

THE CULTIVATOR

NEWS FROM THE CORNUCOPIA INSTITUTE

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What is My Certifier Hiding?

A Farmer's Plea for Certifier Transparency

Neal Laferriere, owner of Blackberry Botanicals, walks his organic farm in rural West Virginia. When Laferriere walks, he thinks.

As he strolls along the rolling hills, he thinks about his family, their farm, and their future. And, more days than he'd like to, he thinks about his farm's organic certifier.

As agents of the USDA's National Organic Program (NOP), certifiers occupy one of the most important roles in the organic movement. Farmers, processors, and handlers hire certifiers to ensure their practices comply with federal organic regulations.

When Laferriere received a letter from his certifier, Pennsylvania Certified Organic (PCO), saying they weren't going to respond to a survey sent by Cornucopia asking about the types of operations they certify, he started walking.

The survey was sent as part of a comprehensive research project Cornucopia launched to help producers choose certifiers with values that align with their own, and to help educate consumers about the entities that certify the organic products they purchase.

Congress charged the USDA with establishing standards and making sure they were universally applied. But, unfortunately, the NOP has been allowing certifiers to interpret the law on their own, which has resulted in varying applications of the organic regulations.



"Why didn't my certifier just respond to the survey? What don't they want me to know?" asked Laferriere.

He has since learned several certifiers sent a similar letter to their clients as a coordinated effort to "circle the wagons," ignoring and/or attempting to discredit the project.

"Subversion tactics aren't going to work," says Laferriere. "Farmers want answers. Certifiers are the gatekeepers to organic production. We want to know who and what they're letting through the door."

Like many organic farmers, Laferriere believes in an organic community built on shared values and transparency. Inconsistencies in the way certifiers implement organic regulations and the cloak of secrecy surrounding their certification practices concern him.

Take hydroponics, for example. Some certifiers are certifying massive hydroponic operations run by multinational corporations operating gargantuan greenhouses instead of growing plants in rich, organically managed soil.

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Suicide Attempt = Organic Marketplace Fallout

Get Big or Get Out or Go Organic. An Outdated Alternative?

BY MARK KASTEL

Right now, giant CAFOs, milking up to 15,000 cows and allowed by the USDA to fraudulently produce “organic” milk, are crushing many authentic organic farms in the marketplace. These are not just jobs for farmers; the majority of these farms have been in the same families for multiple generations.

In the 1980s, when I was involved in the commercialization of organic dairy farming, many families switched to organic management, in part (and it was a big part), because it promised to pay a fair value in the marketplace.

Many of these entrepreneurial farmers made modest adjustments to the way they cared for their land and animals in order to respectfully meet the marketplace demand of consumers for organic. That worked fine for a couple of decades.

But without government agencies protecting the integrity of the organic label, and law-abiding, ethical producers, a surplus of milk is now destroying the alternative many of us worked so hard to create.

I’ve heard from a number of organic dairy producers who are no longer cash-flowing. Some would like to sell their milk, but there’s no market. Some would like to sell their cows, but there’s no market. A lot of tears have been shed on both sides of my phone conversations lately.

An organic dairy farmer in eastern Wisconsin recently shot himself in an apparent suicide attempt. I’d like to use this as a cautionary tale for all of us in the organic community and offer this as a warning to business people who treat farmers like expendable pawns.

If you have too many automobiles in stock, you might shut down your factory for a few weeks and furlough

your workers. But it just doesn’t work that way with cows, farmers, and their families.

First, if you are a producer who is currently struggling, you are sadly in good company. This catastrophe is not your fault. If you are feeling despondent or having challenges controlling your anger, which is understandable, please, please talk to someone you trust.

Neither I nor the other staff at Cornucopia are mental health professionals. But we can help you connect with someone if you haven’t found local resources. In hard times, we all need someone to talk to in order to regain our equilibrium.

I’ve been in touch throughout this year with a group of five farmers in Wisconsin whose milk was being picked up by a cooperative and delivered to a major cheesemaker.

That contract was abruptly canceled and, since the co-op had

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been buying milk from these farmers (displaced from another market disruption) and they were not actually co-op members, their contracts provided for termination after notice (the co-op had no home for the milk and was just passing along the pain).

