



News Briefs

- **2002 Farm Bill Contains Significant Conservation Measures, Though Draws Fire**

Following approval by Congress in early May, the Farm Bill, known formally as the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, was signed into law by President Bush on May 13. The six-year bill governing federal agricultural policy will cost \$190 billion over the next decade, a 77% increase over existing programs (AP, May 13). New and expanded conservation programs will account for one-fifth of the total package (*Energy & Environment Daily*, May 9). Organic, conservation, and rural development groups point to a number of gains contained in the overall legislation, including new funds to promote stewardship practices on working farms and ranches, to protect farmland from urban sprawl, and to assist farmer-owned businesses. Organic agriculture initiatives include \$15 million for research, \$5 million in organic certification cost-share, and exemptions to 100% organic farmers from mandatory commodity promotion programs. The bill language makes organic research a “legitimate priority” for all USDA Research, Education, and Extension programs, says the Organic Farming Research Foundation. A \$40 million value-added market development grants program will expand producer eligibility for projects likely to increase their share of agricultural and food system profit. Despite these advances, some analysts—and many critics—assert that the overall legislation will fail to sustain the U.S. farm and rural economy, and any potential environmental benefits will be offset by record-level subsidy payments for major crops. They allege that the bill’s high crop supports to be paid to the largest farms, and its failure to address increasing concentration in the livestock industry, will lead to continued overproduction of a few key commodities, and more low prices, thereby promoting continued farmer dependence on government, and further losses of small and mid-sized farms. A guide to “Farm Bill 2002” from the USDA and other federal agencies is online at www.usda.gov/farmbill.

- **Comprehensive Review of Organic-vs.-Conventional Food Quality and Safety is Available**

Two New Zealand food scientists have analyzed more than 200 reports from the international literature to compare organic and conventionally produced foods. A major finding from their study of nutritional value, sensory quality, and food safety is that “[t]here are few well-controlled studies...capable of making valid comparisons in these areas.” They found no strong evidence that organic and conventional foods differ in concentrations of various nutrients; an exception was reduced nitrate levels in organic crops. The data on flavor and other sensory qualities were inconsistent, and further studies of certified organic harvesting and distribution systems, to reveal any differences in product freshness and maturity, were advised. They found “no evidence that organic foods may be more susceptible to microbial contamination than conventional foods.” “While it is likely that organic foods are lower in pesticide residues, there has been very little documentation of residue levels.” For a full evaluation of the two food systems, “many other aspects such as environmental, social, political, and economic factors must also be considered,” they concluded. The article appears in the journal *Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition* (Volume 42, No. 1, 2002); for more information, contact lead author Diane Bourn, e-mail diane.bourn@stonebow.otago.ac.nz.

- **Organically Grown Means Less Pesticide, According to “First Detailed Analysis”**

Fruits and vegetables grown organically contain significantly fewer residues from synthetic pesticides than conventional or IPM-grown foods, and residue levels, when present, are much lower, according to a report in *Food Additives and Contaminants* (May 2002). The study team analyzed existing pesticide residue data collected by the USDA, the California Department of Pesticide Regulation, and Consumers Union (CU). The results were consistent across the three testing programs, which covered 94,000 food samples from 20 major crops. For the USDA samples, 23% of organic produce contained one or more pesticide residues, compared to 73% of conventional foods and 47% of foods marketed as IPM-grown or with ‘no detectable residues’; multiple residues were found in 46% of conventional foods, compared to 7% of organic foods. Overall comparisons of a given crop and pesticide showed lower pesticide levels two-thirds of the time in the organic samples, compared to conventionally grown. Synthetic pesticides in organic produce were attributed largely to long-banned organochlorine insecticides (DDT and others) that persist in the environment. Despite scientific uncertainties of possible harm, “exposure to fewer and lower dietary residues should translate into smaller risks,” the authors wrote. A summary of the report, called the “first detailed analysis of pesticide residue data in foods grown organically and conventionally” by CU senior scientist and co-author Edward Groth, is online at www.consumersunion.org; a *New York Times* article (May 8) on the report is available from Common Dreams News Center at www.commondreams.org.

