



News Briefs

- **Expanding Organic Food Industry Is Detailed in New Report from USDA-ERS**

Growth in organic retail sales in the U.S. equaled 20 percent or more annually since 1990. This statistic, one of many compiled from government, academic, and business sources, appears in a new report on recent growth patterns and federal programs in organic agriculture from the USDA's Economic Research Service. Among other trends cited in the report: The U.S. organic food industry crossed a threshold in 2000, when for the first time, more organic food was purchased in conventional supermarkets than in any other venue; in that year, 49 percent of the \$7.8 billion spent on organic food was sold in conventional retail outlets, compared to 48 percent in natural and health foods stores and 3 percent in farmers markets and via other direct-to-consumer methods. Fresh produce is the top-selling organic category, followed by nondairy beverages, breads and grains, packaged foods, and dairy products. The number of milk cows on certified organic dairy farms more than doubled between 1994 and 1997. In terms of acreage, certified cropland doubled between 1992 and 1997, to 1.3 million acres; in 1997, California was the top producer of vegetables and herbs, and North Dakota was the top grain producer. The new USDA standards for organic food, to be fully implemented on October 21 when the new organic seal goes on display, are expected to fuel further growth in the organic sector. "Recent Growth Patterns in the U.S. Organic Foods Market" is online at www.ers.usda.gov; a print copy (AIB-777) is \$25.50 from the USDA Order Desk, 1-800-999-6779. Information on the USDA's National Organic Program is available at www.ams.usda.gov/nop.

- **Key Indicators to Monitor Health of U.S. Ecosystems Are Defined in Heinz Center Study**

A broad set of key ecological indicators, intended to monitor over time the health of the nation's lands, waters, and living resources, is defined in a report released last month by the nonpartisan Heinz Center (Environment News Service, September 26, www.ens-news.com). For the nation as a whole and 6 ecosystem types, the study assembles existing data from government and private monitoring programs into 10 categories of information, such as ecosystem size; amounts of key chemicals (such as nitrogen, phosphorus, or carbon) and contaminants; physical conditions (such as farmland or coastal erosion); condition of native and non-native species, and biological communities; and human use for goods such as food and fiber, and recreation and other services. The study found that nearly half of the ecological information needed to inform environmental and land management policy decisions is missing or inadequate; data were lacking especially for more than two-thirds of indicators relating to landscape patterns, biological communities, and ecosystem services, such as pollination or flood reduction. "State of the Nation's Ecosystems" was compiled over 5 years by 150 authors from universities, government, industry, and environmental groups. The full report and a 26-page summary are online at www.heinzcenter.org/ecosystems; the short version is also free from the Heinz Center, (202) 737-6307, and the full report is \$25 from Cambridge University Press, 1-800-872-7423.

- **White House OMB Continues to Block Technical Assistance Funds for 2002 Conservation Programs**

Nearly four months after passage of the 2002 Farm Bill, the USDA announced on September 6 the availability of FY2002 funding for the Farmland Protection Program (\$48 million) and Wetlands Reserve Program (\$275 million). The White House Office of Management and Budget has continued, however, to block the release of more than 80 percent of the technical assistance portion of Farm Bill 2002 funding authorized by Congress for the two conservation incentive programs, prompting protest by some senators and conservation groups who question the legality of the action (Greenwire, September 20). Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Tom Harkin (D-IA) complained to Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman that while the legislation provides mandatory funding for technical assistance for the FPP, WRP, and Conservation Reserve Program, which USDA estimates at \$36.5 million, the OMB released only \$5.9 million. Ferd Hoefner of the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition said the budget impasse is significant because it indicates willingness by the White House to undermine Congress on conservation funding. More information on complications regarding the release of the technical assistance funds is available online from the National Association of Conservation Districts (www.nacdnet.org) and the Farm Bill Network (www.fb-net.org/fb-updat.htm).

