non-GMO labeled food can still contain agrichemical and drug residues; can be produced with sewage sludge, irradiation, and dangerous food additives; and may be grown in synthetic, petroleum-based fertilizers. Non-GMO food does not mean organic!

Who needs organic food? We all need organic food. Every one of us, as well as the animals we share this planet with and the earth itself. We can be part of the healing process.

Organic Farmers Improve Ecosystem Services

Benefiting Communities and the Planet

BY MARIE BURCHAM, JD

The benefits that a healthy, functioning environment provides for humanity are called ecosystem services. For example, forest ecosystems provide the service of oxygen production.

These benefits are often taken for granted, although these services are finite in nature and tied directly to the vitality of the ecosystem itself.

In the early 2000s, the United Nations sponsored the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), an effort to understand the impact of human actions on ecosystems and human well-being.

The assessment popularized the concept of ecosystem services, discussed in scientific and economic circles for decades prior.

The MA ultimately identified four major categories of ecosystem services:

1. Provisioning (production of food and water); 2. Regulating (controlling climate and disease); 3. Cultural (spiritual and recreational benefits); and, 4. Supporting Services (oxygen production and nutrient cycling).

Agriculture can seriously impact ecosystem services. Excessive tillage, draining of wetlands, voluminous irrigation, deforestation, monoculture, and nutrient overload from animal waste are all examples of damage to ecosystems.

The slash and burn of rainforests destroys their biodiversity, along with their ability to sequester carbon (which helps buffer climate change) and produce oxygen. Draining wetlands to create agricultural land destroys their ability to purify water, slow down floodwaters, and prevent runoff.

As our understanding of the value of each ecosystem service deepens, many are being assigned economic worth.



Even if consumers pay cheaper prices at the checkout for conventional food, they pay dearly for the losses in ecosystem services.

But in conventional agriculture, most of the costs to the environment are externalized. This means that the damage to functioning ecosystems—or the simple replacement of a healthy ecosystem with a dysfunctional one—is not represented economically.

Externalities help explain why conventional food can be sold to consumers at low prices. These ancillary costs are passed off, absorbed by other beings and into other devalued systems.

In short, even if consumers pay cheaper prices at the checkout for conventional food, they pay dearly for the losses in ecosystem services.

Authentic organic food is more expensive to produce and buy, in part, because farmers do not externalize the environmental costs.

Organic farmers who follow both the letter and the spirit of the law include their support for vibrant on-farm ecosystems among their operating costs.

Organic agriculture is mandated to support and maintain on-farm biodiversity and native ecosystems around the farm. Organic principles of soil-based production support nutrient cycling (which provides the service of carbon storage) and prevent harmful runoff (which supports freshwater environments). Some of these more sustainable practices can result in lower yields.

Cornucopia always recommends buying local organic food, but organic food from faraway farms still improves the overall health of the planet.

Most authentic organic farms support biodiversity, pollinators, and the filtration of polluted air or water. Many maintain verdant rural landscape for recreational and cultural benefits.

Next time you grocery shop, factor in the costs of ecosystem services. You will realize what a bargain you are getting when you patronize true organic farms and the brands that support them.

Trust Through Transparency

Managing Conflicts of Interest in the National Organic Program

BY ANNE ROSS, JD

Many federal and state laws, professional bodies, and associations establish policies that recognize conflicts of interest and take steps to mitigate those conflicts.

Federal employees in the executive branch of government are restricted from performing certain post-employment activities, like advising foreign political governments and parties. Similarly, there are restrictions on former congressional members, imposing “cooling off” periods before they can lobby Congress.

Lawyers are governed by strict rules of professional conduct specifically addressing potential conflicts of interest. Lawyers must obtain consent from a former client before representing a new client in matters that are averse to the interests of former clients.

The pharmaceutical and medical device industries are required to disclose consultancy relationships with physicians to avoid the appearance that medical entrepreneurship is prioritized over research or patient care.

The National Organic Program (NOP) should enact similar measures to engender confidence in the organic sector.

Consider scenario A: An individual is employed by a USDA accredited certifier. The individual resigns her employment with the certifier and accepts employment with a certified operation to head that operation’s organic division. The operation happens to be certified by the certifier

that previously employed the operation’s new organic manager.

