



News Briefs

• Harmful Effects of Agriculture Could Rival Those of Climate Change, Researchers Find

During the next 50 years, agriculture “has the potential to have massive, irreversible environmental impacts,” producing sources of global change that “may rival climate change in environmental and societal impacts,” according to research reported in *Science* (April 13, 2001). If past global impacts of agriculture on human population and consumption continue, 1 billion hectares of ecosystems would be converted to agriculture by 2050, accompanied by at least a doubling of nitrogen and phosphorus-driven eutrophication of terrestrial, freshwater, and near-shore marine ecosystems, and comparable increases in pesticide use. The researchers concluded that “an environmentally sustainable revolution, a greener revolution, is needed....Existing knowledge, if widely used, could significantly reduce the environmental impacts of agriculture and increase productivity. Integrated pest management, application and site- and time-appropriate amounts of agricultural chemicals and water, use of cover crops on fallow lands and buffer strips between cultivated fields and drainage areas, and appropriate deployment of more productive crops can increase yields while reducing water, fertilizer, and pesticide use and movement to nonagricultural habitats.”

• Organic Orchards Rank First in Sustainability, Profitability—and Tasty Apples

A study of apple farming published in *Nature* (April 19, 2001) found that organic orchards can be more profitable, produce tastier fruit at similar yields compared to conventional farming, and be better for the environment. Researchers at Washington State University farmed three experimental plots of golden delicious apples using organic, conventional, and integrated growing methods. “Although the organic system took longer to reach profitability, it ranked first in terms of environmental sustainability, profitability, and energy efficiency by the end of the six-year study,” according to a *Nature Science Update* account of the study. “What’s more, untrained tasters rated the organic apples the sweetest.” WSU Researcher John Reganold told the Associated Press, “The bottom line is that organic outperforms the others.”

• Wall Street Journal Lab Finds Genetically Modified Ingredients in “Non-GMO”-Labeled Foods

Laboratory tests performed for *The Wall Street Journal* of 20 food products labeled “non-GMO” found evidence of genetically modified materials in 11 products, and more substantial amounts in five others, according to the newspaper’s story on the tests (April 5, 2001). “It isn’t possible to determine whether the *Journal’s* test results reflect the industry average,” the story said. “No government agency or trade group verifies the accuracy of non-GMO labels...However, the federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act prohibits placing misleading labels on food products.” The story added, “industry executives believe the non-GMO segment is growing about as fast as that of organic products—foods produced without synthetic chemicals—a \$7.8 billion market that is increasing at eight times the rate of the packaged food business as a whole.”

• Proposed 2002 Budget Maintains or Cuts Funding for Sustainable Ag Programs

The Bush Administration’s proposed budget for the 2002 fiscal year either maintains or cuts funding for sustainable agriculture programs. The budget provides no funds for the Wetlands Reserve Program or Conservation Security Payments. It provides the same funding levels as FY01 for the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, \$9.3 million; SARE (Chapter 3) Professional Development Program, \$3.8 million; Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas, \$2 million; implementation of the Organic Foods Production Act, \$1.6 million; Environmental Quality Incentives Program, \$174 million; Community Food Security Act, \$2.5 million; and Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems, \$120 million. The 2002 budget provides that \$30 million for the Fund for Rural America be allocated after the enactment of the FY02 Appropriations Act, within the discretion granted by Congress to the Secretary of Agriculture.

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• **United States Will Sign Global Treaty Reducing Pesticides**

President George W. Bush announced last month that the United States will sign an international treaty that calls for eliminating or reducing the use of 12 persistent organic pollutants linked to cancer and birth defects. The chemicals, known as the “dirty dozen,” include eight pesticides: aldrin, chlordane, dieldrin, DDT, endrin, heptachlor, mirex, and toxaphene. The other chemicals are polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), hexachlorobenzene, dioxins, and furans. The treaty also directs developed countries to provide financial and technical assistance to help developing countries comply. The treaty must be ratified by the U.S. Senate.

• **European Union Preparing Strict Controls on Genetically Engineered Foods**

The European Union is preparing to “enact strict new controls on the sale of genetically engineered foods, which could trigger a major trade dispute with the United States and deal a serious setback to the booming biotech industry,” according to a story in *The Washington Post* (April 11, 2001). After the European Parliament approves the new labeling and tracing requirements on genetically modified products, the 15 member governments will then be asked to make their national laws conform to the new rules by next year.

• **Conventional Farmers Considering Sustainable Alternatives, Gallup Poll Finds**

More than half, or 52%, of conventional farmers interviewed for the Trends in Ag 2000 study said they have considered using sustainable practices, according to the results of a Gallup Poll. The national poll, co-sponsored by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation with assistance from the Alpha Zeta Foundation, surveyed 1,218 farmers and ranchers. Of those surveyed, 23% said they use sustainable farming as their primary production system; producers of tree crops were more likely to use sustainable agriculture than any other crop producer types, while wheat and hay producers were more likely than corn, soybean, and cotton farmers. The survey is available on the Internet at <http://www.agmedia.org>; or e-mail Steve Drake at drake@drakeco.com.