The five farmers found another market with a small, independent cheesemaker. That collapsed when the cheesemaker ran into some kind of financial trouble and quit paying for the milk (a high crime and misdemeanor here in Wisconsin).

We have laws on the books requiring bonding/escrows for just this type of situation, but there's a time lag in getting paid and lots of paperwork. I understand they will only receive about 80 cents on the dollar. If you are already in an economically stressed situation without cash reserves, these conditions can place you and your farm in real jeopardy.

Ironically, the large cheesemaker came back into the market looking for organic milk, this time purchasing directly from farmers. However, out of the five certified organic farms, they only wanted product from the three largest (120-cow range).

The two smaller farms, about 50 cows each, were being hung out to dry. The larger farmers have been trying to negotiate with the company to take all the shippers on but, so far, have failed.

So, reportedly faced with a mountain of paperwork on deadline, pursuant to the default by the small cheesemaker and no potential market for his organic milk looming, one of the farmers shot himself.

I was able to confirm the primary details with the County Sheriff. The most recent report indicated that the farmer was released from the hospital to a rehab facility. So, God willing, he will survive, and receive much needed support from family members and the community.

I have no idea who milked his cows that day, but I am thankful that in Wisconsin we have a tradition



I want to emphasize how important your purchasing decisions are to protecting the livelihoods of our country's very best farmers.

of neighbors helping each other in times of crisis.

So, again, if you are a farmer in a tough spot, please know that there are many of us standing with you. Please talk to your family, your neighbors, a clergy person, or me, if you'd like (cornucopia.org). But talk to someone.

If you are in Wisconsin, where there are more organic dairy farmers than any other state, you can contact the Department of Agriculture's Farm Center Hotline for a referral: 1-800-942-2474. Nearly every county in California has a suicide hotline, listed here: <http://bit.ly/ca-hotlines>. You can also anonymously call the National Suicide Hotline, 24/7, at: 1-800-273-8255 (1-800-273 TALK)

I can't tell you how much I respect each and every one of you who are out in the barn every single day taking care of your girls and providing such an important and wonderful form of nutrition to our society.

Our goal at The Cornucopia Institute is to educate consumers

and wholesale buyers so that they can identify and patronize the brands of organic dairy products that depend on family farmers for their milk supply, instead of supporting the phony, industrial-scale dairies that are destroying the market.

If you are one of our urban-allies reading this story, I want to emphasize how important your purchasing decisions are to protecting the livelihoods of our country's very best farmers.

Please consult Cornucopia's Organic Dairy Brand Scorecard on our website. By doing so, you will be providing your family with the finest, safest, most nutrient-dense food that deserves the organic label.

And you will, simultaneously, be standing with hard-working farm families—who need your support now more than ever.

**National Suicide
Hotline (Toll-free):
1-800-273-8255**



Alchemy by USDA and Certifiers

Conventional Cattle on Organic Dairy Farms

BY MARIE BURCHAM, JD

The organic dairy industry is in a state of crisis. A glut of organic milk in the market is putting economic strain on family-scale dairies, forcing some to close their doors after generations of operation.

A significant cause of the problem is overproduction by industrial-scale organic producers edging their competitors out of business. "Factory" dairies—many milking thousands of cows—have perfected ways to game the system to gain an economic advantage.

One of their insidious methods is to leverage their scale advantage by rotating conventionally raised calves and heifers into organic production.

Cows start lactating around two years of age, when they give birth to their first calves. Organically raised calves usually consume milk, by bottle or bucket—the same quality of organic milk we buy in the grocery store or co-op—from the time they are born until they are weaned.

When a dairy cow "ages out" or otherwise is removed from production, she needs to be replaced if the dairy wants to maintain the same level of production.

The organic regulatory framework allows for the conversion of a distinct herd of dairy cows to certified organic production a single time. In this vein, some operations do not raise their young calves as replacements for their culled cows.

Instead, they purchase cheaper, conventional cattle raised on medicated milk replacer that commonly includes antibiotics



Factory dairies game the system by rotating conventional calves and heifers into organic production.

and other banned pharmaceuticals and substances. After being weaned, these calves are fed conventional grains (usually GMO) and hay treated with toxic chemicals.