Consider scenario B: A high-level administrator at the NOP resigns from his employment and enters into a lucrative consultancy agreement with a certifier. The NOP is responsible for accrediting and overseeing the performance of all certifiers. In exchange for consultancy fees, the former administrator offers to talk to some of his former subordinates at the NOP, attempting to resolve conflicts.

What do these scenarios have in common? They both present situations where an individual may find him or herself with competing interests. These competing interests, commonly referred to as conflicts of interest, can create a perception of bias. Worse yet, if left unmanaged, conflict of interests can provide fertile ground for fraud.

When the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) asked for public comment on factors to assess certifier risk for fraudulent conduct, Cornucopia requested that it adopt similar measures and specifically address the revolving door in these employment situations.

Certifiers have a higher risk for fraudulent conduct if the certifier provides services to an operation that employs a former member of the certifier’s staff, or the certifier hires an individual who was previously employed by an operation it certifies.

Certifiers are also at a higher risk for fraudulent conduct if the certifier engages a former NOP employee as a consultant, board member, advisor, or employee.

One way to mitigate these risks is to require certifiers to disclose to the NOP these employment relationships and for the NOP to make this information publicly available.

The NOP should also require that the former NOP employee, certifier, and certified entity disclose the nature of the relationship (including the disclosure of financial interests) between former NOP employees, certifiers, and/or certified entities.

Managing these potential conflicts of interest through required disclosures engenders confidence in the authenticity of organic food production. It’s the transparency within a system that reveals its ultimate truth, without which there cannot be trust.



One way to mitigate potential conflicts of interest is to require certifiers to disclose to the NOP these employment relationships and for the NOP to make this information publicly available.

Cornucopia Members Speak Up!

Members Across the Country on Why They Support This Work

Cornucopia members are in good company. Family-scale farmers, co-op grocery owner-members, natural business leaders, and good food advocates from across the country make Cornucopia's work possible.

Here are just a few of the many comments submitted with recent donations. Members have unique reasons for contributing, but the thread that brings us all together is Good Food!

* * *

"Thanks for the amazing work you all do—buying organic used to be enough, but not anymore. I have to either know the local farmers who grow my meat, milk, and produce, or I have to use the guidance offered by your scorecards."

– Peggy, Virginia

"We raised five children on organic foods and they are healthy in body and mind. Thank you Cornucopia for keeping us informed."

– Loys, Oregon

"I count on you to defend the true meaning of organic farming and thus protect the planet, the farmers and their workers, and the consumers. Keep up the good fight!"

– Margaret, Washington, DC

"Cornucopia is a trusted resource in helping me spend my food dollars on sustainable producers and avoid those I don't want to give a penny to."

– Kimberlee, Wisconsin

"We support your continued efforts and spread the word about Cornucopia Institute whenever possible. We appreciate you doing what so many of us are unable to do for ourselves. Thank you for protecting a healthy way of life."

– Cory and Anna, Delaware



"I am a fifth-generation organic farmer and value-added farm business owner. I believe strongly in organic practices and am so grateful for the work that Cornucopia does to protect organic integrity."

– Nicole, Saskatchewan

"Organic farmers have my utmost admiration and respect, and I would not want to live in a world without them."

– Elizabeth, New York

"Our health and the future of the earth as we've been able to enjoy it are directly intertwined. Clean food, vital soil, and precious water are now all at great risk across the planet. Cornucopia is a non-partisan, science-based beacon, shining light on corporate and government fraud and highlighting hardworking farms that are deserving models of a wiser path forward. I heartily support their work."

– John, Virginia

"As a survivor of Breast Cancer for five years, it is essential to understand what organic food is. Your organization has been a critical contributor to that understanding. I am genuinely thankful for the work your organization contributes to upholding standards in the organic farming practices. Cornucopia is the consumer's best source for understanding what is expected to bring good clean organic food to the plate."

– Karen, Pennsylvania

"I shop at Whole Foods but can't count on them to do the right thing. Organizations like yours are our best defense to keep the food industry from doing harm to the folks who eat their food. Keep up the good work!"

