



News Briefs

- **‘Fast Track’ Trade Promotion Authority Becomes Law; Is Opposed by Public Interest Groups**

Last month President Bush signed Trade Promotion Authority legislation, also known as ‘Fast Track,’ giving U.S. presidents expanded power over the next five years to negotiate international trade pacts (AP Worldstream, August 6). The bill limits input from the full Congress, which can vote up or down a pending trade deal but not alter the terms. A compromise of very different versions approved by the U.S. House and Senate, the legislation contains an expanded 10-year, \$12 billion federal assistance package for farmers, ranchers, and other workers hurt by trade expansion (*Economist*, August 3), one of several concessions on issues that had formerly split lawmakers with opposing views on liberalizing trade and limiting Congressional oversight (*Baltimore Sun*, August 2). Farm groups opposing the new bill, including the National Farmers Union and the American Corn Growers Association, say that past experience with earlier trade deals—in particular the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), implemented in 1994 under an earlier version of Fast Track authority granted to the Clinton Administration—has set a flawed precedent (*Western Farm Press*, August 17). Citizen and environmental groups, organized labor, and sustainable agriculture organizations have strongly opposed Fast Track, arguing that transferring greater power to the executive branch limits democracy, paving the way for trade deals ‘behind closed doors’ that allow transnational corporations unlimited access to markets, at the expense of workers and communities, and existing health, safety, environmental, and labor laws. Last May more than 95 family farm and rural advocacy groups, including the National Family Farm Coalition (www.nffc.net) and Rural Coalition (www.ruralco.org), urged Congress to oppose Fast Track authority for the Free Trade Areas of the Americas (FTTA), a proposed extension of NAFTA to the entire Western Hemisphere. Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch campaign (www.tradewatch.org), which has documented NAFTA’s impacts on U.S. farmers, urges a “national conversation,” including full Congressional input, to promote more responsible trade policy that “suits the broad needs of U.S. farmers and consumers.”

- **International Organizations Enter Debate over Biotechnology in World Farming and Food Relief**

“Against a background of profound differences over the use of biotechnology in world farming,” including ongoing debate over genetically modified (GM) food aid to famine-threatened nations in southern Africa, the World Bank will launch an initiative intended to break the “policy deadlock” over GM food, according to London’s *Financial Times* (August 29). Conceived as a “global consultation process” to assess the risks and opportunities of a range of alternative technologies, the agricultural initiative was announced at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. The dialogue, to be chaired by the Bank’s chief scientist, Robert Watson, will bring together governments, scientists, industry, and environmental groups to exchange ideas on the future of biotechnology alongside traditional farming methods and organic agriculture; “we want to assess the scientific, economic, environmental and social aspects of all [farming] techniques,” Dr. Watson told the *Times*. A week before, the World Conservation Union (IUCN), a Geneva-based federation of 70 nations, had urged six southern African nations facing severe food deficits to reject GM food aid from the U.S. until adequate scientific study was made of its environmental impact (*Financial Times*, August 23). The IUCN, which also represents 750 non-governmental organizations, advised the countries to consider the implications of introducing GM food into their agricultural systems, fearing that GM-containing corn intended to feed the hungry might instead be planted by local farmers, potentially harming biodiversity and grain exports to countries, including the European Union, which currently ban GM foods. Citing health, economic, and environmental concerns, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Mozambique have resisted—or rejected outright—food donations from the United Nations’ World Food Programme, 75 percent of which is supplied by the U.S. Emergency food aid has been accepted by Malawi, Lesotho, and Swaziland. Seeking to defuse the growing controversy over GM food relief, on August 23 several UN agencies jointly urged food donors and recipients to “balance the spectre of millions of people starving to death alongside governments’ legitimate concerns over GM food imports,” the *Times* wrote. More information is online from the World Food Programme (www.wfp.org) and the World Bank (www.agassessment.org/indexmore.html).

