

Upholding the Soul of Organics

In Defense of the Promise of Organic Food and Farming

December 2021

The Cornucopia Institute extends deep gratitude to all of our donors for enabling us to conduct research and investigations on organic food and farming systems in order to mobilize support for authentic organic farmers and producers.

Cornucopia programs amplify the voices of authentic organic farmers in the policymaking process, while empowering conscientious consumers to uphold the guiding principles of organic agriculture: humane animal husbandry, environmental stewardship, soil fertility and conservation, human health, and the livelihoods of farmers and farmworkers.

This past year, Cornucopia refined and implemented our strategic plan, doubling down to protect the organic label as foundational to the good food movement. To maximize our impact, we have prioritized partnership-building with organic stakeholders to leverage a more collaborative approach.

Your contribution strengthened our watchdog role in the industry, supported transformative policy initiatives, and contributed to campaigns that helped families and retailers across the country identify high-quality organic food and farms in the marketplace. Specifically, we invested your financial support in the following initiatives this year:

Marketplace Activism

Cornucopia remains a trusted source of information for farmers, good food advocates, and health-oriented consumers alike. Our research-based educational tools are designed to drive organic market share away from industrial operations, while rewarding authentic organic farms and processors. Our reports uncover issues with various production practices, and attendant scorecards rate organic brands of foods such as milk, yogurt, snack bars, and eggs, allowing shoppers to differentiate among various organic products on grocery store shelves.

New this year, Cornucopia's team created a co-aligned communications and development plan to make our materials more available to a variety of audiences. Our report format was reorganized to provide more points of access (e.g., human health, understanding labels, a more nuanced look into regulations, etc.) coordinated across communication channels. Customization of messaging to meet audience persuasion is evident in our new co-op pilot project that supports co-ops and independent retailers with tailored organic education.

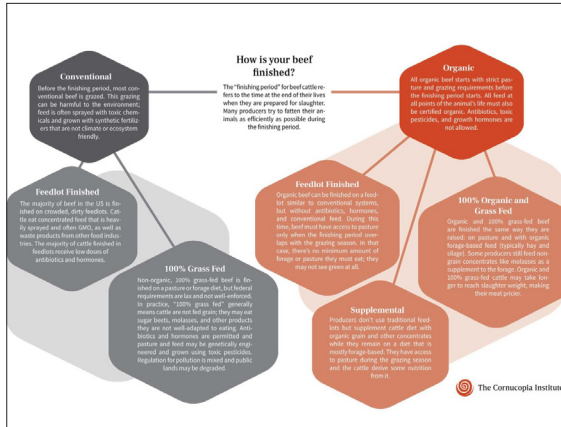
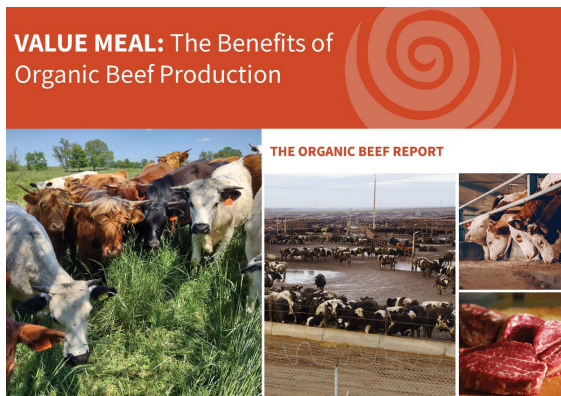


This year, Cornucopia's research, educational materials, and other outreach regularly reached our network of over 62,000 eNews subscribers, 219,000 social media followers, and 50,000 monthly website users. Combined, our scorecards were used by nearly 204,000 people in the past 12 months, and we sent our print newsletter, [the Cultivator](#), to more than 7,500 households quarterly.

With your support Cornucopia accomplished the following marketplace activism deliverables:

DELIVERABLE #1: Organic Beef
Cornucopia released our brand new [Organic Beef Report and Scorecard](#) in July of this year. Alongside educational articles, [infographics](#), and [farmer spotlights](#), the release also included our biggest scorecard yet! The Organic [Beef Scorecard](#) ranks more than 175 brands of domestic organic beef sold at retail and has been used by nearly 8,000 people since its release. Our beef-related educational materials have reached 482,011 people on social media, with another 26,000 pageviews on our website to date. By helping consumers identify ethical organic beef producers who steward soil health, protect precious resources, and even restore ecosystems, this tool empowers consumers to shape the marketplace with their informed purchasing power. Phase II of this campaign will launch in December, further promoting the scorecard and featuring additional consumer education articles and farmer spotlights.