– Martin, Rhode Island

“The information that you provide has been invaluable to me and my family. Beyond what Cornucopia has done for me directly, the organization also impresses me with its unwavering focus on its goals. In this era of political polarization, your organization has remained refreshingly non-partisan, highlighting government failings no matter the responsible party. This honesty and dedication to food justice—not to mention your vigilance even in the face of fierce political and corporate power—is what I find so admirable. I believe that our food rights must be defended: by the people, en masse and on multiple fronts. I thank you for all you have already done and what you continue to do. Press on. We must. For what other choice is there?”

– Matt, Connecticut

“I work at a co-op and see what is happening with large corporations and multi-nationals buying up small organic companies and the resulting weakening of organic labels. Thank you for taking on the watchdog role. And for providing the scorecards, which I reference with customers frequently.”

– Stacey, New Mexico

“I am a small-scale organic farmer/rancher and a health care provider (chiropractor). I am very concerned about the contamination of our food supply and its impact on human health. The level of deception in the food industry right now is shocking. You offer a glimmer of hope in this bleak landscape. Thank you for all the excellent work you do.”

– Mary, Texas



“Lucy is an organic baby that relies on your amazing work, and in a few months she can say ‘Thank You’ herself!”

– Chris, California

Making a Difference: Your Choices for Charitable Giving

We’ve all seen family farms in communities across the country going out of business at an alarming rate due to unfair competition from greedy profiteers and a complicit government. And it’s becoming harder and harder in the grocery to tell the difference between fraudulent, nutritionally deficient industrial organics and the real deal. If we don’t act now, it may soon be too late. Your gift this giving season will protect the good food movement we’ve built together.

Individual donations like yours account for the majority of our fundraising, not only providing fuel for this mission, but also giving us the moral authority to speak out! This year, we’ve made it easier than ever to support Cornucopia.

2-for-1 Matching Grant Check or Credit Card Online

Once again, a generous family foundation has offered to match, dollar-for-dollar, every donation made to Cornucopia up to \$50,000 until the end of 2018. So increase your impact and donate today.

Many members choose to make a monthly donation to provide Cornucopia with steady financial backing to fulfill our mission throughout the year. Others either tuck

a check into the envelope provided in this newsletter or stop by to donate at cornucopia.org. However, there are alternative options available.

Your Life’s Work and Impact Appreciated Assets and Bequests

If you’re interested in helping us build a solid foundation to carry this critical work forward for years to come, consider leaving a legacy gift of appreciated assets (e.g., required IRA disbursements, stock, or real estate), establishing a donor-advised fund through your local community foundation, or making Cornucopia the beneficiary of all, or part, of your estate through a charitable bequest.

Just last year, a longtime member, who had supported our efforts modestly, passed away and left us his family farm. We were truly humbled.

Donating to Cornucopia not only helps us fulfill our mission, but there may be significant tax advantages for your gift as well. Check with your accountant or tax advisor if you have questions. For more information, contact us at: cultivate@cornucopia.org. We couldn’t do it without you!



But large-scale, plant-based beverage manufacturers have touted the health benefits of their products, while unfairly creating skepticism about dairy consumption.

A recent study found that over half of consumers purchasing plant-based beverages do so because of the perception that they are “better for you.”

Some shoppers cite environmental impact concerns and lifestyle choices as reasons for choosing plant-based alternatives, while others simply just like the taste of the products.

Lactose-intolerant consumers and those with milk allergies or sensitivities have welcomed the plant-based alternatives to the market. But a recent survey found that 90% of households purchasing plant-based beverages also consume dairy products.

Authentic organic cow's milk is a highly nutritious food that, unlike most plant-based beverages, does not undergo processing and extensive fortification with additional ingredients.

Studies have shown that milk from animals raised with organic

production methods has a higher content of omega-3 fatty acids. These are essential for human health and often under-consumed in relation to omega-6 fatty acids.

Grass-fed dairy production, mandated by the organic standards, is also one of the best possible sources of a powerful fatty acid called conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), which has been linked to a range of health benefits, including reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, certain cancers, and obesity.

Many plant-based beverages are fortified to replicate the nutritional profile of cow's milk. The FDA is prioritizing its effort to examine public health concerns associated with dairy alternatives. Among other things, they are concerned about the potential adverse health effects that substituting dairy alternatives for milk in the diets of growing children without medical supervision.

The FDA has invited stakeholder feedback as it evaluates the use of the term “milk” to describe these products. FDA Commissioner Dr. Scott Gottlieb

recently said, “An almond doesn't lactate, I will confess.”