Then, in their second year of life, approximately one year before they start producing milk, they are switched to organic management.

This method facilitates high milk production and "burn out," sending cows off to slaughter prematurely. This short lifespan is similar to cattle longevity on large, conventional factory dairies.

These practices competitively disadvantage ethical organic dairy farmers who follow the spirit and letter of the law. True organic calves are raised on organic milk until weaning. On a family-scale dairy, this is a simple system where some of the milk the farmer produces is fed to their own calves born from their milking herd.

These dairies should be able to make extra money by selling their surplus organic calves to other organic dairies. But this market has been virtually nonexistent since the USDA and certain major certifiers have

allowed cheap conventional calves as replacement stock. These practices have also been legally questioned as a gross desecration of the purpose behind the language in both the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) and organic regulations.

Nevertheless, the USDA has refused to act, having neglected to enforce a set standard, clarify the existing rules, or create a guidance for organic certifiers—all of which could cure this crisis.

Congress intended OFPA to create a level playing field.

Some certifiers do not permit farmers to "continually convert" cattle to organic production once a farm has been certified.

Others, with greased palms from their largest clients, are accepting of the practice. In 2017, the USDA stated that addressing this gross inconsistency is no longer a priority for the agency.

For industrial-scale, organic dairies, rotating conventional calves into their herds can amount to as much as a \$1 million increase or more in milk sales per year, on top of the lower costs for raising young stock.

Meanwhile, existing family-scale dairies have to compete with these unfair practices on thin margins.

Persons interested in these issues can seek out more information in Cornucopia's report, *The Industrialization of Organic Dairy*.

Consumers who want to support family-scale organic dairies—those who raise their own replacement calves on organic milk—can find the best brands identified on Cornucopia's Organic Dairy Scorecard.

Thank You for a Successful 2018 Campaign

BY DEVIN MATHIAS

The 2018 calendar year has come to a close, and we are incredibly grateful at The Cornucopia Institute! A generous family offered to match, dollar-for-dollar, \$50,000 in gifts made before the end of the year, which was a part of a year-end push that virtually equaled last year's record giving.

Thanks to the support of Cornucopia's members, we were able to realize the full amount of the match. These gifts have a significant impact as the foundation for all of the work we do. They support the fight for justice for those operating truly organic farms.

Recently, I had the good fortune to attend the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture's annual meeting. There, I saw Cornucopia members Tom and Anaïs Beddard of Lady Moon Farms, which operates in Florida, Georgia, and Pennsylvania,

share their story. Something Tom said really stuck with me: "Integrity is the greatest asset we have as organic farmers."

The support of Cornucopia's efforts directly defends that integrity.

We greatly appreciate everyone who has made the choice to support the good food movement, family-scale farming, and the farmers of high integrity across the country.

Thank you, Cornucopia members!

2018 FUNDING SOURCES



Cornucopia Welcomes New Senior Staffer

Cornucopia is excited to announce our new chief development and communications officer, Devin Mathias. Mathias brings over two decades of fundraising, communications, and marketing experience to our efforts.

He has spent his career dedicated to helping nonprofit organizations increase their impact and their economic capacity to fulfill their missions. His career has included leadership positions with the University of Michigan, Boston Children's Hospital, and the University of Florida.

Mathias has also spent over a decade as a philanthropic and marketing consultant. His clients included large institutions, like Stanford University, Public Radio International, and the Chicago Botanical Gardens, as well as small organizations, like the local United Way and the local Friends & Farmers' Cooperative.



"I'm humbled and excited to join the team at The Cornucopia Institute. I look forward to being a bigger part of the good food movement and building upon Cornucopia's strong culture of philanthropy," Mathias said.

"My initial conversations with members have been inspiring. It is clear that we have incredibly passionate supporters and rightfully so. I look forward to meeting more of our members and learning about what motivated them to choose Cornucopia as a philanthropic investment, as well as how they think we can best protect the integrity of organics going forward."

Mathias lives in State College, Pennsylvania with his wife, three children, two cats, and the family dog. They live about a mile from his undergraduate alma mater, Penn State.

