



## **NEWS BRIEFS**

### **Congressional Lawmakers Act to Repeal Livestock Feed Provision That Weakens National Organic Standards**

Seeking to restore the integrity of the national organic label, Democratic and Republican lawmakers signed on to bills last month that would reinstate the requirement that organic livestock must be fed with 100 percent organic grain. The 'Organic Restoration Act' was introduced in the Senate on February 26 by Patrick Leahy (D-VT), and by month's end more than 70 additional legislators had signed onto the Senate bill or its House counterpart. The new bills would repeal a last-minute rider added to the FY 2003 spending bill signed into law by President Bush on February 20, which permits organic livestock to be fed with conventional grain (allowed to contain pesticides and antibiotics) if organic feed is more than twice as expensive. While the disputed provision was intended to benefit Fieldale Farms, a Georgia poultry operation, Leahy said it was written so broadly it created a loophole for the entire industry. Siding with "a broad range of citizens, corporate food producers, farmers and environmentalists" who called for a return to the original, more stringent standards, Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman said she supported "bipartisan efforts" to overturn the provision, which "could weaken the national organic program" (*New York Times*, February 27). In addition, Leahy and other lawmakers said they would organize as a caucus "to ensure that the growing organic food industry would be protected from further assaults."

### **Senate Leaders Agree to Restore Full Funding to Conservation Security Program**

Leaders of the full Senate and Senate Agriculture Committee agreed last month to restore full funding to the new Conservation Security Program (CSP), which was slashed by nearly one-half during final negotiations for the 2003 federal budget, to offset \$3.1 billion in weather-related crop and livestock losses over the last 2 years. According to Greenwire (February 18), Senate leaders pledged that the funding cuts will not affect the program during the current farm bill, due to expire in 2008, and they will use the "first appropriate vehicle" available to restore full funding as set forth in the 2002 Farm Bill. The CSP would reward farmers and ranchers who practice land, water, and wildlife stewardship as part of their ongoing work, with "green payments" of up to \$50,000 per year (Reuters, February 14, [www.planetark.org](http://www.planetark.org)). Full funding, estimated at \$7.7 billion through 2012, would pay for all producers with approved conservation plans who want to participate in the program; currently, without additional funding from Congress, the program is capped at \$3.8 billion. Opponents of the program cuts said that raiding mandatory farm bill programs to pay for natural disasters sets a poor precedent, especially since conservation initiatives like CSP may help to lessen the effects of drought and flooding. To aid in implementing the CSP, the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service asked for public input by March 20 ([www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)).

### **Bush Administration Seeks Delay in Phasing Out Ozone-Depleting Methyl Bromide under Environmental Treaty**

The Bush Administration, in a proposal last month to the United Nations, requested "critical use exemptions" for 54 companies and trade groups to continue using methyl bromide 2 years past its scheduled 2005 international ban. A fumigant used to sterilize soil and protect stored food, methyl bromide was to have been gradually phased out and completely banned in developed nations under the Montreal Protocol, a global treaty to eliminate chemicals that destroy the earth's protective ozone layer. The 1987 agreement, signed by the U.S. and 182 other countries, allows exemptions for uses having no technical or economically feasible alternatives, such as chlorofluorocarbons in asthma inhalers. Critics of the U.S. government request said that over the past decade most U.S. and international users have managed to find alternatives to methyl bromide, and approving the exemptions will only delay shifts to safer chemical and non-chemical replacements. An official from the Natural Resources Defense Council's Climate Center (as quoted in a February 27 *Boston Globe* editorial urging rejection of most of the requests) stated that granting the exemptions "punishes responsible growers who have invested time and money into adopting safer alternatives," such as solarization to eradicate soil pests.

### **EPA Will Step Up Industry-Led Monitoring in "Vulnerable Watersheds" to Curb Atrazine Pollution**

Responding to a court-imposed deadline, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will require Syngenta, the nation's largest maker of atrazine, to increase its monitoring of water flowing into some treatment systems during high-use periods (*New York Times*, February 1; ENS, February 3, <http://ens-news.com>). The EPA had until January 31 to evaluate the widely used herbicide, in response to a legal suit by the Natural Resources Defense Council, which sued the agency last year to force it to assess pesticide risks, set timetables for acting to protect public health, and investigate its primary manufacturer. Under the agreement, Syngenta will conduct extra tests for atrazine at 200 sites in the Midwest and South where prior monitoring has shown high levels in drinking water, and must fix the problem if the levels are too high; EPA will ban the chemical in "vulnerable watersheds" where atrazine levels continue to exceed safe limits. The agency is continuing to evaluate atrazine's role in hormonal abnormalities in amphibians, and will issue a final atrazine ruling in October following an independent scientific review (January 31, [www.epa.gov/newsroom](http://www.epa.gov/newsroom)).