DELIVERABLE #2: Organic Eggs
Research is underway to update our most popular report and scorecard. More than 83,000 people have used our existing egg scorecard (published in 2016) so far this year. Our policy staff is in the process of updating this work: conducting industry research regarding poultry diets, housing, and



welfare; revising a new producer egg survey to inform new scoring criteria; and planning our strategy for an updated egg report and scorecard release in 2022.

DELIVERABLE #3: Hydroponics and The Living Soil Campaign
Cornucopia's [Living Soil Campaign](#) (launched in July) will demonstrate why *organic* is synonymous with soil, and how fostering healthy soil leads to more resilient food production systems. It has reached 111,034 people on social media, with nearly 8,000 pageviews. Fierce debate continues in the US regarding the eligibility of hydroponic operations for organic certification under the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA). Our hydroponic-related marketplace work will continue with [farmer spotlights](#) highlighting soil-grown produce farmers; [Action Alerts](#) calling on consumers to identify brands of produce in their stores; and updates to our Hydroponic Buyer's Guide. The guide will underscore the importance of organic marketplace transparency in favor of farms and farming practices that encourage biodiversity, soil health, and carbon sequestration.

DELIVERABLE #4: Carrageenan
Cornucopia has brought significant attention to the troubling concerns regarding the consumption of food-grade carrageenan, an additive linked to gastrointestinal inflammation and disease, including higher rates of colon cancer in laboratory animals. In the past five years, dozens of companies have removed the ingredient from their products in response to consumer demand. Yet carrageenan is still found in some certified organic foods, and may not be listed on the ingredient panel. This year, Cornucopia released an updated [Buyer's Guide to Avoiding Carrageenan in Organic Food](#), informing consumers about what products to avoid. The guide has been used by nearly 8,500

people since its release. Cornucopia will continue to leverage marketplace pressure by providing opportunities for consumers to take action: Action Alerts urging shoppers to contact organic brands that still contain carrageenan; and a [proxy campaign](#) calling on Costco to remove carrageenan from store-brand organic products. The proxy form was mailed to more than 10,000 households this month, while our online materials have reached 501,229 people on social media. The campaign will continue with a strategic online outreach effort, followed by delivery of proxy forms to companies.

DELIVERABLE #5: Pesticides and Produce

This year, Cornucopia launched an analysis of chemicals in our food supply to identify which produce poses the most risk to both human health and pollinator health from pesticide toxicity. Cornucopia completed research and a literature review regarding pesticides in the food supply. Valuable partnerships have been formed as a foundation of support for the new project. Our policy team is working with Chuck Benbrook to incorporate his Dietary Risk Index into a web-based, interactive consumer tool illustrating the relative risk of various fruits and vegetables based on pesticide toxicity. The tool will also measure and reveal the impacts of various food choices on pollinator health. Other partners on this project include: Friends of the Earth and project advisor Dr. Pierre Mineau, both of whom are consulting on the formulae being used to design this tool.

Policy & Industry Watch

The integrity of the USDA organic seal and the National Organic Program (NOP) continues to depreciate under industry-friendly governance that prioritizes scale economies and agribusiness profits. When family-scale organic farmers cannot compete in a policy environment that favors cost-cutting and large-scale industrial “organic” farms, consumers lose the ability to choose healthy, whole foods that reflect their environmental and animal welfare values. Cornucopia spearheaded the following policy and industry watch activities during this year:

NOSB Accountability

Again this year, Cornucopia and our partners advocated for organic rulemaking prior to the biannual meetings of the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB). Cornucopia encouraged farmer testimonies, [promoted public comment](#), and made formal recommendations to the board regarding materials considered for inclusion on the National List (i.e., carrageenan, ammonia, fish oil, and biobased mulch). In June, the National Organic Program (NOP) requested specific feedback on the 2015 Origin of Livestock rulemaking. To amplify farmers’ voices in the policymaking process, Cornucopia surveyed all (3,270) currently certified organic dairy farmers in the US. We compiled 175 responses and included a summary report with our full comments to the NOP. Again this year, Cornucopia [reported live](#) from each NOSB meeting, posting regular updates to our website and Facebook.



Aerial photograph shows new construction of Natural Prairie's 3,800-cow dairy operation, with 9 acres of manure lagoons, certified organic by the USDA in 2020.