Mathias completed his MBA while working at the University of Florida. He also served as a board member of a member-owned food cooperative in State College.

Not Your Grandma's Curds and Whey

Cottage Cheese, the Dairy Delight Said to be Making a Comeback

BY ANNE ROSS, JD

In the early 1970s, the average American ate five pounds of cottage cheese per year. Since then, the dairy staple has declined in popularity, often relegated to restaurant salad bars and canned peaches.

This is a shame because, in its simplest form, cottage cheese is a very nutritious food. It is low in calories and high in dietary protein. One cup of cottage cheese can pack 25 grams of protein, which accounts for over 70% of the calories in cottage cheese.

Fitness enthusiasts and athletes look to cottage cheese for its high content of casein protein. Casein is slow-digesting, which means it feeds cells over a long period of time, and is thought to reduce muscle breakdown.

Like many dairy products, cottage cheese is an excellent source of calcium and phosphorus. It is also a good source of B-complex vitamins, which promote heart health, digestion, and metabolic and brain functions. B vitamins are necessary for proper enzyme production and operation, which makes them critical in muscle building, fat loss, immune function, and blood health.

A stroll through your local grocery store will confirm that yogurt is still the queen of dairy (check out our Yogurt Scorecard to find the healthiest options), but you will also likely see an array of flavored cottage cheese.

Recent market data suggests that this once-beloved dairy delight is prime for a global comeback. Food manufacturers have begun to introduce these flavored lines and some that have “mix-ins” of fruits and nuts. Large consumer packaged goods companies are targeting millennials with novel versions of traditionally wholesome cottage cheese.



Cornucopia's upcoming report and scorecard will help you decide which brands are the healthiest.

Which of these products are the protein-packed and calcium-rich curds of cheese people have been eating for health and nutrition for centuries?

And which cottage cheese products have manufacturers converted to junk food with processed ingredients, like the inflammatory agent carrageenan, starches, gums, thickeners, and added sugar?

Cornucopia's upcoming report and scorecard will show the best brands available, as well as those that should be avoided. Just like many yogurt products on store shelves that are marketed as healthy, a close inspection of the ingredients lists and nutrition panels of many cottage cheese products tells a different story.

Cornucopia's analysis shows that organic cottage cheese is superior to its conventional counterparts. Although many conventional cottage cheese brands contain a litany of questionable ingredients, most organic brands stay true to the simplicity of authentic cottage cheese.

Some brands include added flavors. Consumers often avoid “artificial

flavors,” but may be unaware that many “natural flavors” allowed in conventional foods are processed using synthetic, petroleum-based solvents, such as propane and neurotoxic hexane.

They may also contain synthetic carrier systems or artificial preservatives, such as polysorbate 80, BHT, BHA, triacetin, and propylene glycol. These dangerous solvents, carrier systems, and artificial preservatives are prohibited in organic processing.

Sugar has also found its way, in surprising amounts, into many flavored cottage cheese products. Consuming large quantities of sugar is unhealthy and, if consumed in excess, can promote cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

Many conventional cottage cheese products also contain modified corn starch and modified food starch. These ingredients are derived from corn which is heavily sprayed with synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, and insecticides—and is likely genetically modified.

Conventional brands also frequently contain maltodextrin,

a starch commonly made from corn and wheat, although it may also be made from rice, potatoes, or tapioca. The starch is highly processed to create a water-soluble white powder which is used as a stabilizer, sweetener, and thickener in many packaged foods.

The majority of maltodextrin used in conventional food is genetically modified, since most of the corn grown in the U.S. is genetically modified. The other crop sources of conventional maltodextrin are subject to fungicide applications in addition to the toxic sprays used on corn.

Since all ingredients in certified organic products must be GMO-free, maltodextrin in organic cottage cheese must be made from non-GMO sources.

Some researchers have raised concerns about the high glycemic index of maltodextrin. Ingredients with a high glycemic index cause blood sugar to rise quickly. If this process occurs repeatedly over time, a person is at higher risk for insulin resistance and diabetes. Maltodextrin may also be linked to changes in gut bacteria

composition by suppressing the growth of probiotics and increasing the growth of harmful bacteria associated with autoimmune disorders. Some cottage cheese products include fermented or live cultures, and they tout their products as containing probiotics.

