



## NEWS BRIEFS

### Flawed Safety Review Process for Genetically Engineered Foods Is Shown by CSPI Report

A flawed safety review process for genetically engineered foods is shown by a report issued last month by the Center for Science in the Public Interest. "Holes in the Biotech Safety Net" finds that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration lacks both the authority and the information needed to sufficiently assess GE food safety. CSPI sees potential benefits in bioengineered foods and finds that the few crops now on the market appear to be safe, but urges stronger regulations to allow full evaluation of "future foods engineered in increasingly complex ways." The study consisted of a review of 14 applications by crop developers (of 53 submitted to FDA since 1993), obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. It showed a "less-than-thorough safety analysis" by the agency, including obvious errors, insufficient detail, and inadequate testing for known toxicants, allergens, and anti-nutrients. In several cases, the companies declined to provide requested data about insect-resistant GE corn varieties. The report recommends that "Congress provide FDA with legal authority for mandatory review and safety approval of GE crops"; it also urges FDA to establish an approval process that allows for public comment and scrutiny by outside experts, and provide biotechnology companies with detailed safety testing guidelines as it does for drug makers. The 26-page report is online at [www.cspinet.org](http://www.cspinet.org); for a print copy, contact CSPI, phone (202) 332-9110.

### Herbicide-Resistant Weeds Associated with Genetically Engineered Crops Are Increasing, Say News Stories

The growing problem of herbicide-resistant weeds—increasingly associated with Roundup-Ready (RR) soybeans, cotton, and corn in the U.S.—was the subject of articles last month in the *Des Moines Register* (January 10) and the *New York Times* (January 14). Roundup, the world's most popular weed-killing chemical, has been used for nearly 30 years "but exploded in popularity in the late 1990s," according to the *Register* article, along with the use of genetically engineered crops designed to withstand the chemical. Their widespread adoption, especially RR soybeans that make up about 75 percent of all U.S.-grown soybeans, has led to 'survival of the fittest' conditions in which the rare weeds that survive the herbicide can flourish. In recent years, weeds resistant to glyphosate (the generic name for Roundup), particularly mares-tail (or horseweed) and waterhemp, have emerged in Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Tennessee, Kentucky, California, and at the edges of the Corn Belt in Ohio and Indiana. Some scientists say that farmers will need to reduce the use of the herbicide on RR crops, or limit the continuous planting of such crops, in order to preserve its long-term usefulness. The *Register* story and other recent news on glyphosate resistance are online from Ag Biotech InfoNet at [www.biotech-info.net/](http://www.biotech-info.net/).

### Coalition Asks Congress To Address Concentration, Restore Fairness in Livestock and Poultry Markets

A broad coalition of livestock, consumer, and rural organizations has asked Congress to improve the "dismal condition" of today's livestock markets by taking specific action to address concentration, restore competition, and impart fairness in agricultural contracts. A letter signed by 127 groups, including the Wallace Center, was sent to members of Congress on January 14. It cites USDA data showing that market power by large meatpackers has led to vastly increased profit margins over the last decade at the expense of both independent producers and consumers. The letter urges Congress to pass legislation, first introduced last year, to (1) ban livestock ownership by the largest meatpackers; (2) set minimum contract standards; (3) ensure minimum open market volume to allow reliable pricing; (4) make marketing contracts open and competitive; and (5) enhance bargaining rights for contract producers. The petition acknowledged action on January 7 by Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and three co-sponsors, who introduced a bill to ban meatpackers' ownership of livestock prior to 2 weeks before slaughter; supporters of the controversial packer ban say it is the best way for lawmakers to help improve the economic outlook of independent producers (*Land Letter*, January 30). More information from the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture is online at [www.sustainableagriculture.net/competitionSignon.php](http://www.sustainableagriculture.net/competitionSignon.php).

### **Bush Administration Proposes Trimming USDA's Conservation and Value-Added Marketing Programs**

The Bush Administration proposed in mid-January that Congress pull several hundred million dollars from USDA's conservation, nutrition, and other programs to cover a huge shortfall in technical assistance funds needed to service the programs (Greenwire, January 17). Last summer the Office of Management and Budget rejected USDA's request for technical assistance funding to implement the programs, despite "clear wording" in the 2002 Farm Bill intended to release those funds. President Bush's proposal would strip \$332.8 million from USDA programs to create a separate, discretionary account to fund technical assistance services for FY 2003. Proposed cuts include 15 percent (of prior Farm Bill-approved levels) from the Farmland Protection Program, Grassland Reserve Program, and Wildlife Incentives Program; 18 percent from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program; and 75 percent from the Value-Added Market Development Program. Groups including the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (SAC), National Association of Conservation Districts, and Defenders of Wildlife have challenged the Administration's interpretation of the conservation technical assistance provisions and urged Congress to provide full funding as mandated by law; for further information, contact SAC, phone (202) 547-5754.

