



News Briefs

- **Fundamental Reform of EU Farm Policy Is Proposed by European Commission**

The European Commission, executive arm of the European Union, issued last month its mid-term review proposing fundamental reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (London's *Times*, July 16). Costing the equivalent of \$41 billion a year, the 40-year-old system of agricultural aid and subsidies, known as CAP, consumes nearly half of the EU's annual spending. The expensive program "results in...production of too much food at subsidized prices that undercut the developing world, favoring large farms and eating up too much of Europe's budget" (*New York Times*, July 11). The reform package would break the current link between subsidy payments and the type or amount of food produced, limit subsidies paid to larger farms, and gradually shift the savings to broader rural development measures determined by each member nation. Under the Commission's plan, producers would receive direct, flat-rate payments tied more closely to environmental, animal welfare, and food quality standards, with funding reduced by 20 percent over 7 years for all but the smallest farms. EU Agriculture Commissioner Franz Fischler told a July 12 conference that agricultural policy is doomed to fail if it does not respond to "society's manifold expectations towards agriculture." According to the Commission, besides supporting farm incomes, public spending for the farm sector "must yield more in return regarding food quality, the preservation of the environment and animal welfare, landscapes, cultural heritage, or enhancing social balance and equity." Intense debate and negotiation by EU member states in upcoming months are expected to determine the final provisions. The mid-term review proposal, "Towards Sustainable Farming," and related documents are available online at http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/mtr/index_en.htm.

- **California Agriculture Will Be Subject to Federal Clean Air Rules, Says EPA**

California agriculture will be subject to federal clean air rules, thereby requiring "significant polluters" to apply for pollution permits, according to a July 24 announcement from the EPA (*Los Angeles Times*, July 27). The move to regulate emissions from the state's farm and livestock operations, part of a legal settlement reached last May with health, environmental, and community groups (Environment News Service, May 15, <http://ens-news.com>), would override a state law, in place since the mid-1970s, exempting agriculture from stringent standards to reduce ozone-forming gases and particulate matter. Large farming operations emitting 25 or more tons of smog-forming pollutants annually, primarily from diesel-powered irrigation equipment, confined animal feeding operations, and large manure-disposal lagoons, are potential targets for the new permitting process (*Modesto Bee*; *Fresno Bee*, July 25), a 'first step' allowing officials to gather data needed to put regulatory programs into practice. "Perhaps just a few hundred" of the 87,000 agricultural operations statewide will likely require permits, a California Air Resources Board official told the *Times*. The San Joaquin Valley, located within California's Central Valley region, the state's agricultural locus, is "one of the most polluted air basins in the country," according to the ENS story. Permitting authority will return to state control once California removes the agricultural exemption from state law. The EPA will accept public comments on its proposed plan until September 3; more information is online at www.epa.gov/Region9/air/ca/title5.html.

- **EPA Rules for Land Use of Sewage Sludge Fail to Safeguard Public Health, NRC Report Finds**

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency rules governing the land application of treated sewage sludge are based on "outdated science," according to a report from the National Research Council, and thus fail to fully protect public health (Environment News Service, July 3, <http://ens-news.com>). The committee report urges the EPA to "update its standards using improved methods for assessing health risks," to perform a new national survey of contaminating chemicals and pathogens in sewage sludge, and to further investigate reports of a variety of health problems in workers who apply it to land and residents who live nearby. Under a 1993 Clean Water Act rule, sewage sludge treated to reduce levels of certain toxic chemicals and disease-causing microbes, known as biosolids, can be applied to soils. The EPA set its rules governing land use of biosolids using an "unreliable 1988 survey" to identify hazardous chemicals in sewage sludge from wastewater processing plants, and other chemicals have since been found to be of "potential concern," according to the NRC's July 2 news release. Emerging pathogens such as *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Listeria* were also not considered in the decade-old federal rules (Reuters, July 4). Currently over half of the 5.6 million tons of treated sludge produced yearly in the U.S. is used to fertilize agricultural lands or to reclaim damaged soils. Information from the EPA on biosolids use and disposal, including a link to the 220-page report, *Biosolids Applied to Land: Advancing Standards and Practices*, is online at www.epa.gov/ost/biosolids; print copies will be available from National Academy Press, 1-800-624-6242.