- **Honeybees Face Multiple Threats, Including Reduced Federal Research**

“The honeybee in America stands on the edge of the abyss,” imperiled by multiple threats that include potential cuts in federal research spending, according to a *Washington Post* (May 14) article. One-third of fruit and vegetable crops need insect pollination, which is achieved most reliably by the honeybee, *Apis mellifera*. Honeybee colonies across the U.S. have been decimated in recent years by two distinct spider-like parasites, the tracheal mite and the varroa mite, which entered the country in the mid-1980s. East Coast states were especially hard-hit by drought and mite-related causes in the winter of 2000-2001, and despite a federal restocking program, winter losses “remain far higher than in pre-mite times.” Higher management costs have reduced the number of commercial apiarists, said an official from the American Beekeepers Federation. Fewer managed hives, in turn, lead to fewer wild colonies nearby; wild honeybees are down by 80%. Given the insects’ current woes, “beekeepers from California to Virginia are scratching their heads” over a proposal to shut down several USDA bee research laboratories. Bee lab funding in the Bush Administration’s fiscal 2003 budget proposal would decline by more than half (from \$5.7 to \$2.5 million) by closing facilities in Beltsville (MD), Tucson (AZ), and Baton Rouge (LA), leaving a single lab in Weslaco (TX). Prior federal research has led to a number of useful tools to better control parasitic infections, including a widely used wire-screen base, developed in Beltsville, that keeps mites from entering beehives. Baton Rouge researchers are working on a longer-term solution: using resistance genes from the Russian honeybee to create mite-tolerance in honeybee races common in the U.S. The *Post* article is available online at www.washingtonpost.com.

- **New Iowa Livestock Confinement Law is Praised by Public-Interest Groups**

Legislation signed on April 29 by Iowa’s Governor Tom Vilsack, placing new restrictions on the state’s confinement livestock industry, is a “significant achievement,” says a broad-based coalition of environmental, health, farm, and other public-interest groups. The new requirements effective immediately include permits for smaller confinements, and for building earthen manure lagoons, regardless of confinement size; and certification that concrete manure storage facilities meet state standards (AP, April 30). Additional key strengths, according to the Iowa Environmental Council (IEC), a coalition member, include a phosphorus standard for manure management, to control a leading cause of water quality problems; greater restrictions on facility locations near waterways; and adequate funding for oversight and enforcement. The new measures will “[protect] the long-term sustainability of both the livestock industry and the environment,” said an IEC official. Although the regulations cover various kinds of confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs), Iowa’s mega-hog farms, which “foul the air and water, and cause a stench that ruins the pristine nature of rural life,” according to critics, have been at the center of ongoing debate on livestock confinement in rural Iowa. “Summary of the Livestock Bill (SF 2293)” including views on its strengths and weaknesses is available online at www.earthweshare.org, or from IEC, 711 East Locust St., Des Moines, IA 50309; (515) 244-1194.

- **Heavy Antibiotic Use in Livestock Reduces Their Effectiveness in People, Says New Research**

The widespread use of antibiotics to promote growth in farm animals may shorten the period of their usefulness in treating human disease, according to new research published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (April 30). Using a computer model to study the medical consequences of antibiotic use in livestock, the Maryland research team found that antibiotic use for growth promotion or disease control “hastens the appearance of [antibiotic-resistant] bacteria in humans.” “It’s not a good idea to use new drugs in animals until they’ve already been spent in humans,” lead author David L. Smith told *Science News* (April 27). The researchers argue against the common commercial practice of introducing similar antimicrobial agents in animals and humans at the same time; they urge limiting farm use of a given drug until resistance is already widespread in people, an approach contrary to proposed U.S. Food and Drug Administration policy that would allow use of a given antibiotic in animals until resistance by human microbes reaches a critical threshold. As much as 80% of antibiotics produced in the U.S. are used in agriculture, with a substantial proportion used non-therapeutically to promote faster growth in livestock. The *Science News* article is available online at www.sciencenews.org; for a reprint of the original journal article, along with a related commentary article from the same PNAS issue, contact D.L. Smith, Dept. of Epidemiology and Preventative Medicine, University of Maryland School of Medicine, 660 W. Redwood St., Baltimore, MD 21201; dave@needles.umaryland.edu.