- **USDA Orders Testing for E. coli at Meatpacking Plants to Improve Food Safety**

To avoid a repeat of the E. coli outbreak earlier this summer that led to a nationwide recall of tainted meat from a Colorado processing plant, the USDA announced it will begin random testing for E. coli O157:H7 at all meatpacking plants in the U.S.; the new approach reverses a 1998 policy that exempted some facilities from such testing (*New York Times*; *Denver Post*, September 25). According to the September 24 statement, data collected by federal officials show the

potentially fatal microbe “is more prevalent than previously estimated.” Under the new guidelines, beef processing plants must acknowledge that E. coli O157:H7 is a likely hazard, and take steps to eliminate or reduce the risk of the bacteria in their products. The USDA will also have greater authority to close plants if inspectors find contamination with the pathogen. Nearly 19 million pounds of meat were recalled last July from a ConAgra plant in Greeley, Colorado, after several dozen people in 10 states were sickened by contaminated ground beef, making it the second-largest meat recall in U.S. history. A series of news articles on the meat recall and related developments is online at www.denverpost.com; a U.S. General Accounting Office report (#02-902, dated August 30 but released September 19) highly critical of the federal meat and poultry inspection system is available at www.gao.gov.

- **Tighter Controls Are Needed on Farm Animal Antibiotics, Says Canadian Science Panel**

The use of antibiotics in farm animals should be significantly reduced and more tightly controlled in order to counter the growing threat of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, according to a scientific advisory panel reporting to the Canadian government. It recommends monitoring the extent and purpose of antibiotic use by farmers and ranchers, and regulating antibiotics imported for agriculture; making antibiotics for disease control in farm animals available by prescription only; testing growth-promoting antibiotics for their effectiveness and phasing out those with little value; phasing out animal drugs that are important in human medicine; and tracking the rise in antibiotic resistance in livestock. “While the magnitude of the public health impact is unknown, ... resistance is a serious problem in bacterial infections of humans originating in animals,” the report concluded. The Canadian approach of increased scrutiny and regulation “cuts a middle course through a range of possible responses by government,” wrote Saskatoon’s *Star Phoenix* (August 30), falling short of the European Union’s complete ban on growth-promoting antibiotics in livestock. The findings from the two-year study, which were submitted to Health Canada officials in June, were released in mid-September for public comment. “Final Report of the Advisory Committee on Animal Uses of Antimicrobials and Impact on Resistance and Human Health” is online at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/vetdrugs-medsvet/amr/e_policy_dev.html.

- **New FDA Safety Guidelines on Livestock Antibiotics Will Assess Public Health Risks**

New guidelines for drug manufacturers on evaluating the safety of antibiotics used in farmed livestock, proposed last month by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, “could limit the use of new animal drugs in the future” (*Washington Post*, September 15). As part of the agency’s overall preapproval safety evaluation, the new approach, under development for more than 3 years, would require manufacturers to assess whether new drugs used in food-producing animals pose a human health risk by promoting the spread of antibiotic-resistant microbes. According to the *Wall Street Journal* (September 12), the strategy “creates a sliding scale for assessing risk”; instead of withdrawing a drug from the market, the agency might limit its use by requiring prescriptions, or restricting use to sick animals. “Until now,” the Journal wrote, “the biggest safety hurdle for livestock-drug makers has been showing the FDA their product doesn’t leave dangerous residue in meat.” “Guidance for Industry #152: Evaluating the Safety of Antimicrobial New Animal Drugs with Regard to Their Microbiological Effects on Bacteria of Human Health Concern,” available for public comment (docket #98D-1146) until November 27, 2002, is online at <http://www.fda.gov/cvm/antimicrobial/antimicrobial.html>.

- **USDA Will Strengthen Programs To Address Discrimination Concerns of Minority Farmers**

To ensure fair and equitable treatment and full access to its services, the USDA will adopt a number of measures intended to strengthen its programs for minority and disadvantaged farmers, “as part of the [agency’s] ongoing efforts to address concerns of black farmers.” The agency’s plan, announced on September 6, will establish a new minority loan office within the Farm Service Agency; provide an additional \$100 million for an existing operating loan program for minority farmers; and include efforts to expand technical assistance, provide more timely decisions on farm loans, and improve diversity training for employees (*Richmond Times-Dispatch*, September 14). The USDA has faced continuing criticism, including protests and sit-ins at local agency offices earlier this summer, over its handling of a landmark class-action lawsuit won by black farmers in 1999, which acknowledged decades of systematic discrimination against black farmers applying for USDA loans and subsidy programs. “Although hailed as a major civil rights victory, it has since become a major disappointment to many people it was supposed to have helped” (*Washington Post*, September 12). More information is available online from the USDA (www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/news/) and the Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association (www.coax.net/people/lwf/bfaa.htm).