• **PBS’ “NOVA” and “Frontline” Explore Genetically Modified Foods**

PBS last month, on its “NOVA” and “Frontline” shows, aired a two-hour special called “Harvest of Fear” which explored “the intensifying debate of genetically modified crops.” The report presented “both sides of the debate, exploring the risks and benefits, the hopes and fears, of this new technology.” It aired interviews with scientists, farmers, biotech and food industry representatives, government regulators, and critics of biotechnology. Among those interviewed were Jane Rissler of the Union of Concerned Scientists; Paul Muller, a California organic farmer; and former Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman. A transcript of the show is available on the Internet at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/harvest/>.

• **Will Genetically Engineered Insects Be Released Outside the Lab?**

USDA scientists have applied for permission to release genetically engineered pink bollworms into outdoor cages, “the first planned release of genetically engineered insects outside the high-security laboratories where they are being bred,” according to a story in *The Washington Post* (April 25, 2001). The genetically engineered pink bollworms have been designed to control non-modified bollworms that eats the seeds of “the best cotton grown in the Southwest,” according to the story. “The likelihood that a successful bollworm effort would lead to the development of many other engineered insects is exactly what has alarmed biotechnology critics. They worry about unknown and unforeseen consequences from mass releases of engineered insects—newly created entities that cannot be brought back once widely released.”

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Wallace Center/Winrock News

• Agriculture Policy Project to Release Farm Policy Recommendations

Leaders of the Agriculture Policy Project of the Henry A. Wallace Center for Agricultural & Environmental Policy at Winrock International on May 8 will release 95 recommendations for improving U.S. farm and rural development policies. The five-year project has involved 350 farmers, livestock producers, business people, and civic leaders. *Making Changes: Turning Local Visions into National Solutions* presents the project participants' recommendations in nine issue areas: Federal agricultural policy explicitly supporting small and diversified farms; market access in the face of consolidation and vertical integration; alternative marketing channels; research and cooperative extension; economic and rural development; special populations of farmers and farmers in "pockets of poverty"; young, beginning, and retiring farmers and ranchers; farmland preservation and sprawl management; and water and air quality. After May 8, *Making Changes* will be available on the Internet at <http://www.winrock.org/wallace/>; hard copies of the report are \$15 from the Wallace Center for Agricultural & Environmental Policy, Winrock International, 1621 N. Kent St., Ste. 1200, Arlington, VA 22209-2134; (703) 525-9430; e-mail wagpol@winrock.org.

• Andy Manale Joins Wallace Center As Senior Policy Analyst

Andy Manale has joined the Wallace Center as a senior policy analyst on an Intergovernmental Personnel Agreement from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. He was the EPA's staff leader on policy development relating to agriculture and the environment. He has contributed to major statutes including farm bills and the Food Quality Protection Act, as well as major policy directions such as linking agriculture and policies for mitigating climate change. Trained as a biochemist and policy analyst at the University of California, he has an undergraduate degree in German literature from Columbia University.

Positions

Alternative Farming Systems Information Center at the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, MD, seeks a Coordinator at the GS-13 level; closing date for applications is May 21; full job announcement is on the Internet at <http://www.usajobs.opm.gov/wfjic/jobs/BW8224.htm>. Information about AFSIC is available at <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/>.

North East Workers on Organic Farms has published a list of more than 80 farms in the Northeast with farm apprenticeship programs; contact NEWOOF, c/o New England Small Farm Institute, P.O. Box 608, Belchertown, MA 01007; (413) 323-4531; e-mail programs@smallfarm.org.

Resources

Report of the Expert Panel on the Future of Food Biotechnology details the 53 recommendations by a Royal Society of Canada scientific panel of 15 scientists and regulatory experts; the report is available from Sandy Jackson, RSC, (613) 991-6999; e-mail sjackson@rsc.ca; or on the Internet at <http://www.rsc.ca>.

"Strong Winds: Opportunities for Rural Economic Development Blow Across Nebraska" is available from Union of Concerned Scientists, 2 Brattle Square, Cambridge, MA 02238-9105; (617) 547-5552; or on the Internet, <http://www.ucsusa.org/energy/>; e-mail pubs@ucsusa.org.

"Minnesota Agriculture and the Reduction of Greenhouse Gases," released by Minnesotans for an Energy-Efficient Economy, is available on the Internet at <http://www.me3.org/issues/climate/>.

"Small Dairy Resource Book," 56 pages, is available on the Internet at <http://www.sare.org/htdocs/pubs/>; hard copies are available for \$8 plus \$3.95 shipping/handling from Sustainable Agriculture Publications, Hills Bldg., Rm. 10, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405-0082; (802) 656-0484.