### **Fair Trade Standards Will Extend to UK Organic Growers Through New Collaboration**

A new collaboration combining fair trade and organic farming standards was announced last month by the Fairtrade Foundation and the Soil Association, the UK's organic farming organization. The one-year pilot project will extend Fairtrade labeling, initially set up in 1992 to help farmers in developing countries, to organic growers in the UK who also suffer from low prices that fail to cover the cost of sustainable production. Factors including increasing supermarket competition to gain organic market share, growing imports, cosmetic standards more suited to conventional production, and overproduction in some sectors (including organic milk) have reduced prices paid to organic growers, according to London's *Guardian* (January 3); the Fairtrade mark also "aims to make a more direct link between farmers and consumers, and reduce the number of intermediaries taking a slice of the profits." Fairtrade's success "in getting a better deal for producers of major global commodities like coffee has shown alternative forms of trade are viable," a Foundation official told BBC News (January 3). More details on the broader goals of the project are provided in a January 13 public statement posted at [www.fairtrade.org.uk/pr030103.htm](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/pr030103.htm); or contact Fairtrade Foundation, 16 Baldwin Gardens, Suite 204, London, EC1N 7RJ; [mail@fairtrade.org.uk](mailto:mail@fairtrade.org.uk).

### **Federal Capacity to Judge Environmental Risks from Transgenic Fish Is Criticized in Pew Report**

The federal government is "poorly structured to assess possible environmental hazards" posed by genetically engineered fish, according to a recent study by the Pew Initiative on Food and Biotechnology (*New York Times*, January 15). The report assesses the strengths and weaknesses of a regulatory system that relies on the "new animal drug" provisions of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to evaluate the safety of fish containing novel genes, including a fast-growing transgenic salmon strain now under review by the FDA. The provisions, which require a mandatory pre-market approval process, appear to give the agency adequate authority to ensure that transgenic fish are safe to eat, but it is unclear whether they provide the agency with the legal tools and scientific expertise needed to protect wild fish or aquatic communities, the report concludes. It cites benefits that may come from bioengineered fish, but warns that the secrecy of drug applications could undermine public confidence in the regulatory system. "Future Fish: Issues in Science and Regulation of Transgenic Fish" (80 pages) is online at <http://pewagbiotech.org/research/fish>; for a free print copy, phone (202) 347-9044.

### **European Parliament Limits List of Foods Authorized for Irradiation Treatment**

The European Parliament has rejected by a wide margin proposals to expand the list of foods that can be irradiated within the 15-member European Union. The resolution, adopted by a 269-to-180 vote, limits the current approved list to dried herbs, spices, and vegetable seasonings until adequate scientific research proving irradiation's safety is conducted (European Report, December 17). The Parliament adopted a consultation paper from Hiltrud Breyer (Greens, Germany) that cited "unresolved concerns" relating to food irradiation technology, including long-term health effects, "misuse of the technology to substitute for good hygiene," safety risks to workers and the environment, illegal sales, and sustainable development goals. A press release linked to the November 8 Breyer paper is available at [www.europarl.eu.int/press/index\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.eu.int/press/index_en.htm).

## RESOURCES

■ **Agricultural Marketing Resource Center**, a web-based informational resource on value-added agriculture for independent producers and processors, a university/USDA partnership, is online at [www.AgMRC.org](http://www.AgMRC.org); or AgMRC, 1-866-277-5567; [agmrc@iastate.edu](mailto:agmrc@iastate.edu).

■ **Analysis of the European Market for Organic Food** (157 pgs), Volume 1, Organic Marketing Initiatives and Rural Development project, is 20 Euros plus S/H from Organic Centre Wales, University of Wales Aberystwyth, [organic@aber.ac.uk](mailto:organic@aber.ac.uk); a 9-page report summary and project details are online at [www.irs.aber.ac.uk/omiard/publications/index.html](http://www.irs.aber.ac.uk/omiard/publications/index.html).

■ **Conservation Directory 2003: The Guide to Worldwide Environmental Organizations** (832 pgs), from National Wildlife Federation, is \$70 from Island Press, 1-800-828-1302; searchable online version is available at [www.nwf.org](http://www.nwf.org).

■ **Earth, Plant and Compost** (73 pgs), edited by Will Brinton, from Swiss Research Institute for Biological Husbandry and Biodynamic Press, is \$13.50 plus S/H from Woods End Laboratories, 1-800-451-0337; [info@woodsendlab.org](mailto:info@woodsendlab.org).