Watchdogging Industrial Operations

The practices of industrial organic factory farms continue to push authentic organic farmers out of the marketplace and out of business. This incidence is particularly ruinous in the organic dairy industry. Cornucopia continues investigative work to expose the most notorious “organic” factory farms. We are currently investigating Natural Prairie's recently constructed, certified organic CAFO in Lake Village, Indiana (see photo above). This industrial operation was constructed in an ecologically sensitive area, abutting the Kankakee Sands, part of a 20,000-acre prairie and wetland restoration project and home to more than 86 rare, threatened, and endangered species. We are currently conducting a site analysis and following existing legal actions against Natural Prairie, while simultaneously building partnerships with Hoosier Environmental Council and Socially Responsible Agricultural Project to determine a strategic approach that aligns action with impact. Future efforts may include: local organizing, state-level advocacy, media attention, flyover photographs, and/or a formal complaint to the NOP to enforce the organic standards. We will also continue to promote our [milk plant code Action Alert](#), which has received more than 3,000 pageviews so far this year.

Fraudulent Organic Imports

Cornucopia continues to follow the actions of the NOP in relation to international fraud and the Strengthening Organic Enforcement Rule. We are partnering with Organic Farmers Association in a grain fraud working group, consulting industry stakeholders to determine potential opportunities for action moving forward.

Climate Change

Cornucopia works to identify areas where organic agriculture and climate concerns overlap, advocating for policymaking with the potential for long-term impact. This year, we have collaborated with Wild Farm Alliance (WFA) to boost support

from the organic community surrounding the protection of native ecosystems. The organic program has clear benefits for climate health and resilience, but a perverse incentive for farmers to destroy native ecosystems to convert land to organic agriculture currently exists under the law. As the administration pushes for "climate-smart agriculture," it is imperative that we remove incentives that bolster industrial organic operations and threaten the integrity of the organic program - one that should represent ecologically based, authentic organic farms. Our work with WFA continues, as we advocate for this recommendation to become a regulation, which the USDA has signaled will only happen if we can get near-universal support from the organic community. Cornucopia recently submitted a letter to Sec. Vilsack asking him to make this regulation a priority. In addition, Cornucopia's policy director recently responded to a request for public comment on the Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad. Organic agriculture presents an opportunity to mitigate climate change while creating economic, environmental, and health benefits for all food system participants. If seriously invested in climate change mitigation, the USDA should focus on improving and creating programs that encourage conventional farmers to convert their acreages to organic production.

Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Through our strategic planning process, Cornucopia made an ongoing commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in order to build a more collaborative, healthy, and effective workplace and organizational culture. To date, we have dedicated more than 675 staff hours to learning more about the history of oppressive systems in our society, and in our food system, and how these systems currently impact marginalized groups of people. This work has inspired us to dig deeper into understanding where our mission intersects with these issues and how we can grow as a staff and as an organization to reduce harm. In order to build diversity within our organization and across the nonprofit sector we aim to be a more equitable and inclusive organization, with JEDI work rooted in a clear purpose and goals.

Your Donation Matters

Cornucopia greatly appreciates the ongoing trust and support of our partners, enabling us to continue to engage in activities that support the ecological principles and economic wisdom underlying authentic organic agriculture. Your generous gifts uphold organic integrity so that family-scale farmers are able to remain competitive, as corporations aim to overtake the market. Thank you for doing this work with us! If you would like to see additional materials documenting the value of your support, I welcome you to contact me directly.

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What Organic Advocates Are Saying

"As the pressures on organic integrity mount, I count on Cornucopia to watch out steadily for our interests and to let our community know in a timely way how we can participate in the struggle to keep organic standards intact. Thanks for being there."

—Joan Dye Gussow, Author, Columbia University Professor, Piermont, New York

"It's our responsibility as independent retailers to support organizations like Cornucopia."

—Terry Brett, Founder & Owner, Kimberton Whole Foods

"I was hoping I could use your information in our community newsletter. We are a consumer based food co-op in Greensboro, North Carolina and send out a weekly Newsletter email to our community. I believe this information is formatted in a way that is very educational and useful to our members."

— Outreach Coordinator, Deep Roots Market

"As a Registered Nurse I have seen 1st hand the negative effects of industrial agriculture not just on food quality, but also its impact on climate change and subsequently, human health. It's important for healthcare providers to understand the strong relationship between food production, climate change and health outcomes. I support organizations who advocate for sustainable and organic farming practices that are accessible to everyone."

— Anastasia Trent, Lakeland, Tennessee