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- **Chefs, Grocers Shun Genetically Modified Fish; Report to UK Government Urges Commercial Ban**

Some 200 chefs, grocers, restaurants, and seafood distributors in 40 states pledged last month not to buy or sell fish altered through genetic engineering, joining some environmental groups and fisheries that oppose GM seafood (*New York Times*, September 18; ENN, September 19, www.enn.com). Led by the Center for Food Safety, Clean Water Action, and Friends of the Earth, the boycott's chief concern is environmental—that transgenic fish could escape from fish farms and out-compete or interbreed with native species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service have joined the National Research Council in warning of potential problems with transgenic fish, the *Times* wrote. The Food and Drug Administration is currently reviewing a request from a Massachusetts fish farm to market Atlantic salmon genetically engineered to grow twice as fast as its non-GM counterpart, which is already dwindling in the wild. More information on the GM fish boycott is online from the Center for Food Safety, www.gefish.org.

Earlier in the month, UK government advisors recommended banning 'GM super salmon' from British fish farms (London's *Guardian*, September 4, www.guardian.co.uk), along with other controls on GM and cloned animals. The chair of the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission (AEBEC) told London's *Financial Times* (September 4) that action to protect the marine environment from GM fish must be international. The Commission "was particularly concerned that genetic modification should not be driven by commercial motives alone" and argued that "all developments in livestock farming should have a clear purpose and be seen in the context of society's wider relationship with animals, whether they involve traditional or new techniques" (*The Scientist*, September 5, www.the-scientist.com). "Animals and Biotechnology" from the AEBEC is available online at www.aebc.gov.uk.

Resources

"Center Progress Report 2002" (Volume 11), summaries of research and education projects in agriculture and communities, crop systems, livestock, ecology, and special topics, is free from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University, (515) 294-3711, leocenter@iastate.edu.

Conservation Security Program fact sheets including "Get Paid for Real Conservation" (#1) and "Resources of Concern" (#2) are available from the Land Stewardship Project at www.landstewardshipproject.org; for free print copies, contact Mark Schultz, LSP Policy Program Office, (612) 722-6377.

"Creating an Organic Production and Handling System Plan" (35 pgs); **"Market Gardening: A Start-Up Guide"** (16 pgs); **"Economics of Grass-Based Dairying"** (16 pgs) are among the new resource publications available online at www.attra.org; for free print copies, contact Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas, 1-800-346-9140.

"Ecoagriculture: Strategies to Feed the World and Save Biodiversity," a 296-pg book with 36 case studies on reconciling agricultural and conservation interests, from Future Harvest/CGIAR and the World Conservation Union (IUCN), is \$22 from Island Press (1-800-828-1302; www.islandpress.org) or other book retailers.

"Fields of Poison 2002: California Farmworkers and Pesticides" (37 pgs) from Pesticide Action Network North America, United Farm Workers, and California Legal Rural Assistance Foundation is online at <http://panna.igc.org>; for a print copy (in English or Spanish) contact PANNA, (415) 981-1771.

"Gene Flow from GM to non-GM Populations in the Crop, Forestry, Animal and Fishery Sectors," summary document from a UN Food and Agriculture Organization Biotechnology Forum held online from May to July 2002, is available at www.fao.org/biotech/logs/C7/summary.htm.

"Guidance for Industry #153: Drugs, Biologics, and Medical Devices Derived from Bioengineered Plants for Use in Humans and Animals," a draft document on biopharmed crops (available for public comment until January 10, 2003), is online at <http://www.fda.gov/cvm/whatsnew/whatsnew.html>; for a print copy, contact Communications Office, FDA Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, (301) 827-4573.

Heritage turkeys for the holidays, a commercial source list of heritage breeds, is available from American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, (919) 542-5704, mbender@albc-usa.org; information on heritage varieties available via the Ark USA program of Slow Food International is online at www.slowfood.org, or contact Slow Food USA, (212) 965-5641; info@slowfoodusa.org.

"Renewable Energy from Farms: Building on the Principles of Sustainable Agriculture to Achieve Sustainable Energy," a position paper from the Midwest Sustainable Agriculture Group network, is online at www.mnproject.org; or contact Carl Nelson, Minnesota Project, (651) 645-6159 ext. 21; cnelson@mnproject.org.

"SARE 2002 Annual Report" from USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education program is online at www.sare.org/highlight/2002; a print copy is free from SARE National Office, (301) 504-5230; san@sare.org.

"Wild Harvest: Farming for Wildlife and Profitability: A Report on Private Land Stewardship" (110 pgs) is online at <http://calwild.org/resources/pubs/harvest.php>; or contact California Wilderness Coalition, 2655 Portage Bay East, Suite 5, Davis, CA 95616; (530) 758-0380; info@calwild.org.

