



News Briefs

• Jeffords' Switch Elevates Agriculture Leaders, Could Make Farm Policy Higher Priority

Senator Jim Jeffords' (I-VT) jump from the Republican Party to Independent status will have a positive impact on farm policy by elevating two agriculture supporters to leadership positions: Senator Tom Daschle (D-SD) will become the Senate Majority Leader, and Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), Chairman of the Agriculture Committee. "Having a majority leader from an agricultural state certainly moves agriculture up to the front of the agenda," Jay Carson, a spokesman for Senator Daschle told *Successful Farming's* @griculture Online Web service (May 24, 2001). "I think it's safe to say that he [Senator Daschle] is not happy with where we are, and he's going to start working for family farmers." The story also said that a Republican Senate staffer "sees the possibility of more emphasis on concentration issues on the Senate Agriculture Committee under Harkin's leadership." According to Ferd Hoefner of the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, "conservation will be a big issue" with Harkin as the Chairman of the Agriculture Committee, and Harkin's newly-introduced Conservation Security Act will gain prominence "because it's got his name on it." The "green payments" in that bill "could be the defining mark of a Harkin chairmanship," according to Reuters (May 23, 2001).

• Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture Applauds Introduction of Conservation Security Act

The National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture applauded the introduction last month of the Conservation Security Act (CSA), saying it marked "an important shift in U.S. agricultural conservation efforts, emphasizing the environmental benefits sustainable management of land under active production can provide." The bill would establish significant new incentives for farmers and ranchers to adopt and maintain conservation practices that conserve land, water, and wildlife resources. The program's funding would be guaranteed as the Conservation Reserve Program payments are, and be capped at \$50,000 annually for up to 10 years. Crop and livestock producers could qualify for payments in three tiers of practices, with the highest rewards for practices that provide the highest degree of stewardship. Practices include the use of cover crops, buffer strips, rotational grazing, and whole farm planning. The Campaign sees the CSA as one of several reforms needed to address "the failings of the 1996 Farm Bill." A bipartisan group of legislators introduced the bill, led by Senators Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Gordon Smith (R-OR), and Representatives John Thune (R-SD) and Marcy Kaptur (D-OH).

• Freedom to Farm "Fuels Big Farms," According to *New York Times* Article

The beneficiaries of the Freedom to Farm Act of 1996, which has resulted in a tripling of farm subsidies, "hardly fit the image of small, hardscrabble farmers," according to an article in *The New York Times* (May 14, 2001). "Supporters of farm subsidies, which were enacted in the Depression, argue that they are needed to save the family farm. Because eligibility is based on acreage planted with subsidized crops in the past, the farmers who have the biggest spreads benefit the most." Just 10 percent of American farmers receive 61 percent of the billions of dollars the program distributes. "The subsidies have been a chief source of capital for large operators to expand their holdings, often by buying out their smaller neighbors," the article said. "And unlike other federal entitlement programs, farm subsidies have no requirements of income, assets, or debts."

• Certified Organic Farmers Increase by 18 percent, According to New Survey

An annual count of the country's certified organic farmers as of January 1, 2001, reported 7,800 certified organic farmers, an increase of 18 percent from the 1999 total of 6,600. The Organic Farming Research Foundation's (OFRF) annual survey asked all 89 U.S. organic certification agencies how many farmers they currently certify for organic production. Five certifiers did not report the farmers they certify. OFRF maintains the National Organic Certifiers Directory, which is available on the Internet at <http://www.ofrf.org/publications/certifier.html>, or from OFRF, P.O. Box 440, Santa Cruz, CA 95061; (831) 426-6606.

