

THE CULTIVATOR

NEWS FROM THE CORNUCOPIA INSTITUTE

SUMMER 2019

The Crisis in Organic Dairy

Consumers Unite!

BY MARIE BURCHAM, JD,
AND MELODY MORRELL

Family-scale organic dairies are struggling to make ends meet. Many have already lost their farms and businesses, some of which have been in the family for generations.

At their biannual meeting in April, the National Organic Standard Board (NOSB) heard from multiple family-scale dairy farmers about how their businesses are failing due to the inconsistent application of organic principles during certification.

For example, a small number of very large “organic” dairies are disregarding the origin of livestock rules by continuously cycling conventional livestock into production. Industrial organic operations, whose cows spend most of their lives in the feedlot, also struggle to meet even the most modest pasture requirements.

Authentic organic dairy farmers easily exceed the pasture requirements for organic livestock: 30% dry matter intake (DMI) and a minimum 120-day grazing season for each individual animal.

What’s more, the grain being fed in industrial operations may not actually be organic. In 2018, Cornucopia Director of International Policy Anne Ross, JD, exposed a network of fraudulent grain



importers from overseas (read more about Ross on page 8).

Available data shows the U.S. is importing more than they can possibly be growing. This grain is cheap and abundant compared to real organic grain, making it an attractive choice for livestock factories.

Several dairy farmers shared emotional stories at the spring NOSB meeting in Seattle—about their families losing their homes, about financial ruin, about watching other dairies break or bend the organic rules without consequence, while their own ethical practices put them further and further into debt.

These farmers noted that the lack of an origin of livestock rule allows some organic dairies to get rid of their calves and, instead,

buy conventional heifers that are transitioned to organic over one year. This practice gives dairies a financial leg up because it allows them to sell the organic milk produced, instead of feeding it to baby calves.

During the meeting, it became clear that the National Organic Program (NOP) is unwilling to push

DAIRY CRISIS continued on page 8

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Cornucopia's Core Values 2
- NOP & Hydroponic Certification. 4
- Native Pollinators 5
- Small Farms and Certification 6
- Cornucopia's Upcoming Work 9
- Farmer Profile 10

Cornucopia Finds Its Compass

Redefining Our Core Values



The Cornucopia Institute is in the midst of a transition. This phase of growth has allowed us—as an organization and as individuals—to reflect upon our critical role within the good food movement.

We deeply appreciate the patience and confidence extended to us during this time by our members, donors, advocates, friends, board members, and employees.

Cornucopia remains committed to being the leading watchdog in the organic industry. We will continue to work hard to protect authentic organic food, ethical farmers, and the integrity of the USDA label.

In this next chapter, we will push even harder to uncover organic fraud in the marketplace, educate consumers to make the best choices for their families, and mobilize key stakeholders within the organic movement to hold the National Organic Standards Board and the National Organic Program accountable to their mandate.

To do this, we will go forward in solidarity with you, our supporters. Recent internal conversations, discussions with board members, and feedback from members and supporters, have enabled the Cornucopia team to fine-tune the organization's core values. We invite you to review them and share your thoughts with us. Thank you for joining us!

Core Value #1: Integrity

is the root of the organic community and is essential to the work we provide to our constituency. The Cornucopia Institute aims for full transparency in its efforts.

Core Value #2: The Cornucopia Institute continues to be watchdog within the organic industry, working to protect the character of the organic standards while auditing the integrity of products bearing the organic seal.

Core Value #3: The Cornucopia Institute researches, issues, and promotes findings, based in science, that are fundamental to maintaining the integrity of organic labeling, production, processing, and marketing.

Core Value #4: The Cornucopia Institute will be a vocal, visible catalyst for interaction between consumers and producers within the good food movement.

Core Value #5: The Cornucopia Institute works to identify and capitalize on opportunities to partner with like-minded organizations and individuals. We are a collaborative and unifying force within the authentic organic industry.

Core Value #6: The Cornucopia Institute is committed to treating others, including its dedicated champions, volunteers, and staff, with the utmost respect.

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Making Sense of Muckenfuss

These are tumultuous and treacherous times.