Upcoming Events

October 25-27, "Training Tomorrow's Trainers: A Regional Conference for Students of Sustainable Agriculture," co-sponsored by North Central Region SARE, University of Wisconsin Extension, and UW Center for Integrated Agriculture Systems, will be held in Madison, WI; contact Chad Kruger, (608) 265-6483; cekruger@students.wisc.edu; www1.uwex.edu/ces/ag/sustainableconference/.

October 31-November 2, "Thinking Outside the Box Sustainably," 10th National Small Farm Trade Show and Conference, will be held in Columbia, MO; contact Small Farm Today, 1-800-633-2535; www.smallfarmtoday.com.

November 1-2, "Taking Your Product from Field to Consumer," 2nd Annual Wisconsin Specialty Food Marketing Conference, will be held in Algoma, WI; contact Mary Pat Carlson, Farm Market Kitchen and Keweenaw County AgTourism Association, (920) 487-9750; mcarlson@itol.com.

November 1-3, Annual Farmer to Farmer Conference, hosted by Maine Organic Farmers & Gardeners Association and Maine Cooperative Extension, will be held in Bar Harbor, ME; contact MOFGA, (207) 568-4142; mofga@mofga.org; www.mofga.org.

November 8-9, 6th Annual Small Acreage Options, Wisconsin Value-Added & Small Farm Conference, will be held in Baraboo, WI; contact Paul Dietmann, University of Wisconsin Extension Sauk County, (608) 355-3250; paul.dietmann@ces.uwex.edu.

November 8-9, "Sustainable Communities in an Era of Globalization," National Catholic Rural Life Conference 79th Anniversary and Annual Gathering, will be held in Dearborn, MI; contact NCRLC, (515) 270-2634; ncrlc@aol.com; www.ncrlc.com.

November 8, "WSU Northwest Symposium on Organic & Biointensive Farming: Advances in Research and Education" in Yakima, WA, with "The Family Farm on the Cutting Edge," Tilth Producers of Washington Annual Conference, **November 8-10**; for symposium information, contact Carol Miles, (360) 576-6030; milesc@wsu.edu; for conference information, contact Nancy Allen, (206) 442-7620; nancy@tilthproducers.org; www.tilthproducers.org.

November 8-10, 10th Annual Urban-Rural Food Systems Conference will be held in East Troy, WI; contact Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, (262) 642-3303; mfai@michaelfieldsagainst.org; www.michaelfieldsagainst.org.

November 9-11, "Great Markets, Great Cities," 5th International Public Market Conference organized by Project for Public Spaces, will be held in New York, NY; contact Harriet Festing, Project for Public Spaces, (212) 620-5660; hfesting@pps.org.

November 14-15, Farmers Cooperatives Conference will be held in St. Louis, MO; contact Bob Cropp, Director, University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives, (608) 262-3981; cropp@aae.wisc.edu.

November 15-16, "Future Farms 2002: A Marketplace of Ideas," a conference and tradeshow, will be held in Norman, OK; contact Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture, (918) 647-9123; mailbox@kerrcenter.com; www.kerrcenter.com.

November 15-17, "Celebrating a Generation of Stewardship: Feeding Our Neighbors As We Would Ourselves," Carolina Farm Stewardship Association's 17th Annual Sustainable Agriculture Conference, will be held in Boone, NC; contact CFSA-SAC, P.O. Box 448, Pittsboro, NC 27312; (919) 542-2402; CFSA@carolinafarmstewards.org; www.carolinafarmstewards.org.

November 15-17, Native Food Summit, sponsored by First Nations Development Institute, will be held in Albuquerque, NM; contact Native Food Summit Infoline, (540) 371-5615 ext. 41; info@firstnations.org; www.firstnations.org.

November 17-19, "New Movements in New England Food and Farming Northeast Regional Conference," Second Annual 'Soul of Agriculture' Conference, will be held in Durham, NH; contact University of New Hampshire Office of Sustainability Programs, (603) 862-5040; www.sustainableunh.unh.edu.

November 21-22, "Wind Energy: New Economic Opportunities—A Conference for Minnesota and A Model for the Midwest," coordinated by Windustry Project/Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, will be held in Minneapolis, MN; contact (612) 870-3462, info@windustry.org; www.windustry.org/conference.



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