Considering the emerging science on maltodextrin's effects on gut bacteria, the fact that some products contain both maltodextrin and probiotics could be thought of as brands hedging their bets on our intestinal health.

Organic cottage cheese is derived from organic milk, which boasts superior nutritional benefits. Authentic organic dairy cows consume a higher-quality diet than dairy cows raised in conventional confinement.

Researchers have found a 50% higher content of omega-3 fatty acids in organic milk produced by grass-fed cows. This is due to the prevalence of omega-3s in grass, compared with the grain fed to conventional livestock.

A balance of omega-3 and omega-6

fatty acids is essential for human health. Most Americans consume excessive levels of omega-6 with insufficient levels of omega-3.

Grass-fed dairy also contains up to 40% more conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) than conventional milk. CLA has been linked to a range of health benefits, including reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, certain cancers, and obesity.

Choosing organic cottage cheese has another added benefit. Organic dairy cows cannot be treated with rbGH, a hormone that is often injected into conventional dairy cows to increase milk production.

Numerous studies have shown increased growth hormones in milk from cows treated with rbGH and a corresponding risk of cancer in humans.

Cornucopia's upcoming Cottage Cheese Report and Scorecard will help you decide which brands of cottage cheese are the healthiest. Not surprisingly, the findings show that organic really shines.

Scuttling of Organic Livestock Welfare Rules Challenged in Court

The Trump administration's Department of Agriculture withdrew the regulations for organic animal welfare, called the Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices rule (OLPP), in March of 2018.

The USDA claimed that animal care regulations were outside the scope of their regulatory authority. This position reversed the legal and policy positions held by previous administrations, both Democratic and Republican, since the inception of the organic label.

The OLPP was intended to establish clear minimum spacing requirements for poultry and add clarity and stricter guidelines to other organic livestock practices. "Factory farm" organic producers—especially in the egg industry—pushed hard to throw the rule out, despite overwhelming support from both consumers and family-scale farmers.



The OLPP's demise will particularly hurt farmers who have always raised their livestock according to the highest organic ideals. These farmers now have to compete with livestock factories that scarcely differ from conventional production.

As the organic egg industry has grown exponentially, the economic potential has been usurped by the industrial producers locking out family farmers.

After the OLPP was withdrawn, a group of seven nonprofit organizations, represented by our allies at the Center for Food Safety (CFS), sued the government.

The groups argued that if the decision to withdraw the rule is not reversed, it will hurt confidence in the organic label's integrity and harm the organic marketplace.

In August, the court rejected the USDA's argument that the withdrawal of the OLPP could not be legally challenged, allowing the plaintiff's case to proceed.

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To make matters worse, many of the fruits and vegetables that are produced hydroponically are imported from countries that don't allow the sale of hydroponic produce labeled as "organic" within their own borders.

Some of the largest certifiers are allowing hydroponically produced imports, even though federal law requires soil stewardship as a prerequisite for certification.

A number of certifiers also allow egg producers to substitute small screened porches, often times holding less than 3% of the birds in a henhouse, in place of legitimate outdoor access for their birds.

In organic dairy production, some certifiers consider operations with thousands of cows on exceedingly small acreages and milking 3-4 times a day compliant with grazing requirements.

Certifiers will also certify industrial-scale dairies that buy conventionally raised replacement heifers, sometimes raised with antibiotics, and "convert" them to organic on an ongoing basis.

Why would organic farmers who are committed to growing fruits

and vegetables in the soil, as the law intends, pay a certifier that also certifies massive hydroponic operations with whom they are unfairly competing?

Why would organic farmers who are committed to providing their hens and livestock ample outdoor access and grazing time hire a certifier that also certifies industrial-scale operations that look more conventional than organic?

"They shouldn't," says Laferriere. "It's self-defeating, but you've got to know the facts to make an educated choice. If a certifier won't tell you the facts, somebody better ask why."

Because some certifiers are intent on securing profits generated from the industrial-scale clients, they will endorse the production practices that keep their clients in business.