The land that I was born, raised, and disciplined on in Pepin County, Wisconsin, becomes a Century Farm this year.

Township 25, Range 13 W, Section 32.

Home ... For 100 years.

My family has seen plenty of financially treacherous times in farming. Grandpa somehow held body and soul together through the Great Depression. My father left home and went on the road in the 1960s as an organizer for the National Farmers Organization to mobilize other farmers to bargain collectively for “the cost of production plus a profit.”

I was expelled from high school for three days when it was disclosed that I was picketing a dairy processing plant, contrary to what my absence excuse stated, “Helen was needed at home.”

As I pen this, it is the 30th day of May. The lilacs are in full bloom.

I think back over 5 generations of photo albums, where fresh faces stood in front of lilacs for their graduation pictures: eighth grade, high school, teacher college, university, medical school.

Reportedly, two to three dairy farms a day have been shuttered in Wisconsin, either by the bank or by emotionally bankrupted farmers. All of these farms were home to families whose arduous journeys have honored this land. They too, have marked milestones of love and loss, of bumper crops and drought, of birth and death. These farm families were the fabric of rural America. Main street shops and services, schools, centers of worship, camaraderie, community and courage.

Rural America is unraveling at the seams. Many have stepped forward to try to “tie off” the loose threads, to apply a patch, to soften the brutality of it, to offer “belt-tightening” suggestions.

The Cornucopia Institute has not just stood by and witnessed the demise of the family farm. In the last 15 years, The Cornucopia Institute has not taken a day off from fighting for the face of rural America.

Since April 27, 2004, for over 5,500 days, Cornucopia has challenged crooks in the courtroom and crime on the high seas. Cornucopia has stood shoulder-to-shoulder with farmers to defend the markets that they have created and showcased the value of their organically produced food. Cornucopia has paired the most powerful food groups in the world, consumers and producers, through their producer scorecards.

Thanks to two visionaries, Mark Kastel and Will Fantle, Cornucopia and its dedicated staff have enabled farm families to stay on the land and continue to mark milestones “in front of the lilacs.”

Cornucopia will, with your help, continue to robustly implement her mission to “support the ecological principles and economic wisdom underlying sustainable and organic agriculture.”

It is an honor to be a small part of Cornucopia’s team and an inspiration to see what Cornucopia has on the drawing board.

Organically Yours,



Helen Kees
President, Cornucopia Institute BOD

National Organic Program Muddies the Waters

Regarding "Organic" Hydroponic Operations

BY MARIE BURCHAM, JD

At the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) meeting this past April, discussion heated up around a topic that organic stakeholders thought had been settled long ago: the application of glyphosate on operations being certified organic.

Many in the organic community were dismayed when the Real Organic Project (ROP) brought to light conversations with National Organic Program (NOP) Deputy Administrator Jennifer Tucker concerning the use of prohibited substances in "organic" hydroponic production.

Tucker's comments to a group of farmers suggested that hydroponic operations could apply glyphosate—a synthetic herbicide prohibited for use in organic production—to the land immediately before building their greenhouses and receiving organic certification.

Her remarks drew into question whether or not the NOP would enforce the mandatory three-year transition period, which requires that no prohibited substances may be applied to land used for organic fruit and vegetable production for a period of three years preceding harvest of crops.

Comments presented at the NOSB meeting made clear that members of the public and the NOSB alike were disturbed by the NOP's commentary.

Tucker walked back the statements reported by ROP, saying the original context was based on hypothetical situations. She added that she was not aware of any operations currently using glyphosate, but did not provide further clarity at that time.



The NOP has allowed organic certification of hydroponic operations without clear regulations in place.

Cornucopia is strongly opposed to soil-less "organic" production. Organic principles are premised on fostering soil health, and there is no soil to steward in hydroponic or container operations. Divorced from natural systems, soil-less operations can efficiently produce food grown in nutrient solutions sent through miles of plastic tubing. This food is cheap because its costs are externalized.

Despite the controversy surrounding organic hydroponics, the NOP allowed certifiers to grant organic certification to hydroponic operations in 2010. They did so without clear regulations in place. This action was taken against the counsel of several certifiers and despite NOSB recommendations to disallow soil-less operations.