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- **Bloom Time Tracking Will Allow Growers to Predict Pest Attack, Reduce Insecticide Use**

Data accumulated by an Ohio researcher on the flowering times of trees and shrubs, and insect activity, promises to help growers to better predict the emergence of invasive pests before they can harm plants. His work expands on the use of 'phenology,' an age-old technique of studying recurring biological phenomena and their relationship to weather, to help reduce insecticide use by landscapers and gardeners. Data collected in Wooster, Ohio, show that forsythia and star magnolia, for instance, bloom a day or two before the eastern tent caterpillar appears. "Being able to predict the insects' emergence accurately means one application of pesticide will do the job instead of two or more," entomologist Daniel Herms told the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (May 9). Good timing will serve integrated pest management (IPM) goals by allowing pesticides to be applied when target insects are most vulnerable, and improving the effectiveness of short-lived pesticides with lower environmental impact. First commercial use of the technique is planned for Lake County, home to one-third of Ohio's nurseries. "Biological Clocks," Special Circular 186-02, is online at <http://ohioline.osu.edu/sc186>, or available from SCT, Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center, (330) 263-3700; e-mail ct-oardc@osu.edu.

Resources

"The Agribusiness Examiner's" first 162 weekly issues (1998 through May 2002), monitoring corporate agribusiness from a public interest perspective, are searchable online at www.ea1.com/CARP; for more information, contact A.V. Krebs, Editor, Corporate Agribusiness Research Project, (425) 258-5345; avkrebs@earthlink.net.

"Assessing the Impact of Integrator Practices on Contract Poultry Growers" from Farmers' Legal Action Group is online at www.flaginc.org/pubs/poultry.htm; the printed report is free from Jill Krueger at FLAG, (651) 223-5400.

"Designing Feeding Programs for Natural and Organic Pork Production" (07736-BU), an 18-page bulletin from the Alternative Swine Production Systems Program, is \$8 from University of Minnesota Distribution Center, 1-800-876-8636; order@extension.umn.edu.

"FAO Glossary of Biotechnology for Food and Agriculture," 2001 revised version of a searchable database from the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, is online at www.fao.org/biotech/index_glossary.asp; or as an electronic file from C. Sanderson, christina.sanderson@fao.org.

"Farm Animal Health and Well-Being," Technical Working Paper No. 10 for the State of Minnesota Generic Environmental Impact Statement on Animal Agriculture, is available on compact disc for \$8 plus \$3 shipping/handling from author Marlene K. Halverson, 10346 S. Dennison Blvd., Northfield, MN 55057; (612) 669-8105; TWP No. 10 (324 printed pages) is also online at www.mnplan.state.mn.us/eqb/geis/2000/proposals.html.

"Guide to Environmental Labels," a searchable database of eco-labels and certifying organizations, is available online from Consumers Union at www.eco-labels.org.

"Kansas Locally Raised Food Directory," an interactive website for producers and consumers, is available online from Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Alternative Crops at www.oznet.ksu.edu/kcsaac/fooddirectory/welcome.asp; or contact Jana Beckman, KCSAAC, (785) 532-1440.

"Organic Land Care Standards: Practices for Design and Maintenance of Ecological Landscapes," 60 pages, is \$20 from Northeast Organic Farming Association/Massachusetts, 411 Sheldon Rd., Barre, MA 01005; (978) 355-2853; www.massorganic.org; for information on certification courses and public programs on organic landscape management, contact Marilyn Castriotta, Organic Land Care Program Administrator, (781) 646-6322; castriotta@aol.com.

"Phenology Web Links: (1) Sequence of Bloom, Floral Calendars, What's in Bloom; (2) Birds, Bees, Insects and Weeds" (April 2002 Update), a resource guide to using phenology in IPM, and more generally, is available online at www.attra.org; the print version is free from Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas, 1-800-346-9140.

"Poisoned Waters: Pesticide Contamination of Waters and Solutions to Protect Pacific Salmon," 35 pages, from the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides, and Washington Toxics Coalition is online at www.pesticide.org/CleanWaterSalmon.html; the printed report is \$8 from NCAP, P.O. Box 1393, Eugene, OR 97440-1393; (541) 344-5044.

"A Primer on Agritourism and Ecotourism Startups and Management" is \$20, and **"Agritourism and Nature Tourism in California,"** a how-to manual, is \$25, both from Small Farm Center, University of California, One Shields Ave., Davis, CA 95616; (530) 752-8136; sfcenter@ucdavis.edu; more information on the Center's "Agricultural Tourism Project" is available online at www.sfc.ucdavis.edu/agritourism/agritour.html.

"2002 Oregon Tilth Certified Organic Directory" is \$8 from Oregon Tilth Certified Organic, 470 Lancaster Dr. NE, Salem, OR 97301; (541) 729-5673; lacey@tilth.org; on the Internet, www.tilth.org.