- **“Risk Issues” from Animal Biotechnology Are Topped by Environmental Concerns, NRC Panel Finds**

Potential environmental problems, especially the prospect that genetically engineered fish or insects will escape and harm wild populations, top the list of “science-based concerns” associated with advances in animal biotechnology, finds a new report from a National Research Council (NRC) panel. Commissioned by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration as it prepares to rule on the safety of certain bioengineered animal products, particularly cloned cattle, the study was

intended to define the various “risk issues” relating to genetically-based animal biotechnology. It found “no evidence...that products from cloned livestock are unsafe for human consumption,” according to an August 20 statement, yet cited the difficulty of “[identifying] concerns without additional information about food consumption, which could be collected using available analytic tests”; further evaluation of the composition of foods from cloned animals “would be prudent to minimize any remaining food concerns,” the report noted. Other concerns cited include potentially allergenic proteins in modified foods; the existence of adequate controls to keep products from animals engineered to produce pharmaceutical drugs and other non-foods out of the food supply; and possible adverse impacts on animal health and welfare. Although not charged with making policy recommendations, the 12-member NRC panel stated that the current federal framework for regulating animal biotechnology may be inadequate. *Animal Biotechnology: Science-Based Concerns* (160 pages) is online at www.nap.edu; for a print copy contact National Academy Press, 1-800-624-6242.

- **Monsanto Pulls Back from Its Timeline for Marketing Controversial Genetically Modified Wheat**

The Monsanto Company has “pulled back from its stated timeline for bringing the first genetically modified (GM) wheat to market by 2005,” according to the *New York Times* (July 31), a move reflecting the firm’s “difficulty...in winning acceptance for the crop.” While not admitting that the crop will be delayed, a Monsanto official told a meeting of the U.S. Wheat Associates that the firm would bring its herbicide-resistant ‘Roundup Ready’ wheat to market once it meets “certain goals,” including building product demand and devising a system for segregating the GM variety from other wheat. He said Monsanto would proceed, however, with plans to file for federal regulatory approval later this year. According to the *Times* article, wheat millers in Japan and Europe, large export markets for U.S. and Canadian wheat, have said they do not want the bioengineered crop. The head of Italy’s largest miller, Grandi Molini Italiani, announced to the July meeting his company’s position in refusing to import GM wheat—“because consumers don’t want it”—and said it will likely avoid buying wheat from countries or regions where GM wheat is grown (Reuters, August 5). Earlier this summer, a Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) study concluded that there are too many uncertainties relating to gene spread and end-use quality to introduce GM wheat in Canada (Canadian Press, July 9; *Western Producer*, July 11). Last year, 200 groups, including the CWB, asked Canadian regulators to delay approval of GM wheat until economic, safety, and environmental concerns are addressed. In the U.S., administrators at two North Dakota research extension centers declined to host 2002 nursery trials for Roundup Ready GM wheat, citing potential contamination of the centers’ pure foundation seed stocks (CropChoice News, May 6, www.cropchoice.com). Last year North Dakota and Montana, top spring wheat-growing states, voted down legislation backed by many of the states’ farmers, which would have imposed a 2-year moratorium on planting herbicide-resistant GM wheat, though North Dakota passed a revised bill requiring that lawmakers study the issue. Farmers’ concerns about GM wheat are outlined in a recent story in the *Missoula Independent* (August 29, www.missoulanews.com); “Agronomic Assessment of Roundup Ready Wheat” (15 pages) is online at www.cwb.ca; or contact Canadian Wheat Board, Box 816 Station M, Winnipeg MB R3C 2P5, Canada; (204) 983-2996.

- **WHO Finds Weak Evidence for Human Harm from Endocrine Disruptors, Yet Adverse Impacts on Wildlife**

The body of evidence showing that human health has been harmed by exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) is “generally weak” due to “inconsistent and inconclusive results,” according to a comprehensive scientific review released last month by the World Health Organization (WHO). Endocrine disruptors, a highly diverse group of natural and synthetic chemicals, are contained in a variety of common household products, pesticides, and industrial compounds; some of them, such as the organochlorines DDT and PCBs, are widely distributed and persistent in the environment. “Although it is clear that certain environmental chemicals can interfere with normal hormonal processes, there is weak evidence that human health has been adversely affected by exposure to endocrine-active chemicals,” the report concludes, while “the evidence that wildlife have been affected adversely by exposures to EDCs is extensive.” Evidence of harm to wildlife populations and laboratory animals exposed to EDCs “substantiates human concerns” in a number of areas, including their possible role in fertility decline, altered neural and immune function, and certain cancers. Because of these concerns and scientific uncertainty, further research on potential endocrine-mediated effects in humans and wildlife should remain a high global priority, the report states. Priority research areas include studies targeting more vulnerable groups, such as infants and children, since EDC exposure during critical periods of development can have permanent effects. Despite doubts about the role played by EDCs in human disease, the potentially serious impacts of human

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exposure led Congress to write specific language on endocrine disruption into the Food Quality Protection Act and amended Safe Drinking Water Act of 1996, which the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has used to develop an EDC screening program in drinking water sources (Greenwire, August 13). The full report from WHO's International Programme on Chemical Safety, *Global Assessment of the State-of-the-Science of Endocrine Disruptors*, is available online at www.who.int/pcs/pcs_new.html.