■ **Educational and Training Opportunities in Sustainable Agriculture** (15th edition, Dec. 2002) is online at [www.nal.usda.gov/afsic](http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic); a print copy is free from Alternative Farming Systems Information Center, National Agricultural Library, (301) 504-6559; [afsic@nal.usda.gov](mailto:afsic@nal.usda.gov).

■ **Federal Sustainable Agriculture Program Primer** (1st draft, January

2003), in-depth fact sheets on programs and policies developed and promoted by National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture and partners, is online at [www.sustainableagriculture.net/primer.php](http://www.sustainableagriculture.net/primer.php); or contact National Campaign, (845) 744-8448; [sheilah@sustainableagriculture.net](mailto:sheilah@sustainableagriculture.net).

■ **Genetic Engineering and the Intrinsic Value and Integrity of Animals and Plants** (Proceedings of a Workshop at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, UK, 18-21 September 2002, 116 pgs), is \$32 US/Euros; contact Johannes Wirz, International Forum for Genetic Engineering, c/o Naturwissenschaftliche Section am Goetheanum, [johannes.wirz@goetheanum.ch](mailto:johannes.wirz@goetheanum.ch); [www.anth.org/ifgene/2002.htm](http://www.anth.org/ifgene/2002.htm).

■ **Guide to New and Existing Opportunities for Northeastern and Mid-Atlantic States in the 2002 Farm Bill and Other Recent Legislation** (103 pgs) is online at [www.nemw.org/workshopguide.pdf](http://www.nemw.org/workshopguide.pdf); for print availability, contact Northeast-Midwest Institute, (202) 544-5200; [ahance@nemw.org](mailto:ahance@nemw.org).

■ **How to Direct-Market Farm Products on the Internet** (50 pgs) is online at [www.ams.usda.gov/tmd/MSB/msb.htm](http://www.ams.usda.gov/tmd/MSB/msb.htm); a print copy is free from Errol Bragg, USDA-AMS-TMP-MSB, (202) 720-8317; [Errol.Bragg@usda.gov](mailto:Errol.Bragg@usda.gov).

■ **Maize and Biodiversity: The Effects of Transgenic Maize in Mexico**, a set of discussion papers on health, socioeconomic, and biodiversity issues, from North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation, is online at [www.cec.org/maize/resources](http://www.cec.org/maize/resources); or contact CEC, 393 rue St.-Jacques,

bureau 200, Montreal, Quebec, Canada H2Y 1N9; (514) 350-4300; [info@cceintl.org](mailto:info@cceintl.org).

■ **Non-GMO Sourcebook 2003** (2nd edition) listing suppliers of non-GMO and organic seeds, food ingredients and products, testing labs, and other resources is \$49 from Writing Solutions, (641) 472-1491; [ken@non-gmosource.com](mailto:ken@non-gmosource.com).

■ **Organic Price Index (OPX)** from Rodale Institute, a weekly update of wholesale prices for organically and conventionally grown foods by region, to launch in February 2003, is online at [www.newfarm.org/opx/index.shtml](http://www.newfarm.org/opx/index.shtml).

■ **Poultry on Antibiotics: Hazards to Human Health** (2nd edition, 27 pgs), from Sierra Club and Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, is online at [www.sierraclub.org/antibiotics](http://www.sierraclub.org/antibiotics) or [www.iatp.org](http://www.iatp.org); for print availability, contact Sierra Club, (415) 977-5500, [information@sierraclub.org](mailto:information@sierraclub.org); or IATP, (612) 870-0453.

■ **Starting a Specialty Food Processing Business in Maryland** (178 pgs), from USDA Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education project on marketing local foods, is \$14 (includes S/H) from Howard County Economic Development Authority, 6751 Columbia Gateway Dr., Suite 500, Columbia, MD 21046; (410) 313-6500; [gmyers@hceda.org](mailto:gmyers@hceda.org).

■ **State of the World 2003** (241 pgs), 20th anniversary edition, is \$16.95 plus S/H from Worldwatch Institute, 1-888-544-2303; [wwpub@worldwatch.org](mailto:wwpub@worldwatch.org); [www.worldwatch.org/bookstore](http://www.worldwatch.org/bookstore).

## CALENDAR

### March

7–8: 2003 Michigan Conference on Organic Agriculture with Community Supported Agriculture Workshop, in East Lansing, MI; contact Sandi Bauer, (517) 353-3175; [www.canr.msu.edu/anr/week/Agriculture.htm](http://www.canr.msu.edu/anr/week/Agriculture.htm); for CSA workshop, contact Jim Sluyter, (231) 889-3216; [csafarm@jackpine.com](mailto:csafarm@jackpine.com).