"University of California Small Farm Center Online Resource Library," a searchable database of abstracts on small farms topics, with free delivery of full-text articles, is online at www.sfc.ucdavis.edu/library; for more information, contact Small Farm Center, (530) 752-8136; sfcenter@ucdavis.edu.

Upcoming Events

June 21-23, "The Making of Foreclosure, Celebrating a Generation of Influence," a 3-day 20th anniversary event celebrating the making of the community education film, "Foreclosure," including "The Future of Farming Is in Our Hands," an intergenerational dialogue, will be held in Milan, MN; contact City of Milan, (320) 734-4411; cityofmilan@fedteldirect.net; or Audrey Arner, Land Stewardship Project, (320) 269-2105.

July 6 (plus additional dates) for Kansas Graziers Association 2002 farm tours and workshops; contact Mary Howell, KGA Secretary, 1532 Yonder Rd., Frankfort, KS 66427; (785) 363-7306; marshallcofair@networksplus.net.

July 9 until August 17, Summer 2002 Farm Tours (4 one-day events during this period) will be held near Albany, NY; for a seasonal schedule, contact Regional Farm & Food Project, 148 Central Ave., Albany, NY 12206; (518) 427-6537; farmfood@capital.net; or Christopher Reed, (518) 672-7743.

July 14-17, American Forage and Grassland Council Annual Conference/Trade Show will be held in Bloomington, MN, in conjunction with 10th Annual Minnesota Alfalfa and Forage Exposition, **July 17-18**; contact Minnesota Forage and Grassland Council, University of Minnesota, (651) 436-3930; mfgc@umn.edu; on the Internet, www.afgc.org.

July 15 is the submission deadline for posters for 3rd California Conference on Biological Control to be held **August 15-16** in Davis; contact B. Nakamoto, College of Agricultural & Environmental Science, UC Davis, (530) 752-1606; www.biocontrol.ucr.edu.

July 18-20, "Ripe from Downtown," a national symposium on garden-based entrepreneur programs for youth, plus pre-conference workshop, will be held in Cleveland, OH; contact Cindy Walker, Communications Manager, Cleveland Botanical Garden, (216) 721-1695 ext. 172; cwalker@cbgarden.org.

July 19-August 8, Permaculture Design Course for college credit through the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, sponsored by Living Routes Inc., will be held in Shutesbury, MA; for information, 1-888-515-7333; programs@LivingRoutes.org.

July 24-25, "Field Course in Organic Management," intensive training in the fundamentals of conversion, and organic field crop production, will be held in Lamberton, MN; contact Molly Werner, Southwest Research and Outreach Center, (507) 752-7373; werne022@tc.umn.edu.

July 28, August 7 and 22, September 26, and October 15 are the dates for 2002 field days, farm tours, and other events in Pennsylvania; contact Kate Francis, Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture, (570) 387-6327; info@pasafarming.org.

July 29-31, Mid-Atlantic Dairy Grazing Conference will be held in Hickory, NC; contact Steve Washburn, Dept. of Animal Science, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC 27695-7621; (919) 515-7726; Steve_Washburn@ncsu.edu.

July 30, "Farms, Food and the Future," a one-day conference on value-added agriculture, will be held in Ames, IA; for program information, contact Iowa Dept. of Agriculture & Land Stewardship, (515) 281-5321; for registration information, contact Deb Schmidt, Continuing Education & Communications Services, (515) 294-5961.

July 31 is the registration deadline for "The Role of Genetics and Evolution in Biological Control," IOBC International Symposium, to be held **October 14-15** in Montpellier, France; information is available at www.iobc.agrpolis.fr/symposium2002.

July 31 is the submission deadline for papers for 2002 Berlin Conference on the Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change, to be held **December 6-7** in Berlin, Germany; contact sabine.campe@pik-potsdam.de; www.environmental-policy.de.

August 8-9, "Whole Farm Planning" workshop preceding the Northeast Organic Farming Association's 28th Annual Summer Conference to be held **August 9-11** in Amherst, MA; contact NOFA Summer Conference, c/o Dennis & Audrey Cronin, 17 June St., Auburn, MA 01501; (508) 799-2278; nofareg@juno.com; or Jack Kittredge, (978) 355-2853; on the Internet, www.massorganic.org.

August 12-13, 2002 Nebraska Grazing Conference will be held in Kearney, NE; contact Buffalo County Extension Office, 1400 E 34, Kearney, NE 68847; (308) 236-1235; on the Internet, www.grassland.unl.edu/grazeconf.htm.



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