



## News Briefs

### ◆ Nitrogen is “Threatening Ecological Calamity,” Says *Baltimore Sun*’s Five-Part Series

Nitrogen from industrialization, population growth, and intensive use of chemical fertilizers is “building in waters around the globe, threatening ecological calamity,” according to a five-part series on nitrogen pollution by Tom Horton, Heather Dewar, and Frank Langfitt in *The Baltimore Sun* (September 24-28, 2000). “Increasing signs that the chemical balance of the planet is out of whack, either wholly or partly from an oversupply of nitrogen, are already apparent in virtually every corner of the world.” Problems in the Netherlands, Poland, China, Australia, United States, and the Baltic Sea are detailed in the series. Of the “environmental nightmares” caused by nitrogen pollution, the first article said, “hardest hit are coastal bays and oceans—places such as the Chesapeake, the Gulf of Mexico, Europe’s Baltic Sea and the East China Sea—where rivers draining agricultural heartlands dump nitrogen-laden runoff from fertilizers and manure.” The effects of too much fertilizer on water include toxic algae blooms, or red or brown tides; reductions in water clarity; overgrown corals; shaded-out forests of underwater grasses; and “dead zones,” such as the one in the Gulf of Mexico.

“The cycle of upriver abundance and downstream devastation raises fundamental questions that could affect every American: how much we pay for grains and meat, how much tax money is spent on environmental restoration, and how well some of the world’s finest farmland will sustain future generations,” according to the second article. The third article concludes that excess nitrogen is also the leading cause of the destruction and disappearance of underwater grasses and marine nurseries; the fourth article examines agriculture in China, where “unless officials summon the political will to limit fertilizer use and fish farming, lethal and costly blooms of algae will become even more frequent in Asian waters.” The last article concludes that the mounting problems brought on by nitrogen pollution “could be brought under control with a combination of techniques. But it would take a worldwide commitment—and the nations of the world are far from unified.” The series is available on the Internet at [www.sunspot.net](http://www.sunspot.net), or by calling (410) 332-6800.

### ◆ Biotech Firm Suspends Sales of GM Corn Seeds After Recall of Taco Shells

Aventis CropScience, a biotechnology company, last month suspended sales of seeds for the genetically engineered corn that prompted Kraft Foods Inc. to recall millions of taco shells made from the corn, which is approved only for animal consumption. StarLink brand corn seeds will not be sold to farmers for next year’s planting season. “In announcing the move, the company acknowledged it had lost the public’s confidence that it could keep the corn out of the human food supply,” according to *The Washington Post* (September 27, 2000). “The company’s admission that it is having difficulty guaranteeing the seed’s segregation underscores one of the major problems facing genetically engineered food: Consumers, especially in Europe, are demanding that they be able to know which foods contain engineered products and which do not.” The recall of Kraft’s Taco Bell Home Original taco shells last month was the first one of a genetically engineered food product.

### ◆ No-Till Is Best Farming Technology for Reducing Greenhouse Gases, Research Finds

Of all farming methods tested in a ten-year study, no-till provides the best mitigation of the greenhouse gases emitted by agriculture, according to a study at Michigan State University and published in *Science* (September 15, 2000). Agriculture produces greenhouse gases nitrous oxide and methane, but can sequester carbon, the primary gas causing global warming, in soil and vegetation. “None of the annual cropping systems provided net mitigation,” the MSU researchers wrote in *Science*, “although soil carbon accumulation in no-till systems came closest to mitigating all other sources of global warming potential.” According to *The Wall Street Journal* (September 15, 2000), “these findings come as U.S. negotiators prepare to argue that the cumulative carbon dioxide-absorption capacity of forests and farmland should be worth credits toward meeting the carbon dioxide reduction requirements outlined in a Kyoto, Japan, treaty in 1997 to curb global warming.”