For those who must drink plant-based beverages, organic is a better choice than conventional. The organic regulations require that the plant material be grown without most synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. Processed food that is certified organic contains only additives that have undergone rigorous review in terms of human health and environmental impacts.

As the debate continues, consumers considering plant-based beverages will have a valuable tool in our scorecard. In addition to rating individual products, the scorecard also examines brands to help consumers decide which brand to patronize when comparing similar products.

The report highlights several organic brands that receive high ratings, including Three Trees, Malk, and Mooala. All of the plant-based beverages produced by these companies are certified organic.

Whether one chooses dairy or plant-based beverages, or a diet including both, one choice is clear: organic is always the better option.

Policing Fraudulent Imports Through Your Purchasing Power

In June, Cornucopia released a comprehensive and groundbreaking report chronicling how a small number of large Eastern European agribusinesses came to dominate the U.S. organic grain industry following failures by the USDA's National Organic Program (NOP) to stop questionable organic grain imports from flowing into the U.S.

Cornucopia outlined how the USDA's negligent oversight, along with regulatory loopholes, created a porous supply chain that is vulnerable to fraud and organized crime. The USDA is only now, after tremendous damage has been done to domestic farmers and the reputation of the organic label, implementing some reforms to tighten supply chain controls. But will the proposed reforms be enough?

Consumer demand will incentivize more U.S. family-scale farmers to enter organic grain production, fostering

local food systems and protecting the environment. Large organic manufacturers often rely on factory farms and imports to maximize profits, diverting consumer dollars away from struggling local and rural economies.



If you are a shopper purchasing organic eggs, dairy, or chicken products, please seek out the brands identified in Cornucopia's mobile-friendly tools. If these name brands are not available to you, please ask your grocery retailers to carry them. Alternatively, you can contact the ownership/management of organic brands available in your market and tell them the sourcing of all-domestic

feed is an important purchasing criterion to you.

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

"Organic" Restaurant Marketing

Consumers Have to Do the Homework

BY MARIE BURCHAM, JD

Many consumers who choose organic food for home-cooked meals want the same choice when they eat out. Restaurants, like other sectors of the marketplace, recognize that organic food is no longer a narrow niche market but, rather, attracts a wide customer base.

However, the rules and regulations monitoring how restaurants market their organic offerings are sparse. In fact, federal regulations exempt retailers, including restaurants and grocery stores, from organic certification.

Specifically, the rules state that retail food establishments that handle organic agricultural products but do not process them are exempt from organic certification.

Some food establishments do voluntarily pursue organic certification. While others, particularly some restaurants, use the word "organic" in their signage, menus, and websites without ever being subject to a third-party inspection.

This marketing can be misleading to consumers, who may assume that all, or most, of the food at an establishment is organic. Even more confusing, particular menu items may be labeled "organic" without actually being 100% certified organic.

For example, the New York City-based Bareburger chain displayed the term "organic" in its advertising and signage, including marketing for organic burgers. In reality, the chain only sourced organic products "when available" and only carried a few organic products regularly.

While food establishments are not required to be certified, it is still illegal to mislead consumers.

The National Organic Program (NOP) follows up on complaints regarding organic fraud and can take action against restaurants, retailers, and other companies found misrepresenting products.

Cornucopia has made legal complaints regarding two such cases:

Organic Avenue juice bar and Newman's Own Organic brand, accusing both of misrepresenting their products as organic.

Newman's Own used the term "organic" in their marketing, even though most of their products either contained no organic ingredients or were merely "made with organic ingredients," a label that ensures only 70% of the ingredients are organic.

Cornucopia successfully proved the marketing was fraudulent, since the name of the brand misrepresented to consumers that all products in that line were certified organic when, in fact, they were not. In response to pressure, Newman's Own removed the word "organic" from their brand name and labeling.

In the case of Organic Avenue, Cornucopia accused the chain of misrepresenting their juice and cleanse products as organic. The NOP found Organic Avenue in violation of organic rules and regulations and offered them a settlement, which they accepted.

Misleading marketing is a common tactic used by restaurants and other food establishments to



Misleading marketing is a tactic often used to take advantage of the growing interest in organic food.

take advantage of the growing interest in organic food.