Allowing hydroponic operations to become certified organic without clear standards has exacerbated confusion. At least one certifier is now known to have dispensed with the three-year transition period for container operations. Based on a statement by that certifier, this appears to have become a practice among other entities as well.

The concerns expressed by the NOSB and organic stakeholders prompted the NOP to fast-track a guidance memo for accredited certifiers.

The official policy, released earlier this month, clarified that the transition period does apply to hydroponic operations.

The memo suggests that certified operations that did not eschew prohibited substances for three years prior will be "grandfathered."

And, while we welcome this clarification, there are

still critical questions that remain unanswered by the NOP. In particular, how do hydroponic operations meet the other requirements of the organic rules, such as natural resource conservation and biodiversity requirements?

Authentic organic farmers—growing produce in carefully stewarded soil, sequestering carbon to help mitigate the effects of climate change, cycling on-farm nutrients, and promoting biodiversity—have to compete in the marketplace against these operations. The economic survival of authentic organic farms depends on the enforcement of organic law.

Cornucopia's report, *Troubling Waters*, delves into the serious concerns surrounding certified organic soil-less production. Our Hydroponic Buyer's Guide helps consumers identify the organic crops and brands that likely come from hydroponic sources.

Seek out produce grown in soil. Vote with your fork, and send the message that integrity and transparency are the foundation of organics!

A Decline in Biodiversity

Signals Danger for Native Pollinators

BY MARIE BURCHAM, JD

Pollinators are essential to nature, food production, and the future of our planet as we know it. They provide the service of pollinating over 85% of the world's flowering plants, including the majority of food crops.

As such, pollinators are important keystone species and may be one of the most ecologically and economically important groups of diverse animals. In fact, the Xerces Society, a nonprofit dedicated to the protection of these insects, notes that the economic value of native pollinators—species that are native to a specific region and pollinate the flowering plants in that region—is estimated at \$3 billion per year in the U.S.

The United Nations' Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) released a report on the global status of biodiversity in early May 2019. The report found that human activity has resulted in large-scale loss of biodiversity, as well as the harmful alteration of 75% of the Earth's land mass and 66% of the world's oceans.

Many at-risk species are native pollinators. Sometimes, plants and their pollinators coevolve, so that when one species declines, the other does as well.

The IPBES found that a large part of this decline is caused by land conversion. Agriculture has historically been a significant contributor to this type of habitat loss. When native wildlands are plowed and turned toward agricultural

purposes, they no longer support the same level of species biodiversity. In addition, mono-cropping and pesticide use on conventional farms leave poor habitat and lethal residues that impact native pollinators.

Thankfully, there are things individuals can do to support native pollinator populations both locally and on a global scale.



There are things individuals can do to support native pollinator populations.

One way to take action is to reduce or eliminate the amount of food purchased that comes from crops sprayed with pesticides. While pesticides are intended to kill target species that harm crops, most also effect sensitive insect pollinators and many vertebrate pollinators as well. Organic crops are produced without the worst chemical offenders.

Organic farmers often practice regenerative agriculture. They diversify their operations, rotating many kinds of crops and livestock.

Diversified farms offer better support to native pollinators because their crops, including pasture plants, typically flower throughout the seasons to provide a steady

supply of food to native bees and other pollinators.

Organic and sustainable farms also provide safe spaces for pollinators to nest by providing weedy verges, protected watershed areas, and wild habitat within the farm ecosystem.

Land previously used for conventional farming transitioned

to organic production can restore poor habitat and support increased biodiversity in nearby ecosystems.

On a macro scale, regenerative farming techniques contribute to climate resiliency, helping species on all levels.

At home, gardeners can support a variety of pollinators by growing an array of native plants that bloom at different times of year. Home gardeners should avoid applying pesticides and learn management practices that support native pollinator populations.

For example, dill can be planted to attract ladybugs, aphid midges, and green lacewings—all of which prey on aphids.

Because about three-quarters of native bees in North America are solitary nest builders, having undisturbed ground that is not covered by landscaping cloth or heavy mulch can also be beneficial.

Since the global effect of food production on pollinator biodiversity is profound, our actions have serious impact. Choosing local, organic food and making your backyard habitat friendly to pollinators are effective ways that every individual can support native pollinators in their region and around the world.