7–9 and April 4–6: “Fundamentals of Plant Improvement for Organic Agriculture,” a 3-day intensive course for seed growers, in Port Townsend, WA; contact Mathew Dillon, Abundant Life Seed Foundation, (360) 385-5660; [alsf@olympen.com](mailto:alsf@olympen.com).

8–9: Washington State Farmers Market Association Annual Meeting and Workshops, in Puyallup, WA; contact WSFMA, (206) 706-5198; [zach@wafarmersmarkets.com](mailto:zach@wafarmersmarkets.com).

8–10: Farmers Cooperative Genome Project Annual Meeting in conjunction with 2003 Public Interest Environmental Law Conference ([www.pielc.org/about.html](http://www.pielc.org/about.html)), in Eugene, OR; contact FCGP, (541) 998-3069; [jhaap@tilth.org](mailto:jhaap@tilth.org).

12–13: 3rd Annual New England Farmers’ Direct Marketing Conference & Trade Show, in Boxborough, MA; contact Charlie Touchette, (413) 529-9100; [info@massfarmstands.com](mailto:info@massfarmstands.com).

13–15: Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network’s Annual Organic Conference & Trade Show, in Halifax, Nova Scotia; contact ACORN, (902) 632-2523; [admin@acornorganic.org](mailto:admin@acornorganic.org); [www.acornorganic.org](http://www.acornorganic.org).

20–23: “Ethics As a Dimension of Agrifood Policy,” European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics’ 4th EurSafe Conference, in Toulouse, France; [www.eursafe.org/conferences](http://www.eursafe.org/conferences).

24–28: “Trade and Environment in the Americas 2003,” including public workshop on NAFTA Chapter 11 and “Second North American Symposium on Assessing the Environmental Effects of Trade,” in Mexico City; contact North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation, (514) 350-4300, [info@ccentl.org](mailto:info@ccentl.org); [www.ccc.org/symposium](http://www.ccc.org/symposium).

28: Abstract submission deadline for Water Environment Federation’s TMDL 2003 Conference, November 16–18, 2003, in Chicago, IL; [www.wef.org/pdf/Files/TMDL03Call.pdf](http://www.wef.org/pdf/Files/TMDL03Call.pdf).

28–29: “Connecting through Local Foods Conference,” sponsored by College for Southern Idaho’s Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Science Dept. and Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides, in Twin Falls, ID; contact Rick Parker, ACES, [rparker@csi.edu](mailto:rparker@csi.edu); or Jennifer Miller, NCAP, (208) 850-6504.

28–29: Great Lakes International Grazing Conference, in Battle Creek, MI; contact Bill Bivens, (517) 788-4292 ext. 1319; [bivens@msue.msu.edu](mailto:bivens@msue.msu.edu); [www.msue.msu.edu/jackson/GLGC.htm](http://www.msue.msu.edu/jackson/GLGC.htm).

31–April 1: Small Farm and Ranch Marketing Conference, organized by Southwest Marketing Network, in Durango, CO; contact Pamela Roy, (505) 473-1004; [pamelaroy@aol.com](mailto:pamelaroy@aol.com).

### April

6–7: “Organic Products Europe,” in London; contact Full Moon Communications, phone +44 (0)1903 817300; fax +44 (0)1903 817310; [www.naturalproducts.co.uk/op\\_europe/index.htm](http://www.naturalproducts.co.uk/op_europe/index.htm).

8–10: “Building Alliances for the Future of IPM,” 4th National IPM Symposium, in Indianapolis, IN; contact Elaine Wolff, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, (217) 333-2881; [ipmsymposium@ad.uiuc.edu](mailto:ipmsymposium@ad.uiuc.edu); [www.conted.uiuc.edu/ipm/](http://www.conted.uiuc.edu/ipm/).

23–25: “Beneficial Use and Protection of Water Quality,” 2nd Canadian Organic Residuals Recycling Conference, in Penticton, BC; contact British Columbia Water and Waste Association, (604) 540-4077; [www.weao.org/events/corr\\_conference.htm](http://www.weao.org/events/corr_conference.htm).

25–27: “Toxics in the Age of Globalization,” 21st National Pesticide Forum, in Austin, TX; contact John Kepner, Beyond Pesticides/NCAMP, (202) 543-5450; [info@beyondpesticides.org](mailto:info@beyondpesticides.org).

26–30: “Forages: The Forgotten Crop,” American Forage and Grassland Council Annual Meeting, in Lafayette, LA; contact AFGC, 1-800-944-2342; [dtucker@io.com](mailto:dtucker@io.com); [www.afgc.org](http://www.afgc.org).



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