"Directions for Farm Policy: The Role of Government in Support of Production Agriculture," prepared by the Commission on 21st Century Production Agriculture, is available on the Internet at <http://www.usda.gov/oce/21st-century/index.htm>.

"International Organic Cotton Directory," published by Pesticide Action Network and the Organic Trade Association, is available on the Internet at <http://www.OrganicCottonDirectory.net>, or from Margaret Reeves at PAN, (415) 981-6205; e-mail mreeves@panna.org.

Upcoming Events

May 20-22, "Urban Agriculture: Emerging Opportunities in Science, Education, and Policy" will be held in Dallas, TX; contact Jamie Mills, Texas A&M, (972) 231-5362.

May 30-31, National Stakeholders Roundtable on criteria for effective livestock environmental management systems will be held in Washington, DC, and co-sponsored by USDA/NRCS and EPA; contact Elizabeth Bird, National Farm*A*Syst/Home*A*Syst, (608) 265-3727; on the Internet, <http://www.uwex.edu/AgEMS/livestock/stakeholders.html>.

June 30-July 1, Heartland Conference and Country Fair will be held in Turlock and Stevinson, CA; contact Ecological Farming Association, toll-free at 1-877-763-2111; on the Internet, <http://www.eco-farm.org>.

July 8-11, Annual Conference of the Agricultural Institute of Canada will be held in Guelph, Ontario, Canada; contact University of Guelph, (519) 767-5000; e-mail info@open.uoguelph.ca.

July 20-24, "Full Circle: Agriculture, Nutrition, and Health," the 34th Annual Conference of the Society for Nutrition Education, will be held in Oakland, CA; contact the Society at (202) 452-8534; on the Internet, <http://www.sne.org>.

July 23-25, USDA's Risk Management Agency National Outreach Conference will be held in Memphis, TN; contact Marie Buchanan, USDA, (202) 690-2686; e-mail civil_rights_outreach@wdc.usda.gov; on the Internet, <http://www.rma.usda.gov/calendar/2001/july.html#memphis>.

August 4-8, Soil and Water Conservation Society's Annual Conference will be held in Myrtle Beach, SC; contact Charlie Persinger, (515) 289-2331, ext. 12; on the Internet, http://www.swcs.org/what_calendar.htm.

August 10-12, "Growing Community," the Northeast Organic Farming Association's 27th Annual Summer Conference and Celebration of Rural Life, will be held in Amherst, MA; contact Julie Rawson, NOFA, (978) 355-2853; e-mail jackkitt@aol.com.

August 13-15, the 7th Biennial Conference on Agroforestry in North America and the Annual Conference of the Plains and Prairie Forestry Association will be held in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada; contact the Program Chair at (306) 695-5130; on the Internet, <http://www.agr.ca/pfra/aftappfa.htm>.

August 13-24, International Short Course on Agroecology will be held at the University of California Santa Cruz; contact Joji Muramoto, (831) 459-2506; e-mail shortcourse@agroecology.org; on the Internet, <http://www.agroecology.org/shortcourse/2001/announce.htm>.

August 15-19, "Locality and Society: Challenges and Opportunities for Rural Places in the New Millennium," the 64th Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, will be held in Albuquerque, NM; contact Kenneth Pigg, RSS, (573) 882-9065; e-mail ruralsoc@missouri.edu; on the Internet, <http://www.ruralsociology.org>.

August 27-30, "Monitoring and Modeling Nonpoint Source Pollution in the Agricultural Landscape," the 9th National Nonpoint Source Monitoring Workshop, will be held in Indianapolis, IN; contact Tammy Taylor, Conservation Technology Information Center, (765) 494-9555; e-mail taylor@ctic.purdue.edu; on the Internet, <http://www.ctic.purdue.edu>.

September 7-9, 22nd Annual Conference of the American Community Gardening Association will be held in Salt Lake City, UT; information is available on the Internet at <http://www.communitygarden.org>.

October 1-5, "First Worldwide Congress on Conservation Agriculture: A Worldwide Challenge" will be held in Madrid, Spain; contact UN Food and Agriculture Organization by e-mail at conservation.agriculture@ecaf.org.

October 21-25, the Annual Meetings of the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America will be held in Charlotte, NC; contact Keith Schlesinger, ASA-CSSA-SSSA Headquarters, (608) 273-8090 ext. 322; e-mail kschlesinger@agronomy.org.

September 15-19, 2002, "Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture for Dry Areas for the 2nd Millennium" will be held in Shijiazhuang, China; contact Catherine Vachon, Lethbridge Research Centre, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, (403) 317-2257; e-mail vachonc@em.agr.ca.

November 29-30, "The Future of Our Food and Farms Summit" will be held near Philadelphia, PA; contact Maria van Hekken, Farmers' Market Trust, 1201 Chestnut St., 4th Fl., Philadelphia, PA 19107; (610) 530-2584; e-mail mariavhm@aol.com.



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