Certifying Small Farms

The Challenges and How Consumers Can DIY

Farmers markets are in full swing. Whenever possible, we urge consumers to support certified organic farm vendors first. But not all small-scale farmers choose to certify. To help determine if these non-certified farms still meet your standards, Cornucopia has recently released our *Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Organic Certification Guide*.

Many local farms who sell direct to consumers, either at markets or through CSAs, have chosen not to go through the organic certification process. In some cases, the challenges and obstacles inherent in the certification process are prohibitive and do not serve small farmers.

While Cornucopia advocates unequivocally for organic foods and organic farmers, it is important that we recognize and explore these issues within the certification process. Michael Losonsky, the owner of a small organic vineyard in McMinnville, Oregon, spoke with us to help us understand his situation.

Losonsky noted that increases in certification fees in 2019 amounted to around 10% of his gross income and between 40 and 50% of his net income. Incurring this cost each year is not sustainable for his small organic farming operation.

Cost-share programs are often touted as the solution for cash-strapped, small farmers by both certifiers and the USDA itself. Such programs reimburse fees associated with the costs of organic certification for some farmers. However, there are some serious problems with cost share programs.

First, the program is competitive. Farmers have to apply, and if an application is delayed for legitimate reasons, the funding for the program may run out, leaving those farmers without recourse. In addition, since the program only offers



Many small-scale farmers with high integrity and ethical standards are choosing not to certify organic at all because of the flawed process.

reimbursement, applicants must absorb all of the up-front costs of certification themselves at the risk of being denied.

Losonsky and many other small producers agree that the program would be far more useful if these costs were funded directly—so that the application process was affordable at the front end—rather than through a reimbursement, cost-share program that has the potential to run dry.

In addition to the cost-share program, many small farmers take issue with the fact that some accredited certifiers do not scale their certification costs based on the size of the farm.

In these cases, a small farm would pay the same fees to get certified as a farm ten times the size. In addition, farmers take issue with a lack of transparency among certifiers about fee scales. Many farmers have even complained of undisclosed costs in their final bills.

With all of these issues, in addition to the infiltration of industrial organic products into the marketplace, many small-scale farmers with high ethical integrity standards are choosing not to certify organic at all.

While buying locally produced AND certified organic guarantees the most authentic, nutritious, and sustainable food, this may not always be an option for consumers. Cornucopia encourages eaters to educate themselves.

Asking the following questions at your market, CSA, or retailer can help guide your purchasing toward the healthiest choices for your family and the environment.

“Who grew this food?”

Producer-only farmers markets feature vendors who sell items which they themselves produced. Other market models allow vendors to resell produce they bought wholesale.

“What is in season right now?”

Some farmers may be selling

produce that is not local, while others use hoop houses or heated greenhouses to bring produce to market out of season.

“If not certified, how was it grown?”

Claims of “no-spray,” “chemical-free,” “natural,” or “grown using organic methods” are subjective. Synthetic fertilizers, agrichemicals, and spraying of field borders are possible. Learn about management of soil fertility and weed, disease, and pest controls.

“Do you use OMRI-approved products? If not, what do you use?”

Organic Materials Review Institute products are authorized for use under the National Organic Program’s standards.

“How do you control pests?”

Biodiversity, wildlife corridors, beneficial insects, proper spacing, and crop rotations all minimize pests. Organic-approved pest control products are available; ask for product names and see if they are OMRI-listed.

“How is disease managed?”

Fertile soil, rich in organic matter, managed using crop rotations, cover crops, and composted animal manures will resist diseases. Organic-approved fungicide used can be checked for OMRI listing.

“How do you control weeds?”

Organic farmers will tolerate some amount of weed pressure, as long as their crop’s yield is not threatened. Organic strategies used to control weeds include using cover crops, mulching, cultivation (tilling), and/or hand weeding, in smaller operations.

“How is livestock managed?”

Organic standards require access to the outdoors/pasture and prohibit confinement. Mobile coops for chickens and, for cattle, one cow or less per acre are good

standards. Non-organic grain is likely GMO and contaminated with agrichemical residues.