- **EPA Tightens Federal Rules on ‘Recycling’ Hazardous Waste in Fertilizer, Urges Tougher State Laws**

The EPA said last month it will regulate certain toxic contaminants in steel-mill waste used as farm and garden fertilizer (*Seattle Times*, July 20, www.seattletimes.com). The new ruling, which closes a legal loophole exempting mining industry products from federal hazardous-waste laws, will require that steel-mill wastes “meet strict limits on lead, cadmium, arsenic, mercury, chromium and dioxins” when used in products applied to soils. The regulation applies to zinc micronutrient fertilizers, which account for nearly all micronutrient fertilizers made from hazardous-waste ingredients (EPA, July 26). The agency had received nearly 1,000 public comments on its proposed rule, most calling for stronger national regulation, including consumer labeling of fertilizers made from hazardous waste, the *Times* wrote. Finding that fertilizers are “generally safe,” the EPA views a broad regulatory program as unnecessary, while noting also that “a wide range of fertilizers and soil amendments, including many products...not made from recycled wastes, contain appreciable levels of heavy metal contaminants.” It urges individual states to adopt laws such as those in Washington, Texas, and California, which since 1997 have set limits on toxic chemicals in fertilizer. Washington’s state law, called “highly successful” in reducing fertilizer contamination, restricts nine toxic chemicals and publicizes chemical analyses of registered products. The EPA ruling states also that the agency will continue to study the safety of Ironite, a lawn and garden fertilizer brand made from Arizona mine tailings. Last June, 23 health and environmental groups called on home improvement stores to stop selling the product because of high arsenic and lead levels (Environment News Service, June 12, <http://ens-news.com>). The EPA’s final 84-page rule and background documents are available on the Internet at www.epa.gov/epaoswer/hazwaste/recycle/fertiliz/; more information is available from Washington Toxics Coalition (www.watoxics.org) and Washington State Department of Agriculture (www.wa.gov/agr/PestFert/Fertilizers/Metals.htm).

- **Toxic Effects of Environmental Antibiotics on Plants Is Emerging Research Focus**

Although a growing body of research indicates the presence of antibiotics in the environment and the harm they may pose to people and wildlife, little attention has been paid to the potential harmful effects of antibiotic residues, present at trace (or higher) levels in farm animal and human wastes, on crops and other plants (*Science News*, June 29). Much of the antibiotics and other pharmaceuticals used in human medicine or fed to animals is excreted and can reach farm fields through several routes, including animal manures and sewage sludge applied as fertilizer, or surface waters used for irrigation. Yet only a few studies have looked into the possible phytotoxic effects of contaminating drugs, and whether they are directly toxic or act by disrupting microbial or chemical processes in soils. Preliminary findings, mostly from studies in Europe, “paint a disquieting picture: A wide range of plants—from weeds to field crops—are susceptible to antibiotic poisoning.” Differences in crop uptake rates and tissue storage patterns raise concerns also that some crops, though not harmed enough to show poor health or lowered yields, may deliver antibiotics into the food supply. Early evidence shows a good deal of variation in drug persistence in waste materials and treated soils. A lack of systematic data collection on antibiotics used in humans or livestock in North America, or the amounts applied to farmlands, has hampered studies of antibiotic impacts on plants, the article notes. The fully referenced article is available online at www.sciencenews.org.

- **Pesticides Increase Parasite-Induced Limb Deformities in Frogs, Recent Study Shows**

Field studies conducted by a Pennsylvania State University research team show that infection with trematode parasites, combined with exposure to pesticide-laden agricultural runoff, increases major limb deformities in wood frogs (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, July 23). The highest rates of hind-limb defects occurred in central Pennsylvania ponds that contained both pesticides and parasitic larvae. Developing frogs shielded from the parasites did not develop deformities, even when pesticides were present, a finding that extends prior work in the western U.S. showing that trematode infection is essential in causing the limb defects in several frog species. In the new report, laboratory studies with two common pesticides, atrazine and malathion, tested at levels below the EPA-recommended threshold for safe drinking water, confirmed the link between trace-level pesticide exposure and increased trematode infection. The lab-reared tadpoles exposed to pesticides had higher rates of infection, with reduced white blood cells and slower development, suggesting that the chemicals reduce immune system function and make the frogs more vulnerable to the parasite-induced limb abnormalities. Evidence that widely used pesticides can weaken the immune system of vertebrates

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“might be a much greater concern than any yet raised in the investigation,” say scientists who reviewed the study (*Washington Post*, July 15). Additional news stories are available online from Environment News Service (July 9, <http://ens-news.com>) and *Newsday* (July 23, www.newsday.com); for a reprint of the journal article, contact author Joseph Kiesecker, Department of Biology, Penn State University, (814) 865-8778; jmk23@psu.edu.