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• Agricultural Research Increasingly Controlled by Private Companies, Article Reports

Once “the realm of public institutions like land-grant colleges,” agricultural research is “increasingly being controlled by private companies,” according to an article in *The New York Times* (May 15, 2001). “This fundamental shift alarms some farming experts, who point out that the public research system trained thousands of farmers over the decades and vastly improved farm output both in the United States and overseas. Now, these critics say, patent restrictions are choking the free exchange of seeds and technology that nourished the public system.” Research of potential crop improvements has been delayed or abandoned, the article reported. “In the quest for profits, crop development for poor countries could be neglected.” In the United States, about 45 percent of plant breeders at universities said that trouble getting seeds from private companies interfered with their research, according to a 1999 survey by Steven C. Price of the University of Wisconsin. Other critics say companies are overemphasizing genetic engineering because it is easier to protect engineered crops with patents, and others worry that a small group of companies could control the world’s food supply, according to the article.

• New Counselor to the EPA Administrator on Agriculture Policy Appointed

Jean-Mari Peltier of California has been appointed to the new position of Counselor to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator on Agriculture Policy. The creation of the position will allow the agency “to integrate the concerns of the agriculture community when making important decisions about how best to protect our natural resources,” according to EPA Administrator Christie Whitman. The Counselor will serve as the central contact for EPA cooperation with U.S. Department of Agriculture to work on joint policy, cooperative efforts between agency staff, and other interagency issues. She will also maintain an awareness of Congressional agricultural activities. Peltier has most recently been the President of the California Citrus Quality Council, and previously served on the U.S. delegation to the Codex Alimentarius Committee on Pesticide Residues, the EPA Committee to Advise on Reassessment and Transition, and the USDA Agricultural Technical Advisory Committee on Trade.

• USDA Announces \$1 Million for Organic Certification

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has announced the availability of \$1 million in Fiscal Year 2001 funds to share the cost of organic certification in Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming. Producers are eligible for reimbursement of up to 70 percent of certification costs, not to exceed \$500. The cost-share program will assist eligible organic crop and livestock producers in transitioning into the new National Organic Program and provide an incentive for early adoption of the national standards by certifying agents and producers. To be eligible, a production operation must be in one of these states and be certified by a certifying agent as of December 21, 2000. More information is available on the National Organic Program’s Web site at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/>.

• The Organic Industry Is Now Big Business, Attracting Big Corporations

The organic food industry, the fastest-growing category in the supermarket, has “attracted the attention of the very agribusiness corporations to which the organic movement once presented a radical alternative and an often scalding critique,” according to the cover story of *The New York Times Magazine* (May 13, 2001). “Now that organic food has established itself as a viable alternative food chain, agribusiness has decided that the best way to deal with that alternative is simply to own it.” The organic movement has become a \$7.7 billion business: “call it Industrial Organic,” said the article, which traces the growth of several small organic farms which were acquired by corporations or otherwise became mainstream.

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•Henry A. Wallace Biography Wins Award for Best Iowa History Book

American Dreamer: The Life and Times of Henry A. Wallace has received the Benjamin Shambaugh Award from the State Historical Society of Iowa for the best book on Iowa history published in the past year. The Wallace biography, by former Senator John Culver of Iowa and former *Des Moines Register* reporter John Hyde, was published in March 2000. Society Administrator Tim Morain said, "Henry A. Wallace is in a league of his own, yet many Iowans aren't familiar with him. Culver and Hyde have done Iowans a great service with their book." The book will be available in paperback in August, published by W.W. Norton and Co.

• Workshop Examines Environmental Impacts of Corn Belt Production

The Wallace Center's role in a collaborative project with the World Wildlife Fund and the American Farmland Trust culminated in the staff facilitating an early May workshop meeting titled "Midwest Region Commodities and the Environment." Approximately 30 participants from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Ohio, Nebraska, and Wisconsin gathered at the meeting to discuss policy ideas to significantly reduce the environmental impacts of present Corn Belt production systems. To learn when summary proceedings from the meeting will be available on the Internet, contact the Wallace Center at wallacecenter@winrock.org.