All reports indicate the market will continue to grow as more consumers become interested in the benefits of food and other products produced without genetically modified organisms, antibiotics, herbicide cocktails, and other toxic inputs, including Roundup®.

In today's market, organic options can almost always be sourced—it's just a matter of whether buyers are willing to pay the premium.

Restaurants and other retail establishments that want to illustrate their greater accountability to discerning consumers are taking steps to get their entire businesses certified. Some exemplary restaurants are transparent about their offerings and only display the term organic when it is truly applicable.

In the meantime, consumers can do their part by requesting more information about where a restaurant's food really comes from. If the menu or other marketing uses the term "organic," it is important to determine if that use is appropriate. Complaints can be made to the NOP Compliance and Enforcement Branch.



THE CORNUCOPIA FARMER PROFILE

Faith in Farming

Finding a Way of Life on Windy Acres Farm

BY JASON COLE

What is the meaning and purpose of work? Is it simply a means of making a profit and accumulating wealth? Can work build community and nurture the creation? Are we simply miners of the soil, taking all we can get, or are we caretakers so that future generations will also receive the blessing and benefit of the good land?

These were some of the questions that Alfred and Carney Farris came to consider in the 1970s, soon after they moved back to family land in the northern Tennessee foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. There, they began a lifetime learning process through their stewardship of what would become Windy Acres Farm.

Though they both grew up on what might be called “hobby farms,” Alfred and Carney came late to full-time farming, just as Alfred was approaching his 40th birthday.

Initially, they farmed like everyone around them, depleting the soil and degrading the land with chemicals and synthetic fertilizers.

Alfred and Carney soon developed relationships with a growing community of idealistic young Christians in the area who had



PHOTO COURTESY OF WINDY ACRES FARM

come of age during the environmental movement of the late 1960s and whose perspectives challenged them to “rethink what it means, as followers of Jesus, to care for His Garden.”

For the Farris, this came to mean two things: 1. keeping healthy soil on farms, and 2. keeping healthy farms on the soil.

To keep healthy soil on their farm, the Farris sought to change their agricultural practices to be more sustainable. They were told by the contract farmer working their family’s land that the kind of chemical-free agriculture they were interested in was impossible.

Undeterred, they traveled to the Rodale Institute in Kutztown, Pennsylvania and began reaching out to other farmers who were successfully employing organic practices.

They not only learned that chemical-free farming was possible, but they also became passionate advocates of the need for a paradigm shift in how we steward the land and its precious resources.

It took the Farris decades to learn how to grow with the land and climate, rather than fight against it. But by 2000, they had obtained their USDA organic certification for both crops and pasture, and their diverse system of rotations was beginning

to get the attention of others.

Early on, the abundance of weeds in their fields made clear that livestock were a necessary component of a sustainable organic farm.

They started with a few British White cattle, a heritage breed known for its ability to thrive exclusively on pasture, and today maintain a herd of almost 50. More recently, they began to raise sheep as well.

The land is managed on a six-year rotation. The livestock graze for three years, then a cover crop of vetch and clover is planted to provide green manure back to

the soil before being rolled down using Rodale's no-till system. This cover crop is followed by soybeans or grains, and then goes back to grass.

"We always want something green growing on the soil, capturing the sun's energy and producing living roots to feed the microbes," explains Alfred.

Today, Windy Acres Farm comprises 470 acres of certified organic grain crops and pasture. The Farris family markets grass-fed beef in the rapidly expanding metro region of Nashville.

Their grain crops include corn, soft red winter wheat, barley, clear and dark hulum soybeans, oats, rye, hairy vetch, and open-pollinated white and yellow corn. Around 70% of their grain sales, by dollar value, are sold direct to customers in the area as specialty feed for chickens, milk goats, or other livestock.

The Farris describe their methods as "part of the solution to our broken industrial agriculture model, which is dependent on massive, long-distance transportation, fossil fuels, and markets dictated by speculators."

In a truly local market, the farmer and the customer work together to support a more balanced and regenerative system. According to Alfred, "I would like to never again ship a semi load of grain."

Their second goal of keeping healthy farms on the soil is another matter. Windy Acres Farm is protected under the Land Trust of Tennessee.

"This will protect it from development and save it for future generations of farmers," says Alfred. "Our land will never see a shopping mall or subdivision. This will not, however, protect it from bad farming practices. For that, I would like to see an agrarian trust that could step in and protect the land further."