- **World Food Prize Is Awarded to Cuban-American Soil Scientist and Agroforestry Pioneer**

Dr. Pedro Sanchez, a Cuban-American soil scientist and agroforestry pioneer, was named last month the winner of the 2002 World Food Prize for his seminal work over three decades in improving crop yields from depleted soils, while protecting the environment and improving farmers' lives in South America, Southeast Asia, and Africa. Sanchez was chosen as this year's recipient of the prestigious \$250,000 award for his "groundbreaking contributions to reducing hunger and malnutrition throughout the developing world," according to the World Food Prize Foundation. He is credited with improving soil management techniques in Brazil's Cerrado region, which brought 75 million acres of marginal lands into production in the 1970s, "the single largest increase in arable agricultural land in the last half century." As director of the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry in Nairobi, Kenya, Sanchez led efforts to develop techniques to replenish croplands with nutrients from rock phosphate and native, nitrogen-fixing trees, helping small landholders to fertilize their soils with local resources instead of costly chemical fertilizers. Such practices have "helped to eliminate slash-and-burn agriculture, expanded the forests of Africa and increased food production for many African farmers by as much as 400 percent" (*New York Times*, August 12). Sanchez currently chairs the United Nations Task Force on World Hunger, and is a visiting professor of tropical resources at the University of California, Berkeley.

Resources

"An Assessment of Organic Farming Research, Teaching and Extension at Washington State University" (CSANR #3) and **"Sustainable Agriculture in Washington State: A Look at Baseline Indicators"** (CSANR #5) are online at <http://csanr.wsu.edu/>; for free print copies, contact Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources, Washington State University, 7612 Pioneer Way East, Puyallup, WA 98371-4998; (253) 445-4626; csanr@wsu.edu.

"Directory of Organics in Canada 2002" is CDN\$7.50 from Canadian Organic Growers, Box 6408, Station J, Ottawa ON K2A 3Y6, Canada; (613) 231-9047; www.cog.ca.

"Economic Benefits with Environmental Protection: No-Till and Conservation Buffers in the Midwest" (32 pages) is online at www.ctic.purdue.edu/ctic; for print copies of the brochure, contact Conservation Technology Information Center, 1220 Potter Dr., Suite 170, West Lafayette, IN 47906; (765) 494-9555; ctic@ctic.purdue.edu.

"Going to Market: The Cost of Industrialized Agriculture," a 28-page report on the livestock industry, is online at www.iwla.org; or contact Izaak Walton League, 1619 Dayton Ave. Suite 202, St. Paul, MN 55104; (651) 649-1446.

"Landowner's Survival Guide: Resources for Agricultural Landowners in Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia," 62 pages, is \$5 (or free for Future Harvest-CASA members) from Future Harvest-CASA, 106 Market Court, Stevensville, MD 21666; (410) 604-2681; rsullivan@friend.ly.net; www.futureharvestcasa.org.

"Methods to Develop Markets to Improve the Profitability of Small Family Farms in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New Jersey," commissioned by the Rodale Institute, is \$19.95 plus \$4 shipping/handling from Rodale Institute Bookstore, 611 Siegfriedale Rd., Kutztown, PA 19530; (610) 683-6009.

"100 Years of Bacillus thuringiensis: A Critical Scientific Assessment" (18 pages), based on a November 2001 colloquium, is online at www.asmus.org; for a print copy, contact American Academy of Microbiology, 1752 N St. NW, Washington, DC 20036; fax (202) 942-9353; academy@asmus.org.

"Organic Agriculture Information website," a project of Organic Agricultural Consortium (OAC) and Scientific Congress on Organic Agricultural Research (SCOAR), is being developed for public launch in fall 2002; to submit practical and research-based information on organic agriculture, visit www.organicaginfo.org, or contact Kathleen Bielek, OAC; oac@osu.edu, or Brise Tencer, Organic Farming Research Foundation, (831) 426-6606.

"Organic Export Directory Online," a searchable database partially supported by the USDA's Foreign Agriculture Service Market Access Program, is available from Organic Trade Association at www.ota.com; or contact Dan Pratt, OTA, (413) 774-7511, ext. 13; dpratt@ota.com.