• Agriculture Policy Project Proposes Changes in U.S. Farm Policy

Making Changes: Turning Local Visions into National Solutions, released last month, details the 95 recommendations generated by participants in a five-year Agriculture Policy Project of the Wallace Center, which receives its principal funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The project started with a diverse group of people who took part in 12 local, three regional, and one national policy visioning session. Nine of the 12 local policy groups are still active and are implementing the programs they developed to address problems in their own communities: Routt County, Colorado; Ada and Canyon Counties, Idaho; Parke and Montgomery Counties, Indiana; Vermilion Parish, Louisiana; Southcoastal Massachusetts; Grand Traverse Bay Area, Michigan; Knox County, Nebraska; Buncombe, Henderson, and Madison Counties, North Carolina; and Deaf Smith County, Texas. The project's report will be presented to Congress and the Administration for consideration in the upcoming Farm Bill debate and other longer-term efforts for developing policies for food and agricultural systems, and economic development in rural areas. The entire report and its executive summary are available on the Internet at <http://www.winrock.org/wallace/>. Hard copies of the report are available for \$15 from the Wallace Center, 1621 North Kent St., Ste. 1200, Arlington, VA 22209-2134; (703) 525-9430, ext 675.

• Harold Breimeyer, Sustainable Ag Supporter, Dies at Age 86

Harold Breimeyer, an agricultural economist who was a major supporter of sustainable agriculture and an original member of the *American Journal of Alternative Agriculture*'s Editorial Board, died in March at age 86. He worked at the U.S. Department of Agriculture for several decades, and then taught at the University of Missouri-Columbia. He wrote a weekly column for the *Columbia Tribune*, "Prospect for the Third Millennium," in which he wrote extensively about the importance of federal policies that support family farming and environmental stewardship, and his opposition to the growing influence of agricultural corporations.

Positions

Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (MSAWG) is seeking to fill two positions: DC Representative in the MSAWG/Sustainable Agriculture Coalition Office, contact Ferd Hoefner, (202) 547-5743, e-mail fhofner@msawg.org; and Midwest Coordinator in the office of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Des Moines, IA, contact Brother David Andrews, (515) 270-2634, e-mail nrcrc2@aol.com.

Washington State University seeks a Small Farms Outreach Extension Coordinator; for full job description, contact Marcy Ostrom, WSU, 7612 Pioneer Way East, Puyallup, WA 98371-4998; (253) 445-4514; e-mail mrostrom@wsu.edu.

Sustainable Cotton Project in Oroville, CA, seeks an Assistant Director; more information is available from Kate Duesterberg at kduester@igc.org, or on the Internet at <http://www.sustainablecotton.org/job/>.

Upcoming Events

July 14, Polyface Farm Field Day will be held in Swoope, VA; contact ACRES U.S.A., P.O. Box 91299, Austin, TX 78709; (800) 355-5313.

July 19-20, Food and Agriculture Conference will be held in Nashville, TN; contact Organization for Competitive Markets, P.O. Box 6486, Lincoln, NE 68506; on the Internet, <http://www.competitivemarkets.com>.

July 20-22, "Rooted in Community III" will be held in Detroit, MI; contact Jean at the Front Porch, (313) 965-8153 ext. 60; e-mail ae7562@wayne.edu; on the Internet, <http://www.communitygarden.org/new/RICIII.html>.

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 27-29, "Whole Land: Healthy People; A Celebration of Holistic Management" will be held in Colorado Springs, CO; contact Cindy, Colorado Branch for Holistic Management, (970) 882-4222; e-mail cindydv@reanet.net.

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 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 27-28, "The Organic Challenge – Unity Through Diversity," the Inaugural Organic Industry Conference, will be held in Sydney, Australia; contact Merryn James, Organic Program, Rural Industries R&D Corporation, phone 61-2-6272-4205; e-mail organicconference@rirdc.gov.au.

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 5-7, Mid-Atlantic Biodynamic Food and Farming Conference will be held in Hillsboro, VA; contact Allan Balliett, (540) 668-6165; e-mail igg@igg.com.

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.

November 1-3, 2001 National Small Farm Trade Show and Conference will be held in Columbia, MO; contact Small Farm Today, (800) 633-2535.

December 7-9, third Northeast Community Supported Agriculture Conference will be held in Claryville, NY; contact Beth Holtzman, e-mail bholtzma@together.net; on the Internet, <http://www.csacenter.org>.

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