## **News Briefs** (continued from page 1)

### ◆ **EPA Report Finds No Serious Threats to Animal Life from Bt Corn**

A draft EPA risk assessment released last month found that the genetically engineered corn that produces the insecticide Bt poses no serious threats to monarch butterflies or other animal life. "The weight of evidence indicates no unreasonable adverse effects" of the genetically engineered crops "to non-target wildlife, plants or beneficial invertebrates," the report said. The draft risk assessment for Bt corn, cotton, and potato plant-pesticides is available for public comment and scientific review prior to an October 18-20 meeting of the Scientific Advisory Panel on the scientific issues of the assessment. After incorporating public comment and peer review, EPA will use the assessment to make decisions about registrations for Bt products. The draft report and information about the meeting are available on the Internet at [www.epa.gov/scipoly/sap](http://www.epa.gov/scipoly/sap).

### ◆ **Sustainable Ag is "Winning Farmers Over," According to *The Furrow***

"The appeal of stewardship, innovation, and profitability is steadily winning farmers over to sustainable practices," according to a cover story in *The Furrow* (September-October, 2000). Pointing out that organic acreage in the United States and Canada has more than doubled since 1992, the article features several sustainable farmers, including Lew Grant of Colorado and Dick Thomson of Iowa. "Widespread implementation of practices such as integrated pest management, intensive rotational grazing, and direct and value added marketing reflects expanding interest in the overall sustainable agriculture movement," Rick Welsh, formerly of the Wallace Center, told the magazine, which said that "proliferating research has helped boost recognition of and respect for sustainable agriculture." Research data are now available in the farm press, Internet sites, and foundation newsletters, according to the story. Grant applications for SARE funding in the North Central Region have tripled in the last five years because of "uncertain markets, environmental regulations, and rural life disruptions." According to Dick Thompson, "sustainable agriculture offers practical solutions for many of these problems."

### ◆ **Smithsonian Institution's "Listening to the Prairie" Exhibit to Open in DC, Go on Tour**

An exhibit on "Listening to the Prairie" will open at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, in November, and then go on tour to 20 libraries starting in March, 2001. The exhibit and accompanying interpretive materials focus on five themes: Native Americans who tended crops on the American prairie for 4,000 years; how new settlers, machinery, railroads, and government policies transformed the prairie into one of the greatest food-producing regions of the world by the late 19th century; the effects on the land of increasing mechanization, new crop varieties, irrigation methods, fertilizers, and pest controls; new methods to keep farm productivity high, costs low, and minimize environmental damage; and how prairies are grasslands whose composition has changed over the centuries. The exhibit highlights four sustainable farmers: Annie Wilson of Kansas, Tom Larson of Nebraska, Joel Rissman of Illinois, and Jeff Mortenson of South Dakota. The exhibit received input for its sustainable focus from former and current SARE Directors Rob Myers and Jill Auburn.

### ◆ **Brazil to Reduce Farm Machinery Air Pollution with Biodiesel Fuel**

Brazil may soon refine a diesel fuel from soy oil and sugar cane that can cut air pollution from farm machinery by almost 90 percent, according to a Reuters story (September 25, 2000). The "biodiesel" fuel is compatible with conventional diesel engines and requires no modifications to the motor, the story said. Because Brazil is the world's top sugar cane grower and the second largest soybean producer after the United States, the biodiesel fuel would give both markets a boost. States such as Arizona, Ohio, Maryland, New Jersey, and Delaware, the story said, have already approved use of biodiesel as an alternative fuel and have allowed fleet operators to convert to biodiesel fuels rather than buy new vehicles to comply with clean air regulations.

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*Alternative Agriculture News* (ISSN 8755-4941) is published monthly by the Henry A. Wallace Center for Agricultural & Environmental Policy at Winrock International, formerly the Henry A. Wallace Institute for Alternative Agriculture, established in 1983 and supported by publications sales, donations, and grants from foundations, corporations, and individuals. Subscription rates for individuals in the United States are \$16 a year; contact the Wallace Center for additional rate categories. All materials in the newsletter may be used without permission, provided credit is given. Financial contributions to the Wallace Center are tax-deductible.