- **“More Stringent Rules on Tracing and Labeling” of GM Foods Are Approved by European Parliament**

The European Parliament announced on July 3 its approval of “more stringent rules on tracing and labeling” of genetically modified food and animal feed sold within the 15-nation bloc. The draft regulations, which require final approval by EU governments, are “the latest step toward Europe reopening the process of approving the sale and production of new varieties of GM grains frozen by an unofficial moratorium since 1998” (Reuters, July 5, www.planetark.org). The plan would mandate labeling of all food items containing at least 0.5 percent GM content, or lower if scientifically acceptable, and containing ingredients such as refined sugars and oils whose GM content is not detectable but can be identified through traceability schemes (London’s *Independent*, July 4). The Parliament threw out the European Commission’s weaker proposal for a one percent limit for accidental GM contamination. It also rejected compulsory labeling of products such as milk, eggs, and meat from animals raised on GM feed, and foods made with GM enzymes or other processing aids, as well as a ‘GM-free’ label. The rules would also ban shipments of conventional food and feed containing traces of unapproved GM materials (Environment News Service, July 3, <http://ens-news.com>). “Environmental and consumer organizations have hailed the [Parliament’s] vote as a victory for consumer choice while the biotechnology industry and the U.S. have registered disappointment” (European Report, July 6); it follows a 2001 survey showing that 94% of Europeans want the right to choose whether to eat GM food (London’s *Guardian*, July 2). The tight limits on GM content “would force significant changes in [U.S.] agricultural practices to access EU markets,” and, according to a U.S. official cited by ENS, the proposed regulations “will seriously impair trade in agricultural biotech products.” U.S. grain industry officials told Reuters that the traceability rule will impose added costs to segregate the corn, soybean, and cotton products imported into Europe, a \$6.3-billion annual market for U.S. agricultural commodities. The July 3 news release is online at www.europarl.eu.int/home/default_en.htm.

Resources

“Adoption of Bioengineered Crops,” 61-page report on the economic dimensions of farm-level adoption of transgenic crops with pest management traits, is online at www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aer810; to purchase a print copy (#ERS-AER-810), call 1-800-999-6779.

“Biotech Bias on the Editorial and Opinion Pages of Major United States Newspapers and News Magazines,” 23 pages, from Food First/Institute for Food & Development Policy, is online at www.foodfirst.org/media/press/2002/biotechbiasreport.pdf; or contact Food First, (510) 654-4400; foodfirst@foodfirst.org.

“Fatal Harvest: The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture,” 320-page paperback edition with 40 essays by leading agroecological thinkers, from Foundation for Deep Ecology/Island Press, is \$16.95 from Island Press (1-800-828-1302; www.islandpress.com) or other book retailers; an expanded 396-page edition with photos is also available.

FoodRoutes Network (formerly Fires of Hope) has launched a new website, www.foodroutes.org, to promote locally grown foods; producers and organizations are invited to submit information online about local food products or local food systems initiatives; for more information, contact Joani Walsh, (814) 349-6000; joani@foodroutes.org.

“Grazing for Change: Range and Watershed Management Success Stories in California,” a 36-page booklet, is free from California Cattlemen’s Association, (916) 444-0845; staff@calcattlemen.org; www.cattlemen.org/GC.htm.

“How Sustainable Agriculture Can Address the Environmental and Human Health Harms of Industrial Agriculture,” a review article in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* (May 2002), is online via a link from www.jhsph.edu/environment; for a reprint, contact lead author Leo Horrigan, Center for a Livable Future, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, 615 N. Wolfe St., Rm. 8503, Baltimore, MD 21205; lhorriga@jhsph.edu.

“Manufacturing Drugs and Chemicals in Crops: Biopharming Poses New Threats to Consumers, Farmers, Food Companies, and the Environment,” 97 pages, from Genetically Engineered Food Alert coalition, is online at www.gefoodalert.org; or contact Matt Rand, National Environmental Trust, (202) 887-8800.

“Riparian Areas: Functions and Strategies for Management,” a 386-page report from the National Academies’ National Research Council, is online at www.nap.edu/books; for a print copy, contact National Academy Press, 1-888-624-8373; zjones@nas.edu.

“Working Landscapes in the Midwest: Creating Sustainable Futures for Agriculture, Forestry, and Communities,” 118 pages, proceedings from a November 2001 conference in Delavan, Wisconsin, is available online at www.workinglandscapes.org; for more information, contact winfo@iatp.org.