An inherent conflict of interest is built into a system where certifiers are paid by the operations they are responsible for monitoring. Transparency, however, can help minimize conflicts and an unfettered pursuit of profit.

Certifiers that responded to Cornucopia's survey did so at the risk of falling into disfavor with members

of their trade association and the NOP. In choosing to respond, some of the best certifiers showed a commitment to transparency by refusing to perpetuate the distrust that silence engenders.

Cornucopia's tiered scoring system reserved the highest rating for exemplary certifiers with a demonstrated commitment to organic principles, transparency, and regulatory adherence.

Certifiers that certify dairy CAFOs of questionable legality (e.g., confinement chicken houses with porches and hydroponics) and/or have been implicated in other improprieties, like certifying products with non-organic ingredients, are relegated to the lowest tier.

Laferriere says he plans to consult Cornucopia's report to learn more about certifiers, including the identities of the certifiers that didn't respond to the survey.

"You know, saying nothing actually says a lot about what they don't want to disclose. But, the fact that some certifiers refused to be silenced gives farmers a meaningful choice and gives me greater confidence in the organic system."

Stakeholders Flexing Muscle in the Market for Certification

West Virginia organic farmer, Neal Laferriere, is facing unfair competition. The USDA and many accredited certifiers that farmers are paying are selling out his best interests—and the interests of his peers and their loyal customers and urban-allies.

By April, the Cornucopia Institute will publish a report and scorecard that expose the certifiers whose practices are undermining the organic label and threatening the livelihood of every organic farmer in the country, including Neal.

The new web-based scorecard tool can help farmers and ranchers wisely invest certification dollars with organizations that perform their duties with the organic community's best interests in mind. Right now, many of you are being betrayed.



This might be the most provocative initiative Cornucopia has ever launched. Make no mistake about it, after many of our farmer-members requested, asking for a rating system for certifiers, we are going after their revenue stream.

This is where the capitalistic structure of our industry should kick in. Empowered with objective information, stakeholders can shift millions of dollars of market share away from profit-focused certifiers who have sold out our values to organizations truly dedicated to the integrity of organics.

For consumers, since the name of certifiers is required by law to appear on product labeling, our Certification Scorecard is just one more tool to determine the most trustworthy organic brands in the marketplace.

Pressure will force some certifiers to change their practices and, just like farmers, some processors and marketers to seek alternatives. Knowledge is power!

- MAK

Why Don't You See Organically Labeled Fish?

The Complicated Industry May Be Incompatible with Organic Principles

BY MARIE BURCHAM, JD

Consumers often note that they do not see fish with the USDA organic seal at their grocery store or fishmonger. It is a topic that has come up many times within the National Organic Program (NOP) and its advisory board, the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB).

In 2003, Congress amended the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) to allow wild-caught fish to be certified organic as long as regulations were developed first. However, despite this change, regulators decided that wild fish should not be labeled organic because hunting wild animals is not “agriculture.”

In 2005, the NOP created an Aquaculture Working Group (AWG), which generated a report to inform the NOSB on the issues. The NOSB’s Livestock Committee then developed standards for farmed fish and other aquatic species, releasing several recommendations between 2007 and 2009.

However, there are questions as to whether a proposed organic rule on fish farming, also called aquaculture, is even viable. Both wild catch and most fish farming are associated with environmental problems that may make them incompatible with fundamental organic tenets.

Aquaculture comes with a host of environmental issues. A common method of farming fish, especially salmon, is to raise them in open nets in the ocean.

Due to crowding and nutrient (i.e., manure) overload, these pens often cause pollution that devastates nearby waters.



It is far more difficult to create standards for aquaculture than for produce or livestock.

Farmed fish also carry more parasites and diseases, and fish that escape from these systems threaten to weaken or disrupt fragile wild populations.

Another concern is that wild fish are often harvested as feed for aquaculture operations, especially for salmon farms. This wild harvest contributes to the problem of overfishing, a serious concern due to its impacts on ocean ecosystems.

While management practices and technology could potentially mitigate some of these problems in the future, the industry is not there yet.

Furthermore, these issues only scratch the surface as to why no organic standards for fish have been proposed yet. It is far more difficult to create comprehensive standards for aquaculture than for produce and livestock.

