CULTIVATOR

20 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

Spring/Summer 2024 | *News from The Cornucopia Institute* | cornucopia.org

Two Decades of Fighting for You

Two decades ago, corporate consolidation in the organic sector prompted the founding of The Cornucopia Institute.

Ever since, we have been working tirelessly to push the pendulum back toward a system that centers people, animals, and the soil. We believe that the organic marketplace should benefit the common good, not the interests of a powerful few.

Consolidation robs you of power, but information and action give some of it back. Your willingness to get off the sidelines and use our tools to impact the marketplace breathes life into our strategy.

Hundreds of independent retailers have relied on our work to determine which brands to stock on the shelves. Since they were first published, our Organic Scorecards have helped more than 4.2 million eaters master the grocery store. More than 90% of our partners have changed their purchasing habits because of them.

Says Helen Kees, Cornucopia board vice president and owner and operator of Wheatfield Hill Organics in Durand, Wisconsin: "Cornucopia's Scorecards do not let 'organic' outlaws hide."

The stakes are high. Pesticide disinformation and anti-organic propaganda are rampant. Environmental toxins are at an all-time high. And large corporations continue to gobble up many organic brands.

"Our destinies are linked, you and I, farmer and eater." —Helen Simpson Kees, left, with Marguerite Simpson Schutten, planting blueberries at Wheatfield Hill Organics, circa 2005.

We may be 20 years old, but we're just getting started. Our momentum is powered by your values that span generations: independence, transparency, and accountability. And you have proven that you are up to the challenge through your gifts, actions, volunteering, and more.

"You have enabled Cornucopia to mature from a scrappy nonprofit into a mature organization determined to carry on our mission to uncover the truth behind organic food and advocate for an organic label you can trust," Kees says.

To celebrate our anniversary, we are asking you to keep standing up to the forces that strip away our liberties. Join us as we build a different kind of power, one fueled by people, for the next 20 years and beyond.

What are your hopes and dreams for the food system in the next 20 years and how will Cornucopia play a role? Let us know by mailing back the survey we sent you earlier this year. We value your input!

What it Takes

A letter from Cornucopia's executive director

My personal introduction to the shadowy special interests controlling our food came in 2012.

It curled my toes.

After Cornucopia's comprehensive report about the inflammation caused by carrageenan reached the masses, industry shills attempted to gaslight us in comments on blog after blog. *Don't believe the anti-carrageenan lobby, they said. Carrageenan is safe.* They claimed their industry-funded papers were more trustworthy than scientific research funded by the National Institute of Health.

I was shocked that a) there is a carrageenan industry and b) they attacked a report from a small nonprofit in Wisconsin. I was pretty naïve back then. There's a lot of money out there working to cover up the facts, and agriculture is fraught with deeply vested interests.

The fact that we continue to provoke the ire of industry underscores our own power. With a 20-year history serving as the intrepid watchdog for organic, we are a formidable opponent of Big Food.

We out companies that are trying to sell us a watered-down version of organic food. Cornucopia names *names*. Our staff has logged tens of thousands of hours investigating the truth behind organic food.

We have steered you to the most faithful organic farmers, reminding you that bad actors cannot overshadow the bright spots in our increasingly consolidated food system.

Cornucopia is in good company, as Executive Director Melody Morrell shows in this list of organizations supported by Mountain Rose Herbs.

Our reporting is built on audacious behind-the-scenes work. Our passionate staff digs into farming practices and public records, such as permits, lawsuits, complaints, non-compliances, lobbying activity, and company ownership. We investigate tips.

Cornucopia scrutinizes marketing claims with practiced eyes. We engage with and learn from people who are invisible to the outside world: distributors, traders, truckers, and farmworkers. Whenever possible, we visit farms or take flyover pictures.

And when your voice is needed to influence organic regulation, we let you know. With 12 years of organic regulatory action under our belts, our team applies pressure to activate critical changes in the rules governing organic.

You are part of this team. Your gifts of time, attention, care, and money keep our knowledgeable staff in the field, quite literally.

You make our organic future possible.

For people and food over corporations and commodities,

Melody R. Morrell
Executive Director

A Force for Good in Organic Dairy

Organic dairy choices are disappearing from our grocery shelves. Since 2016, we've lost more than 35% of family-owned organic dairy farms in the state of Vermont alone.

From our founding, Cornucopia has worked to protect community scale organic dairies, while pushing regulators for continuous improvement of all certified organic dairies. The health of our bodies and our planet are at stake.

Last year, Cornucopia filed an official complaint regarding Natural Prairie Dairy, calling on the USDA National Organic Program to investigate allegations that this industrial organic operation destroyed sensitive areas in Indiana.