“How is animal health managed?”

Organic production relies on disease prevention and bans most veterinary medicines and antibiotics. Many non-certified farmers are not knowledgeable as to which alternative therapeutic approaches are acceptable under the National Organic Standards.

“How do you manage parasites?”

Maintaining a closed herd, quarantining sick animals, and sanitization measures minimize exposure to disease and parasites. Sustainable stocking rates, intensive rotational grazing, and the use of multispecies grazing are helpful practices to help break the life cycles of internal parasites. Parasiticides allowed in organic production are on the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances.

“What is the origin of the livestock?”

Were the animals managed organically from the last third of gestation and born on the farm, or were they purchased from an auction, a practice not allowed under the organic standards?

“Can I visit your farm?”

Visiting a farm is one of the primary ways to verify that the farm is operating with integrity and meets organic standards. Some farms even offer “work for produce” exchanges, which is a great way to become more intimately familiar with your farmer’s practices.

Farmers markets and CSAs offer meaningful ways to access some of the best food in your community. Please visit Cornucopia’s DIY Certification Guide to identify authentic produce and ethical farmers at your market when certified organic is not available.

New Report Released

Before your next gander down the grocery store beverage aisle, be sure to check out Cornucopia’s recently released Plant-Based Beverages Report and Scorecard!

Cornucopia’s report, *“Pouring” Over Plant-Based Beverages*, gives shoppers the information they need to decide whether plant-based beverages, cow’s milk, or a diet consisting of both best meets their individual needs and expectations.

Because large beverage companies are eager to capitalize on the rapidly growing plant-based beverage market, selecting the best beverages can be challenging. Manufacturers often add a variety of ingredients to enhance flavor and product appeal. As such, buyers must be wary of the highly processed products masquerading as nutritious milk alternatives.

Using our mobile-friendly scorecard, consumers can learn which of the over 300 products rated contain unsavory ingredients, such as carrageenan (a potent inflammatory agent), other thickeners or gums, and vegetable oils. Consumers can also check the scorecard to identify the most nutritious, least processed, plant-based options without added sugar.

For those who include dairy in their diet, the report highlights how organic, grass-fed cow’s milk is usually a minimally processed, whole food with nutritional qualities that are superior to both conventionally produced cow’s milk and plant-based beverages.

Regardless of your dietary needs, choose USDA organic products to avoid dangerous processing agents, many questionable food additives, and residues from pesticides.



DAIRY CRISIS continued from page 1

a rule change that would clarify the language on origin of livestock because the proposed rulemaking from 2015, never enacted, is now thought to be outdated. NOP staff are concerned the dairy industry has changed too much, necessitating a new origin of livestock rule.

The 2015 proposed origin of livestock rule had major deficiencies, including loopholes that could allow the current problems in the industry to continue unchecked.

Unfortunately, whether the 2015 proposed rule is pushed forward or a new origin of livestock rule is created, it could still be two or more years before any regulation is enacted. In the meantime, more family-scale dairies will be lost.

That loss is devastating, not only for authentic farmers, but also for consumers. Consumers become disillusioned when massive factory-farm operations are allowed to operate outside of the organic laws and still carry the USDA organic seal.

The organic marketplace is scale-neutral, meaning both small and large operations should be able to participate

within the spirit and the letter of the law. These industrial dairies are taking advantage of consumers by charging a premium for milk, while undercutting authentic organic dairies.

Cornucopia has long called for better enforcement of the existing rules, insisting an end to this fraud and a leveling of the playing field. The NOP, however, has suggested—at the recent NOSB meeting and in policy statements—that they do not plan to put any organic operations out of business.

Certifiers perpetuate the problem by applying the rules and guidelines inconsistently. Cornucopia's report, *The Gatekeepers of Organic Integrity*, highlights the role of accredited certifiers in this debacle. The organic marketplace is now effectively divided, and consumers are being duped.

While the factory farm and store brands are dollars cheaper than real organic, they are essentially overpriced conventional milk.

Cornucopia is calling on consumers to help us support legitimate organic dairies. Wielding our voices and purchasing power, consumers can have a profound impact to help these

farms survive and continue to provide the most nutritious milk in the marketplace.