Fish that are herbivores may require different standards than carnivorous fish, as will bottom feeders and bivalves (i.e., oysters, scallops, and other shellfish).

As it stands, the NOSB’s aquaculture recommendations cover topics including fish feed, net pens, and related issues. But fish farms also use medications and other materials

not allowed in organic production.

Alternative methods or practices would need to be developed to farm fish, even if organic rules were developed to allow the practice.

At the request of the NOP, the AWG started submitting petitions for materials that could be approved in organic aquaculture in preparation for future standards.

However, as of October 2014, all aquaculture

materials are currently tabled with the intention to re-evaluate them as soon as a proposed rule for organic aquaculture becomes available. The comments submitted into the public record regarding organic aquaculture show overwhelming agreement in two areas.

First, most commenters oppose organic certification of open-ocean pen facilities—many believe the environmental risks and incompatibility issues cannot be overcome.

Second, most commenters oppose the use of wild-caught fishmeal and oils in organic aquaculture feed.

Consumers may see fish labeled “organic” at some point in the future, but developing organic aquaculture standards does not seem to be a priority for the USDA.

This is not surprising, given the negative feedback from the public and the possibly insurmountable challenge of developing organic aquaculture standards.

In the meantime, interested consumers can use the Monterey Bay Aquarium’s Seafood Watch Guide to identify which seafood is high-quality and environmentally sustainable.



THE CORNUCOPIA FARMER PROFILE

Building Soil and Community

The Story of Stonebridge Farm

BY CORNUCOPIA STAFF

While Stonebridge Farm is named for its signature stone bridge, it is characterized by its relationships.

John Martin grew up in Oregon in a farm community. As a young man, his summers were spent harvesting strawberries and beans on large conventional farms.

Finding joy in the work, he continued coming back to the fields each summer throughout college. And after he completed his graduate degree, an opportunity presented itself to put his roots down in Lyons, Colorado.

Here, one destined summer day, Martin attended a church picnic hosted on a local farm. He was taken by the couple who ran the farm—their visionary commitment to organic farming, as well as their devotion to engaging with the community.

Not only were these farmers founding members of the thriving Boulder Farmers Market, they also firmly believed in the value of bringing people out to the farm to connect them directly with their food source.

To this end, in 1992 and with six shareholders, Stonebridge became one of the first community supported agriculture (CSA) farms in Boulder County.

Martin fell fast in love with this set of ideals and this land and, with no farm transition plan in place, the aging farmer couple entertained his proposal to lease their farm.

From that day forward, Martin, along with several partnering farmers, would continue farming the land, committed to the same growing practices and the same set of principles that had been followed since the late 60s.

As any farmer in the West knows, water is a precious resource in Colorado. Auspiciously, this particular piece of farmland obliges three irrigation channels, tributaries of the St. Vrain River.

Seven different bridges connect the farm's many fields, forest, and pastures across these channels. It was reverence for this water and these bridges, notably one prominent stone bridge, after which the farm would eventually be named.

Five years later, Martin would purchase the entire property outright from his partners. A full-time professor at the nearby University of Colorado, Martin worked with volunteers from the college to help sustain the farm. When he met his future wife, Kayann Short, also an educator at CU, he invited her to dinner at Stonebridge.

Short comes from a long line of farmers, as far back as she can trace. Most recently, her grandparents raised wheat and cattle in North Dakota. Short grew up gardening but never intended to farm until she met John and fell in love with Stonebridge (or perhaps it was vice versa).

"We see the land as an ecosystem," explains Short, "including what's below the soil and the people who live and work here. So the decision to grow organically came out of this ethic."

When Colorado first began offering organic certification, Stonebridge immediately enrolled. "Our work has always been about developing the culture of agriculture in the region," Martin continued. "Getting people to grow their own, reconnecting



Farmer John picks beans with the barterers.



Farmers and educators John Martin and Kayann Short

with the land and with their food. I'm interested in people being a part of the farm and not simply purchasing a commodity from it."

They gradually expanded the CSA to just under 100 shares and, in 2000, they introduced barter shares. Some members could work on the farm in exchange for their produce.