"The Rap Sheet on Animal Factories," a 21-page report on environmental, food safety, and worker safety violations by large-scale animal feeding operations, is online with related information at www.sierraclub.org/factoryfarms/rapsheets; for a print copy, contact Sierra Club, 85 Second St., 2nd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105; (415) 977-5500.

"Working Trees for Communities" (6 pages), 2002 revised edition, is free from Nancy Hammond, National Agroforestry Center, East Campus UNL, Lincoln, NE 68583-0822; (402) 437-5178; nhammond@fs.fed.us; www.unl.edu/nac.

Upcoming Events

September 20-22, Biodynamic Gardening Conference, a 3-day conference/harvest festival, will be held in Red Boiling Springs, TN; contact Jeff Poppen, Long Hungry Creek Farm, (615) 699-3843; barefootfarmer@hotmail.com.

September 20-22, "Green Genes: Choosing Genetics for Sustainable Livestock Production," American Livestock Breeds Conservancy's 25th Anniversary Conference, and New England Heritage Breeds Conservancy's annual exhibition and sale will be held in Pittsfield, MA; contact ALBC, (919) 542-5704; albc@albc-usa.org; www.albc-usa.org.

September 20-22, 26th Annual Common Ground Country Fair will be held in Unity, ME; contact Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, (207) 568-4142; cgcf@mofga.org; www.mofga.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 Agricultural Agent, (908) 788-1338; mickel@aesop.rutgers.edu; www.smallfarmexpo.org.

September 28, 9th Annual Country Living Field Day featuring alternative farm products, marketing strategies, and production systems, sponsored by Ohio State University Extension and Small Scale Agriculture Committee, will be held in Carroll County, OH; contact Mike Hogan, Agriculture and Natural Resources, OSU Extension, Carroll County, 32 W. Main St., Carrollton, OH 44615-1336; 1-800-448-8027 or (330) 627-4310; <http://carroll.osu.edu/countryliving.htm>.

October 4-5, "Production Farming with Community Development," a training workshop, will be held in Lincoln, MA; contact Food Project Institute, (781) 259-8621; www.thefoodproject.org/fpi.

October 4, "Farm to Cafeteria: Healthy Farms, Healthy Students," a national conference, will be held with "Eating Locally, Thinking Globally," 6th Annual Community Food Security Coalition Conference, **October 5-7**, in Seattle, WA; contact James Hong, (310) 822-5410; james@foodsecurity.org; or CFSC, (310) 822-5410; cfsc@foodsecurity.org.

October 8-10, "Changing Faces of Conservation and Agriculture: The Future of Working Lands," a conference sponsored by Soil and Water Conservation Society, West North Central Region, will be held in Moline, IL; contact Chris Murray, chrism@agribiz.org; or Lynn Betts, lynn.betts@ia.usda.gov; www.iaswcs.org/west_north_central.htm.

October 11 is the submission deadline for posters and abstracts for "Training Tomorrow's Trainers: A Regional Conference for Students of Sustainable Agriculture," co-sponsored by North Central SARE, to be held **October 25-27** in Madison, WI; contact Chad Kruger, (608) 265-6483; cekruger@students.wisc.edu; or Diane Mayerfeld, (515) 294-7836; dmayerfe@iastate.edu.

October 16-19, "Partnering for Our Future," 10th Annual Conference of the National Association of Farmers Market Nutrition Programs, will be held in Washington, DC; contact NAFMNP, (202) 331-7950; bv@nafmnp.org.

October 18-20, 13th Annual Bioneers Conference will be held in San Rafael, CA; contact Bioneers/Collective Heritage Institute, 1-877-246-6337; info@bioneers.org; www.bioneers.org.

October 23-26, "On the Road to Sustainable Agriculture," a national conference with on-site tours, hosted by Southern Region SARE program, will be held in Raleigh-Durham, NC; contact Southern SARE Office, (770) 412-4786; ppatton@gaes.griffin.peachnet.edu; www.griffin.peachnet.edu/sare.

October 28-30, National Poultry Waste Management Symposium will be held in Birmingham, AL; contact Richard Reynnells, USDA/CSREES/PAS, 800 9th St. SW, Rm. 702 Waterfront Center, Washington, DC 20250; (202) 401-5352; rreynells@reeusda.gov; <http://animalscience.ucdavis.edu/Avian/npwmsprog.pdf>.



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