Keep an eye out in upcoming weeks as we launch a social media campaign to highlight the very best organic dairies, their cows, and their superior products: seeing is believing.

We will be asking our members to commit to buying only authentic organic dairy, starting with their next trip to the store. Send the message that you do not condone “organic” factory farming, and share your commitment to support the highest-integrity organic brands produced by the most dedicated dairy farmers.

Cornucopia's Organic Dairy Scorecard, under the *Scorecards* tab at cornucopia.org, can help conscientious consumers advocate for the most authentic dairy brands.

Use our ratings to identify 5-, 4-, and 3-cow rated dairy products in your neighborhood co-op or grocery, or seek out an organic, grass-based dairy farmer to buy from directly in your local community.

Your food dollars keep real organic dairies in business, send a message to “faux-ganic” producers, and nourish your loved ones—that is a bargain!

Staff Spotlight: Anne Ross, JD

In recent years, Cornucopia has become a leading advocate in the campaign to uncover and mitigate the economic impact of fraudulent imported organic grain on true organic farmers in the U.S. This work has largely been spearheaded by our highly skilled and dedicated staff member Anne Ross.

An attorney and advocate for organic farmers and consumers, Ross has focused on ways to reform and strengthen domestic organic regulations, while increasing oversight of organic products originating overseas.

In February, Ross spoke at the annual meeting of the International Organic Inspectors Association in Huatulco, MX on legal issues related to organic fraud. Ross was also recently invited to participate in two preeminent programs:



American Bar Association's International Legal

Exchange (ILEX). In late May, Ross joined the delegation on a trip to Moldova, Ukraine, and Belarus, focusing on trade issues and implementation of the rule of law. Legal reforms are needed in this region to address fraudulent grain originating there and to ensure organic integrity.

IFOAM Organic Leadership Course.

Hosted by the worldwide umbrella organization for the organic agriculture movement, this course consists of 10 on-line webinars and two face-to-face sessions. Ross will complete summary reports on the state of organic agriculture and report on specific issues in the U.S. She also plans to deliver a presentation at an international conference

to fulfill the course requirements. Cornucopia is honored to have Ross on staff.

What's In Your Pantry?

Cornucopia Wants to Know

BY ANNE ROSS, JD

For Cornucopia's team, every workday reminds us of our mission to safeguard organic integrity. This mission is built on values we share with each other, our members, and an increasing number of consumers all over the world.

Our work has always included an emphasis on consumer education. Whether it's about organic food production, products available in the marketplace, or the personal stories of the hard-working farmers who produce our organic food, Cornucopia's goal remains the same.

We strive to ensure the organic label represents all that it promises. But some producers offer more transparency and integrity to consumers than others. While we maintain organic is always a better option than conventional, we aim to highlight the organic products that are truly exceptional.

Our reports and scorecards give consumers the tools they need to support organic brands that meet their expectations. With these objectives in mind, we need your input! We want to know which products you'd like to learn more about and those you would like to see rated.

Over the years, we've received requests to write about many products—from organic coffee and chocolate, to organic beer and beef. Cornucopia's staff is excited to turn our efforts to investigating some of these products in the upcoming months.

Consider organic coffee. The U.S. imports more coffee than any other product. Chances are, your morning cup of organic joe was imported from



Cornucopia's reports and scorecards give consumers the tools needed to support truly exceptional organic brands.

Peru, Mexico, or another country with a suitable growing climate.

As with other certified organic crops, organic coffee is grown by farmers without the use of toxic pesticides and fertilizers, thereby protecting soil health and the health of farmers. The pesticides often used in conventional coffee production wreak havoc on human and environmental health.

As you enjoy that cup, rest assured that organic coffee is better for the environment, farm workers, and coffee lovers. Because most organic coffee is imported, people have inquired how we can be sure organic coffee imports meet our standards, how its production is different from conventional, and where they might purchase home-grown organic coffee beans. These questions are on Cornucopia's agenda to investigate.

Those with a hankering for chocolate will be happy to hear that Cornucopia will also be researching organic cacao—how the beans are grown, how that delicious organic chocolate bar is made, and from where the cacao was sourced. Like organic coffee, organic cacao is largely imported from Central and South

America. These regions are supplying an ever-increasing number of domestic chocolate makers.