This practice proved successful and is the model they continue to use now as the farm enters its 28th CSA season. Today, 90% of the wine and produce grown on the farm is sold directly to CSA members.

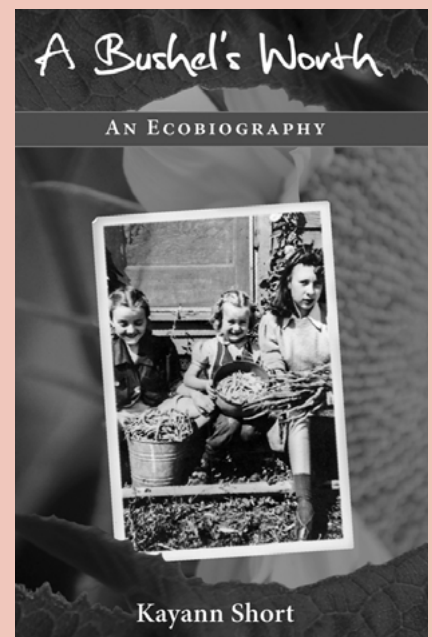
These days, both Martin and Short are using their professional training as educators to build relationships with beginning farmers who are interested

in following in their footsteps. They host farm events, teach workshops, and give lectures on topics ranging from backyard viticulture to soil building.

Beyond education, their work also includes community organizing. They are active in GMO labeling campaigns and work to monitor extractive industries in their neighborhood.

As housing developments and urbanization spread across Colorado, and the cost of land continues to steeply rise while the cost of food continues to drop, Martin claims, "It will be the creativity and dedication of these young producers that ensures we will not lose our relationship with the source of our food."

A prolific writer, Short's essays have appeared in numerous publications, and she maintains an active blog to share her reflections on farming and the environment. However, it is this particular relationship with the land that Short examines most closely in her award-winning book, ***A Bushel's Worth: An Ecobiography***. In this ecology-based memoir, Short challenges the human versus nature dichotomy and explores how her life has been shaped by her connection with the natural world. Short coined the term "ecobiography" to describe a form of writing about the interdependent "ecological kinships" between humans and the animals, plants, and landscapes with which we interact.





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

Food vs. Health Care



We have the cheapest food here in the United States, bar none. And we have the most expensive healthcare system, by multiples. The outcomes? Endemic levels of chronic disease, obesity, premature birth, low birth weight, maternal mortality, and more. This is no bargain. In 2019, look to Cornucopia for qualitative analysis differentiating “the two organic labels.” If you feed the soil, not the plants, you come up with a diverse microbiome that creates nutrient-superior food. Not all organics qualify. Our research will also look at the relative safety and nutritional quality of plant-based beverages (“milks”), other dairy alternatives, and factory-produced, cell-cultured “meat.” Stay tuned!

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Dangerous Inflammatory Agent Still Lurking in Organics



Carrageenan is an emulsifying and thickening additive known to cause inflammation in the gastrointestinal tract.

In 2012, Joanne Tobacman, MD of the University of Illinois presented her independent research to the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), an expert organic industry panel set up by Congress to advise the Secretary of the USDA.

Dr. Tobacman and Cornucopia staff members made a clear case for the NOSB to remove carrageenan from the list of substances approved for use in organic food. Despite the compelling testimony, carrageenan industry lobbyists persuaded the industry-friendly board to re-list it.

In the interceding years, we have documented hundreds of stories from people sick with irritable bowel syndrome, spastic colon, inflammatory bowel disease, and chronic diarrhea whose health improved dramatically when they removed carrageenan from their diets. We shared their stories at the 2016 NOSB meetings, along with more studies showing the toxic effects of carrageenan—and the NOSB voted to remove carrageenan from organics, beginning in 2018!

And then, in an unprecedented and unilateral decision, USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue reapproved carrageenan, betraying public trust. Secretary Perdue disregarded the NOSB vote, published in the Federal Register, without even taking public comments. We continue to investigate legal options.

Thanks to a public outpouring of criticism for carrageenan, many organic companies have voluntarily removed it from their product lines.

You can protect your loved ones and learn more about the health impacts of this additive, including a link to our Carrageenan Buyer's Guide, at <http://tinyurl.com/carrageenan>.