Progress takes time and tenacity. In the last several years, we've celebrated two hard-won updates to the organic rules. The Origin of Livestock Rule closed a loophole that allowed organic dairies to transition conventional cows into operations. And the more recently finalized Organic Livestock and Poultry Standards (OLPS) Rule is a much-needed step toward improving organic animal welfare.

The organic seal is the starting point for finding ethical dairy brands. (Non-organic dairy cattle are among the most mistreated animals in our food system.) Authentic organic dairies push beyond the basic regulations set by the organic rules. Cornucopia points you to these leaders — the 4s and 5s on our Organic Dairy Scorecard.

As for the brands at the bottom of our Organic Dairy Scorecard? Often, they are "private label" brands, operated by chain stores that buy products wholesale at the lowest available market price and package them with their own branded labels. While still free from the most toxic pesticides, these brands tend to be quite secretive about their practices.

Look for an update of our Organic Dairy Scorecard in early 2025.

Seven Stars Farm, a top-rated Pennsylvania dairy on the Organic Dairy Scorecard, was recently used as a filming location for Cornucopia's commercial.

Finding the Right Plant-Based Beverage for You

Avoiding dairy? Consumer demand has driven a seemingly endless selection of plant-based beverages.

Cornucopia helps you sort through the crowded marketplace. Our Plant-Based Beverages Scorecard points you to the best choices, which are always certified organic. Organic regulations prohibit the use of synthetic fertilizers and highly toxic pesticides, and eating organic food lowers exposures to pesticide residues.

Our scorecard also helps you avoid problematic ingredients. That includes carrageenan, an additive that's meant to improve texture, but triggers an immune response in the body that can lead to inflammation. This highly processed, synthetic ingredient adds no nutritional value – and has no place in organic. Due to Cornucopia's work, many organic brands have removed carrageenan from their formulations.

When possible, seek out companies that exclusively manufacture USDA certified organic plant-based beverages. Your purchases support farming systems that keep the most toxic pesticides out of our soil. They're a vote for the kind of agriculture you want to see in the world!

Two Decades of Impact

A look back at what we've accomplished — together

Cornucopia begins **investigations of two organic dairies** and files formal complaints with USDA resulting in the closure of one operation.

2005

2004

2006

Cornucopia releases its **Organic Dairy Scorecard**, and many co-ops drop Horizon. This work has been used more than 2 million times.

Cornucopia catches **Walmart labeling conventional food organic**, resulting in enforcement actions by USDA and other agencies. Walmart signs a consent decree and changes its practices.

Based on Cornucopia's formal complaints, USDA finds Aurora Dairy willfully violated organic regulations. Aurora subsequently pays $8 million to settle a **consumer fraud lawsuit.**

2007

With support and pressure from Cornucopia, the final **Pasture Rule** improves standards for organic dairy.

2010

Cornucopia's first **Organic Egg Scorecard** is released, followed by formal complaints to USDA against Herbruck's Poultry Ranch and Petaluma Farms.

2012

Cornucopia **exposes the human health impacts of carrageenan**, prompting many organic brands to remove this ingredient from their formulations.

Cornucopia shares **flyover images** of 14 industrial dairy and poultry operations, filing formal complaints against the operations and their certifiers.

2014

2015

Cornucopia challenges the **Danone/WhiteWave merger**, resulting in Danone's divestiture from Stonyfield in 2017, a major win for antitrust efforts.

The National Organic Standards Board **votes to remove carrageenan** from the National List. (The National Organic Program has since refused to follow the recommendation, and the fight continues.)

2016

2018

Cornucopia uncovers massive **organic grain fraud** in Eastern Europe and Turkey.

Cornucopia examines the most recent research in certified organic beef production and publishes its inaugural **Organic Beef Scorecard**.

2021

2022

USDA finalizes the **Origin of Livestock Rule**, closing the loophole that allowed organic dairies to continuously cycle conventional livestock into organic. Cornucopia's work rectifying this flagrant abuse of the organic rules spanned a decade.

USDA publishes the final **Organic Livestock and Poultry Standards Rule**, which will eventually stop organic egg operations from using porches to satisfy the requirement of "outdoor access." Cornucopia vigorously advocated for this step toward improving animal welfare standards.

2023

2024

Feeding People, Not Corporations

Independence: Refuge in the not-so-free market

Consolidation of our food supply is the topic du jour. A recent report published by the Federal Trade Commission highlights how, since the pandemic, consolidation has entrenched the market power of the largest firms and made for more fragile supply chains. But what does this mean for shoppers?

When corporate grocers merge, competition decreases and prices increase, leaving customers with fewer options and lower quality products. Service is compromised, worker power is decreased, and lower prices are paid to producers and farmers.