While chocolate and coffee aficionados want to know their beans, beer drinkers tell us they want to know their hops. U.S. organic beer sales have increased dramatically since the early 2000s, and recent statistics suggest they are valued at over \$90 million.

Certified organic beer must contain 95% organic ingredients, including organically grown hops. Additives such as yeast, carrageenan (commonly used to clarify beer), and calcium sulfate generally make up the remaining 5% of non-organic ingredients.

Some of our readers want to know more about organic hops production, brewery sourcing, and which breweries are crafting certified organic beer.

Finally, if you'd like a certified organic burger with that beer, you'll be pleased to learn an organic beef report is high on our priority list.

Buying certified organic beef supports cattle that have been given access to the outdoors, fed organic feed, and raised without growth hormones or antibiotics. Additionally, grass-fed, organic beef is leaner than its conventional counterpart and higher in key nutrients, such as omega-3 fatty acids.

So next time you're out shopping or when you open the cupboard door, consider the organic products you'd like to know more about. Maybe beer or beef isn't your bag and you'd rather hear about baby food. Whatever that food might be, we want to hear from you!



THE CORNUCOPIA FARMER PROFILE

Renaissance Family

The Prevailing Winds of Weatherbury Farm

BY RACHEL ZEGERIUS

Nestled in the tightly woven hills of the Washington Valley, 35 miles southwest of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, rest the rolling pastures of Weatherbury Farm, purchased by the Tudor family in 1986. Historically a sheep farm, in the mid-1800s this region produced one-quarter to one-third of all of the wool in the U.S. The Tudors still keep a small herd of 10 to 15 lambs in homage to this agricultural heritage.

It took only one season at Weatherbury for the Tudor family to decide that they wanted to seek out alternative farming practices, in contrast the high-input methods being advocated for by extension.

Both Dale and Marcy came from multigenerational farm families. They remember the days: their parents didn't spend a lot of money on fertilizers; they spread manure and made hay—an approach that may be considered “regenerative” farming today. So, in 1988, they stopped using chemical inputs altogether.

Over the next several years, the Tudors raised a family on the farm, built a successful cow/calf operation, and ran a rewarding agritourism business—all while also hosting an on-site, farm education program. Weatherbury offered farm vacation stays as a bed and breakfast for 25 years, from 1992 until 2017.

In large part, the Tudors have kept the farm economically viable over the years because of their unique proclivity to adapt, evolve, and grow access to new niche markets.

This continuous innovation sets Weatherbury Farm apart and is



From Left: Nigel, Nancy, and Dale Tudor exhibit flours in the mill room at Weatherbury Farm.

personified earnestly by their son, Nigel. His decision to move back to the farm opened the door for their expansion into grass-fed beef in 2007.

An architectural blacksmith, not only does Nigel employ his metalworking skills to repair the farm's machinery, but he has also devoted himself to diversifying Weatherbury's small-scale processing capacity. With help from a SARE grant, Nigel designed and built both a compost turner and a spelt dehuller, also used for emmer, einkorn, and other hulled wheats.

The Tudors began to grow their own grains as their consumer market for grass-fed beef flourished and the on-farm demand for more hay and bedding increased (resulting from keeping calves on the farm for an extra year). Their grain outputs quickly grew as the local distillery

market took off and, again, after they purchased their own flour mill in 2014.

Today, Weatherbury is a highly successful, vertically integrated, 225-acre farm. At home, they keep the majority of their 102 acres in rotating pasture—food for their grass-fed cows, lambs, and certified organic laying hens. The Tudors additionally manage four satellite farms, where they grow grains—five winter varieties and five spring-planted.

The Tudors sell certified organic grain wholesale. But it's not always easy to compete with the efficiencies of larger organic grain farmers. This distinction has inspired the Tudors to focus on diversifying their value-added products.

Larger farms are typically found in less contoured areas or more arid regions, where one contiguous field may surpass the size of the Tudors' whole farm.