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# Wallace Center/Winrock News

## ◆ Winrock International's 1999 Annual Report Now Available

"A Global Partnership," Winrock International's 1999 Annual Report, reviews the progress of the organization's U.S. and international programs and projects, and features two pages about the Wallace Center's work advancing sustainable agriculture. "Winrock's need for research and policy analysis has increased with expansion of domestic and international programs," the report said. "Creation of the Henry A. Wallace Center for Agricultural & Environmental Policy fills that need and positions Winrock to play a greater role in the policy arena in the decades to come." Winrock International works with people in the United States and around the world to increase economic opportunity, sustain natural resources, and protect the environment. For a copy of the annual report, contact the Wallace Center, Winrock International, 1621 N Kent St., Ste. 1200, Arlington, VA 22209; 703-525-9430; e-mail [wallacecenter@winrock.org](mailto:wallacecenter@winrock.org).

## Resources

**"A Whole-Farm Approach to Managing Pests"** is available from Sustainable Agriculture Network, National Agricultural Library Rm. 304, 10301 Baltimore Blvd., Beltsville, MD 20705-2351; (301) 504-6425; e-mail [san@nal.usda.gov](mailto:san@nal.usda.gov); on the Internet, [www.sare.org/san/htdocs/pubs/](http://www.sare.org/san/htdocs/pubs/).

**"Putting the Pieces Together: State Nonpoint Source Enforceable Mechanisms in Context"** is \$12 plus \$2 shipping from Environmental Law Institute, 1-800-433-5120; an overview of the report is available on the Internet at [www.eli.org](http://www.eli.org).

**"Development of a Code of Practice for Prudent Use of Antimicrobials in Livestock Production,"** a report from the World Health Organization, is available on the Internet at [www.who.int/emc/diseases/zoo/antimicrobial.html](http://www.who.int/emc/diseases/zoo/antimicrobial.html).

**"Emission and Reduction of Greenhouse Gases from Agriculture and Food Manufacturing,"** a report from the U.S. Department of Energy, is available by calling 1-800-862-2086, or on the Internet at [www.oit.doe.gov/agriculture](http://www.oit.doe.gov/agriculture).

**"Market Farm Forms: Spreadsheet Templates for Planning and Organizing Information on Diversified Farms"** for either Macintosh or PC platforms are \$45 plus \$5 shipping from Full Circle Farm, 3377 Early Times Ln., Auburn, CA 95603; (530) 885-9201; e-mail Marcie Rosenzweig at [fullcircle@jps.net](mailto:fullcircle@jps.net).

**National Directory of Farmers' Markets** is available by calling the USDA at 1-800-384-8704, or on the Internet at [www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets](http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets).

**"Reshaping the Food System: Seed to Supermarket,"** a video from a three-day workshop on "The Food System of the 21st Century: Strategic Opportunities and Challenges," is \$20 from Michigan State University Bulletin Office, (517) 355-0240; order on the Internet at [www.aec.msu.edu/agecon/Smith\\_Endowment/index.htm](http://www.aec.msu.edu/agecon/Smith_Endowment/index.htm).

**"Greenbook 2000, Marketing Sustainable Agriculture"** is available free from Prescott Bergh, Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, 90 W Plato Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55107; (651) 215-0367; e-mail [prescott.bergh@state.mn.us](mailto:prescott.bergh@state.mn.us); or on the Internet at [www.mda.state.mn.us/ESAP/Greenbook2000/gb2000.html](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/ESAP/Greenbook2000/gb2000.html).

**"Organic Farming CD,"** which includes 60,000 international records and abstracts on organic farming from 1984 to the present, is funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food, United Kingdom and available for \$315 from CABI Publishing, 10 E 40th St., Ste. 3203, New York, NY 10016; 1-800-528-4841; more information is available on the Internet at [www.cabi.org/catalog/CDROM](http://www.cabi.org/catalog/CDROM).

## Positions

**Consortium for Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education** seeks nominations to fill nine open positions on its Governing Council, which represents the farming community, non-profit organizations, and university leaders and scientists; contact Elizabeth Bird, CSARE, e-mail [eabird@facstaff.wisc.edu](mailto:eabird@facstaff.wisc.edu); information on the Governing Council is available on the Internet at [www.csare.org/howeare/structure.htm](http://www.csare.org/howeare/structure.htm).

**Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture** seeks an Executive Director; send resume, cover letter, and five references to PASA, Executive Director Search, 114 W Main St., P.O. Box 419, Millheim, PA 16854; (814) 349-9856, ext. 234; e-mail [info@pasafarming.org](mailto:info@pasafarming.org); on the Internet, [www.pasafarming.org](http://www.pasafarming.org).

## Upcoming Events

**October 30-November 3**, a course on the Albrecht soil quality system will be held Valley Center, CA; contact Center for Living in Harmony, Little Creek Acres Farm, 13802 Little Creek Ln., Valley Center, CA 92082; (760) 749-9634; e-mail [info@livinginharmony.org](mailto:info@livinginharmony.org).

**November 10-12**, "Creating a Healthy Farm: A Biodynamic Conference" will be held in Montpelier, VT; contact Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, P.O. Box 29135, San Francisco, CA 94129; 1-888-516-7797.

**November 10-12**, "Tri-State Women's Fall Harvest Gathering" for Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota will be held in Spring Valley, MN; sponsors are Women, Food and Agriculture Network/Iowa; the Wisconsin Women's Sustainable Farming Network; and Women in Sustainable Agriculture/Minnesota; contact Stacey Brown, (712) 243-3264; e-mail [wfan@nishna.net](mailto:wfan@nishna.net).

**November 30-December 1**, "The Future of Our Food and Farms," a regional summit for Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, and Delaware, will be held in Philadelphia, PA; contact Meredith Stone, Farmers' Market Trust, 1201 Chestnut St., 4th Fl., Philadelphia, PA 19107; (215) 568-0830; e-mail [fmtrust@libertynet.org](mailto:fmtrust@libertynet.org).

**December 1** is the deadline for abstract proposals for "Conservation from the Mountains to the Sea," the Soil and Water Conservation Society's Annual Conference to be held in Myrtle Beach, SC, August 4-8, 2001; contact Charlie Persinger, SWCS, 7515 NE Ankeny Rd., Ankeny, IA 50021; e-mail [charliep@swcs.org](mailto:charliep@swcs.org).

**January 24-27, 2001**, 21st Annual Ecological Farming Conference will be held in Pacific Grove, CA; contact Ecological Farming Association, 406 Main St., Ste 313, Watsonville, CA 95076; (831) 763-2111.

**February 15-18, 2001**, "Bio Fach 2001," the World Organic Trade Fair, will be held in Nuremberg, Germany; contact NurnbergMesse GmbH, Messezentrum, D-90471 Nurnberg; phone 49-0-9-1186-06-0; e-mail [infor@nuernbergmesse.de](mailto:infor@nuernbergmesse.de); on the Internet, [www.nuernbergmesse.de](http://www.nuernbergmesse.de).

**March 5-7, 2001**, "How to Expand Composting/Recycling Programs," BioCycle's West Coast Conference, will be held in Portland, OR; contact BioCycle, 419 State Ave., Emmaus, PA 18049; (610) 967-4135; on the Internet, [www.biocycle.net](http://www.biocycle.net).

**May 17-19, 2001**, "All Things Organic," the Organic Trade Association's Conference and Trade Show, will be held in Austin, TX; contact Eurich Management, (517) 327-9207; e-mail [otashow@ota.com](mailto:otashow@ota.com).

**July 12-14, 2001**, "Higher Education and Research for Agriculture and Food Systems in the 21st Century" will be held in San Francisco, CA; contact Global Consortium of Higher Education and Research for Agriculture, e-mail [GCHERA@iastate.edu](mailto:GCHERA@iastate.edu); on the Internet, [www.gchera.iastate.edu/](http://www.gchera.iastate.edu/).

**October 14-18, 2001**, "Optimizing Nitrogen Management in Food and Energy Production and Environmental Protection," the second annual Nitrogen Conference, will be held in Potomac, MD; contact Rhonda Kranz, Ecological Society of America, 1707 H St. NW, Ste 400, Washington, DC 20006; (202) 833-8773, ext. 212; e-mail [nitrogen@esa.org](mailto:nitrogen@esa.org); on the Internet, [esa.sdsc.edu/n2001](http://esa.sdsc.edu/n2001).



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October, 2000  
Volume 18, No. 10