But Cornucopia believes hope resides in the grocery landscape. That's why we are ramping up advocacy for independent retailers and co-ops across the country.

According to the National Grocers Association, US independent grocers account for one-third of all grocery sales. **(Even if you aren't lucky enough to have one in your area, you may still benefit from their survival.)**

While it's true that independent retailers and co-ops may not be able to outcompete corporate-backed firms, these retailers contribute to building an alternative food system in a meaningful way.

Increased resilience and better service aren't all that these retailers offer. They are champions of independent brands. They anchor small communities and are fierce advocates for the organic marketplace. And the information they share is just as vital as the product selection they curate. (Many of these retailers consult our work before bringing new brands to their shelves.)

Seeking out these retailers in your region, or during your travels, pushes back against the pressures of consolidation and builds more resilient supply chains. We will help you by continuing to create and update tools to support the food you want to see in the world. (Look for an article in our next issue that documents a new pilot project unfolding at three stores.)

"We can lie down and let the supermarkets take total control of what ends up on our plates. We can stand by, dismayed but passive, as they drive all but the largest farmers and food suppliers out of business by sourcing products from parts of the globe where they can buy for even less. Or we can change our food shopping habits and use them to vote for a different sort of food economy, one that supports small, local and diverse, not large, global and monotonous." — Joanna Blythman, *Shopped*

When customers at Le Beau Market in San Francisco couldn't get to the grocery store during the pandemic, a support team of staff and customer volunteers quickly launched a free delivery service. Did you see similar trends in your community?

Ways to Give

Thank you – each of you who invests in the fight to preserve organic integrity. You are a champion of the organic food system. Every gift counts. And there are many ways to give one!

Recurring Gifts
A recurring gift (monthly, quarterly, or annually) from your checking account or credit card is the easiest and most powerful way to support our work. Recurring gifts strengthen our organization with financial sustainability and steady growth.

Donor-advised Fund
Donor-advised funds (DAFs) are the fastest-growing charitable giving vehicle in the US. A DAF is a tax-exempt investment account where an individual, family, or organization can deposit cash, securities, or other financial instruments to support the charity of their choice. (Cornucopia's tax ID is 20-1075143). Contact a wealth advisor to learn more.

Stock
If you realize a gain on appreciated assets, consider a tax-exempt contribution of stock or other assets directly to Cornucopia. You'll save on taxes and make an impact on the next 20 years of organic food and farming.

Bequests
Bequests are gifts that are made as part of a will or trust. Designating Cornucopia as a beneficiary is an effective way to leave a legacy impact, combining philanthropy and tax benefits.

Other Planned Gifts
Many vehicles for planned giving allow for significant tax deductions, including financial and estate planning, retirement plans, and gift annuities. Explore your options with a wealth advisor today.

For more information about these and other ways to give, please call 608-637-8278 or email cultivate@cornucopia.org. Include us in your giving plans to protect the future of organic food. You make this important work possible!

Mountain Rose Herbs' Marketing Whiz Joins Our Board

The Cornucopia Institute is delighted to welcome Thomas Dick as our newest board member. Thomas has served as the Chief Business Officer and Executive Vice President at Mountain Rose Herbs since 2023.

He first joined Mountain Rose Herbs in 2008 and has been instrumental in shaping its exceptionally stunning branding.

Born and raised in Appalachia, Thomas developed an early appreciation for nature's beauty and resilience. This deep-seated respect for the natural world led Thomas to pursue higher education at The Ohio State University, where he earned a dual degree in environmental studies and marketing design.

This interdisciplinary background laid the groundwork for a professional journey dedicated to distilling the awe that surrounds us into compelling marketing.

Thomas is highly qualified to provide guidance and leadership as Cornucopia works to fight consolidation in the food system by partnering with and propping up independently owned brands.

We deeply appreciate his passion for Cornucopia's work and his willingness to serve.

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As a donor of Cornucopia, you are a valuable member of the organic food movement.
We are pleased to continue to bring you quarterly issues of the newsletter as a benefit of your support.

What's Inside

Read about the challenges facing organic dairy farms today. Plus: an inside look at the Plant-Based Beverages Scorecard.

Since Cornucopia's founding in 2004, we've challanged Big Ag and championed authethic organic production. Take a walk down memory lane — together we have made an impact.

Learn why Cornucopia is ramping up advocacy for independent retailers and co-ops — crucial components of an alternative food system.

RAINBOW GROCERY
A WORKER-OWNED CO-OP

Thank you to Rainbow Grocery, a worker-owned co-op, for sponsoring the 20th anniversary issue of the Cultivator.