Farm land in northern Tennessee has recently sold for as high as \$13,000/acre, yet commodity prices remain very low. The Farris are concerned this discrepancy will lead to non-farmers, corporations, or even foreign investors owning the land.

"Today, the only way a farmer can get started in this area is by inheriting land or marrying into it," says Carney. "We need to find a new way for young farmers to acquire land so they can work it responsibly and successfully."

For now, the Farris family continues to learn from, and give back to, their land, as they have for nearly fifty years. "We have truly been blessed during these years, as we have actually discovered and proven that organic farming can work and that we can be a part of the restoration of the Lord's Vineyard."

Cornucopia Challenges Agribusiness Influence at NOSB Meeting

Three Cornucopia staff members attended the fall 2018 National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) meeting in St. Paul, Minnesota. Each offered public testimony about the challenges facing organic family farmers struggling to compete with industrial pseudo-organics, hydroponics, and dubious imports.

Responding, in part, to Cornucopia's research and scathing indictment, Dr. Jennifer Tucker, the recently appointed Deputy Administrator of the National Organic Program (NOP), reported that import fraud remains a high priority.

Dr. Tucker announced that a draft rule aimed at increasing traceability throughout the supply chain and eliminating exclusions for uncertified handlers is expected in the spring of 2019. Cornucopia has long called for regulatory reform to address import fraud and is disappointed that the Secretary of Agriculture is not operating under the sense of immediacy warranted. The watchdog

organization formally petitioned the NOSB to engage in emergency rulemaking over a year ago.

The NOSB addressed organic fraud, recommending that the NOP adopt specific criteria to identify certifiers at higher risk for fraudulent activity and to improve inspector qualifications. Other meeting highlights

included NOSB resolutions calling on the Secretary of Agriculture to issue a final Origin of Livestock Rule, closing the door to conventional cattle coming onto "organic" factory farms, and calling on the NOP to allow continued use of paper pots for seedlings while rulemaking proceeds.

Aquatic plant (i.e., seaweeds and kelp) certification under wild crop harvesting standards also continued

to generate extensive commentary. The NOSB has encouraged the public to weigh in, as it grapples with concerns over how the global harvesting of seaweed accelerates the destruction of marine ecosystems. For a full report of Cornucopia's real-time coverage of the meeting, visit <https://tinyurl.com/Fall2018NOSB>.





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

For a decade and a half, Cornucopia has been at the forefront of the fight to uphold the integrity of local and organic food and agriculture. As a tax-exempt public charity, we rely on the passionate moral and financial support of organic advocates from across the country. Cornucopia is excited to report that we are now able to share more about what we do, and how we do it, with a wider audience. Guidestar is the world's largest online source of nonprofit information and a leader in advancing transparency in the nonprofit sector. Achieving the Platinum level, Guidestar's highest ranking, demonstrates our commitment to nonprofit transparency and accountability, so that all good food advocates can feel confident contributing to support this critical work.



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Cornucopia, WI 54827

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Sewage Sludge

Avoiding Chemicals and Heavy Metals



Sewage sludge is a byproduct of wastewater treatment. It is full of nutrients—which is why some consider it the perfect candidate for cheap fertilizer—but it can also be full of contaminants. Some of these contaminants include heavy metals, pharmaceuticals, carcinogenic flame retardants, and pathogens.

Unlike Europe, the U.S. domestic sewage system is intertwined with its industrial waste systems.

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) recently reported that the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) control over the application of sewage sludge, also called biosolids, was "incomplete or had weaknesses and may not fully protect human health and the environment."

Before use as fertilizer, the biosolids are usually run through additional treatment. But whether all potential toxins are removed is unknown and poorly regulated, according to the OIG report. The EPA only tests this sludge for a limited number of "known" contaminants before allowing its use. When applied to land, these toxins can find their way into the air, groundwater, and surface waters (e.g., lakes and rivers). Plants also uptake toxins from the soil.

The EPA responded to the OIG report by noting that the presence of pollutants in biosolids "does not necessarily mean that those pollutants pose a risk to public health and the environment." However, the uncertainty of risk alone is reason to be concerned.

The use of sewage sludge is specifically prohibited on certified organic farms. Discerning consumers can help protect themselves and their families from contamination by choosing organic foods.