Upcoming Events

August 21, “Managing Animal Waste: A Practical Workshop,” on anaerobic digesters for minimizing environmental hazards of animal feedlots while producing renewable energy; contact The Minnesota Project, (651) 645-6159 ext. 21; cnelson@mnproject.org.

August 30 is the submission deadline for posters for “Northwest Symposium on Organic and Biointensive Farming: Advances in Research and Education,” to be held **November 8** in Yakima, WA, in conjunction with Tilth Producers of Washington Annual Conference on **November 8-10**; regarding posters, contact Carol Miles, (360) 576-6030; milesc@wsu.edu; <http://csanr.wsu.edu>; for conference information, contact Nancy Allen, (206) 442-7620; nancy@tilthproducers.org.

September 6 is the abstract submission deadline for papers for an edited volume on “The Role of Rural-Urban Linkages in Sustainable Agriculture”; contact Karen Krug, Centre for the Environment, Brock University, St. Catharines, ON L2S 3A1 Canada; karen.krug@brocku.ca, or Robert Feagan, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 756-8228 ext. 5708#; rfeagan@wlu.ca.

September 6 is the preproposal submission deadline for North Central Region SARE Research and Education Grants; contact NC SARE office in Lincoln, NE, (402) 472-7081; ncsare@unl.edu; www.sare.org/ncsare.

September 16-19, “Changing Places—Changing Faces,” National Extension Tourism Conference 2002, will be held in Traverse City, MI; contact Phil Alexander, (989) 731-0272; alexande@msue.msu.edu; <http://tourism.msu.edu/Net-2002.htm>.

September 17 and 19, Conservation Tillage 2002 Conference will be held in Davis and Five Points, CA; contact Jeff Mitchell, University of California, (559) 646-6565; mitchell@uckac.edu; <http://groups.ucanr.org/ucct>.

September 17-20, Third National Small Farm Conference will be held in Albuquerque, NM; contact Edmund Gomez, New Mexico Small Farm Coordinator, (505) 852-2668, gr@nmsu.edu; www.reeusda.gov/smallfarm.

September 18-19, Network of Food Business Venture Centers and Incubator Facilities—First Annual Conference and Education Symposium, a best practices workshop for organizations assisting food ventures locally and regionally, will be held in New Brunswick, NJ; contact Marta Zurbriggen, (732) 932-1000 ext. 572; zurbriggen@aesop.rutgers.edu.

September 19 (Quitman, AR) **and 24-26** (Branson, MO), **October 8-10** (Clemson, SC) **and 17** (Spring Hill, TN), Sustainable Livestock Management Workshops will be held; contact ATTRA, 1-800-346-9140; www.attra.org/beef/index.html.

September 19-21, “Pasturing for Profit: Advanced Grazing Management,” will be held in Poteau, OK; contact Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture, (918) 647-9123; mailbox@kerrcenter.com; www.kerrcenter.com.

September 21-22, “Future Harvests: Fatal and Otherwise,” 24th Annual Prairie Festival, will be held in Salina, KS; contact The Land Institute, 2440 E. Water Well Rd., Salina, KS 67401; (785) 823-5376; theland@landinstitute.org; www.landinstitute.org.

September 21-22, Second “Northeast Regional Small Farm and Rural Living Exposition” will be held in Gilbert, PA; contact Warren County (NJ) Extension Office, (908) 475-6503; or Robert Mickel, Exhibits Chair, Hunterdon County (NJ) Agricultural Agent, (908) 788-1338; mickel@aesop.rutgers.edu; www.smallfarmexpo.org.

September 24-25, “Livestock Grazing for Vegetation Management” will be held in Sparks, NV; for conference information, contact Hudson Glimp, University of Nevada at Reno, (775) 784-4254; hglimp@cabnr.unr.edu; <http://grant-adams.wsu.edu>.

September 24-26, “Diversifying Your Agricultural Operation,” a conference on agri-entrepreneur opportunities, supported by Western Region SARE Professional Development Program, will be held in Sheridan, WY; contact Boyd Byelich, USDA-NRCS, (307) 772-2015; or Cindy Garrestson-Weibel, Wyoming Business Council, (307) 777-6589; www.agdiversity.org/education.htm.

September 26-27, “Working with Organic Farmers: Enhancing Agency Involvement in the Northeast” will be held in Kerhonkson, NY; for workshop information, contact Vern Grubinger, Organic PDP Conference, University of Vermont Extension, (802) 257-7697 ext. 13; vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu; www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/organicconf.html.



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