But the main challenge at Weatherbury is precipitation. In particular, the farm fields are sloped with heavy, silt loam, prone to compaction when wet. This agricultural landscape limits both the size of the equipment that can be used and the number of days they can get into the field to work.

Last year, the Tudors milled nearly 35,000 pounds of organic flour for their direct-to-consumer market. More than a dozen types of flour are custom ground on the farm. And what isn't sold on-farm, Weatherbury markets to individuals and restaurants through a cooperative CSA, Penn's Corner Farm Alliance, as well as distributes to bakeries, markets, and grocers with the help of Three Rivers Grown.

It hasn't been simple, but creativity has enabled the Tudors to weather the changes in the grain market. Within the last five years, they have witnessed, first-hand, how fraudulent organic grain imports have suppressed the market and begun to limit what price ethical farmers can get from some buyers.

For example, distilleries are fairly price-sensitive, as Nigel notes, and if they can source cheaper organic grain elsewhere, they will. This limits the price the Tudors can charge for their product.

Nigel remembers the every-other-day calls from the grain brokers looking to buy wholesale. They slowed around 2014 or 2015, eventually stopping altogether. This is the litmus Nigel uses for measuring the impact of grain import fraud on domestic, organic farmers. Now, once a month, they get a call.

Demand for organic grain has grown in recent years and the volumes of grains being imported are copious. If the problem of fraud had been fixed by regulators and/or at the policy level, the resulting restrictions in the market would surely have impacted domestic brokers, who would be clamoring to buy up as much domestic grain as possible.

"That's the conundrum," says Nigel. "You create a successful niche market and, eventually, the bigger operators or supermarkets come along and look for a way to tap into the market that you've created." In the absence of enforcement by the USDA, fickle markets drive domestic farmers toward value-added production.

Grass-fed beef is the most recent example of emerging market fluctuation. Weatherbury Farm is currently shrinking their cattle operation in response to a saturation of the market by grass-fed beef imports, mostly from Australia and Ireland, as well as an increased supply by other farmers in the area.

The Tudors are looking forward to finding their new niche and evolving. They are currently learning to integrate a buckwheat huller into the production line; they are dialing in their skills on the extruder, while experimenting with homemade pasta recipes using eggs from their organic hens; and, finally, they are looking to add a wood-fired oven on the farm in the next year or so.

Pittsburgh eaters should keep an eye out for Weatherbury Farm's bread CSA, yet another example of the Tudors' uniquely innovative approach. Their efforts will result in one of the first grain-to-bread (or seed-to-loaf) on-farm bakeries in the country.

If you are not lucky enough to live in the greater Pittsburgh area, don't worry—you can order any of Weatherbury's amazing, stone ground, organic flours on their website.

What's more: you can scan the QR code on the bag to learn more about where and how your grains were grown using Weatherbury's new Grain Tracker program!



Planting oats in one of Weatherbury Farm's fields.





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Add-On Labels

Coming to the Organic Marketplace



As early as this summer, consumers may begin to notice additional labels on their favorite organic products in the grocery store. “Add-on labels,” or “third-party labels,” are those that are not regulated by a government body but, instead, by outside organizations. More than one organization is currently working to roll out alternative organic certification programs in the U.S.

The Real Organic Project (ROP) has developed a label intended to fill in the gaps in the existing USDA organic standards and its enforcement. The organic farmers leading ROP object to the USDA’s actions that conflict with the interests of foundational organic principles, including soil health and animal welfare (especially including outdoor access for livestock).

ROP is particularly concerned about soil health and will not certify any hydroponic operations. ROP also adopted many of the stricter standards for livestock found within the Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices (OLPP) Rule (which had previously been discarded by the current administration), along with even more rigorous requirements.

Another add-on label, Regenerative Organic Certification (ROC), also builds off the existing USDA organic standards. This label focuses on approaches to land management that contribute to the health of ecosystems, including human communities. Along with soil health, the ROC label will have modules for animal welfare, as well as farmer and worker fairness.

To become certified by either ROP or ROC, a farmer must already hold the USDA organic certification.

The goals and aspirations of these add-on labels can only be achieved if consumers recognize their value in the marketplace. Cornucopia will continue its efforts to help consumers understand the divide in the organic marketplace and to support the highest-integrity producers.