### **Pigs from Bioengineering Studies May Have Illegally Entered Food Supply, Says FDA**

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration said last month that pigs involved in bioengineering studies may have been sold illegally for use as food (*New York Times*, February 6, [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)). Although the agency did not believe the experimental pigs posed any risk to public health, the article said, "the incident is the latest of several that call into question whether regulations are adequate to ensure that the food supply remains safe as plants and animals are increasingly engineered to produce drugs and other products." Experimental pigs at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign were engineered with foreign genes to improve nutrition and speed growth in their offspring, as an alternative to growth-promoting antibiotics: from April 2001 until last January, 386 piglets were released without FDA's permission to a livestock dealer who may have sold them for use as food. Although the university insisted the offspring it distributed had not inherited the foreign genes, the agency was unable to verify that assertion. The FDA's Deputy Commissioner said that the university may face fines or be required to stop certain research. More information is online in FDA's Talk Paper (February 5) at [www.fda.gov/opacom/hpnews.html#talk](http://www.fda.gov/opacom/hpnews.html#talk).

### **Increased Antimicrobial Resistance Is Measured on Integrated Fish Farms**

Integrated fish farming practices that add livestock manure directly to fish ponds as fertilizer are likely to increase antimicrobial resistance in bacteria living in the ponds, a Danish and Thai research team reports (*Environmental Science & Technology*, February 1). Animal manure increases fish yields inexpensively by stimulating the growth of microbes that serve as food for the farmed fish, yet antibiotics and other growth promoters often fed to livestock are shed along with the animal waste. Within 2 months on integrated farms, bacterial resistance to oxytetracycline and sulfamethoxazole increased from less than 5 percent to 100 percent, and to 80 percent for ciprofloxacin. The report, published in *Applied and Environmental Microbiology* (December 2002), is thought to be the first study of antimicrobial properties in fish ponds treated with manure. While human health effects were not addressed, "resistance traits can easily transfer between a wide variety of aquatic environmental bacteria and potentially to humans through the food chain," the news story noted. For a reprint of the original study, contact Andreas Petersen, Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, Stigbojlen 4, 1870 Frederiksberg C, Denmark; [andp@kvl.dk](mailto:andp@kvl.dk).

### **Six States Draining Water to Lower Mississippi River Will Test Ways To Reduce 'Dead Zone'**

Representatives from government, industry, and environmental groups from six states that drain water to the lower Mississippi River agreed last month to test ways to reduce their share of waterborne nutrients that cause the annual 'dead zone' in the Gulf of Mexico (AP, February 11; *Baton Rouge Advocate*, February 12). Nitrogen and other nutrients from fertilizer, animal waste, and sewage produce massive algal blooms that deplete oxygen in coastal waters; last summer the low-oxygen zone exceeded 8,500 square miles. The Lower Mississippi River Sub-basin Committee, the first of six regional committees to begin addressing the hypoxia problem, announced that each state (including Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee, and Texas) will select a small watershed for test projects to reduce nutrient runoff, including helping farmers to improve fertilizer management. While much of the nutrient load originates from midwestern farm states, about 7 percent of the total drains from the six lower-Mississippi states. The agreement is an outgrowth of a federal-state plan adopted in 2000 to cut nitrogen levels entering the river by 30 percent.

## WALLACE CENTER/WINROCK NEWS

### **Agricultural Bargaining Cooperative Can Increase Grower Welfare, Wallace Center Study Finds**

Membership in an agricultural bargaining cooperative increases grower satisfaction, according to a new study of apple growers by researchers from the Wallace Center, Cornell University, and Clarkson University. Apple growers who are members of the Michigan Agricultural Marketing Association (MACMA), a state with a strong collective bargaining law, said they had more input into prices received for their crops, and contract terms and public policy that might affect them, compared to non-MACMA members and growers in New York, which does not have a state collective bargaining law. Average prices for processed apples in Michigan were higher than prices in New York and the U.S. overall, although real prices steadily declined for all growers over the 1969–2001 time period. “The Effect of Laws That Foster Agricultural Bargaining” (26 pgs) is online at [www.winrock.org/wallace](http://www.winrock.org/wallace); for more information, contact Shelly Grow, Wallace Center, (703) 525-9430 ext. 682; [sgrow@winrock.org](mailto:sgrow@winrock.org).

## RESOURCES

■ **2003 Directory of Least Toxic Pest Control Products** listing over 2000 items from 600 commercial sources is \$15 from Bio-Integral Resource Center, (510) 524-2567; [birc@igc.org](mailto:birc@igc.org).

■ **Conservation Implications of Climate Change: Soil Erosion and Runoff from Erosion** (26 pgs) is online at [www.swcs.org/t\\_advocacy\\_action.htm](http://www.swcs.org/t_advocacy_action.htm); a print copy is free from Soil and Water Conservation Society, (515) 289-2331; [pubs@swcs.org](mailto:pubs@swcs.org).

■ **Cost of Community Services Studies: Making the Case for Conservation** (78 pgs), a comprehensive report on how farm and forest lands help balance community budgets, is \$16.95 from American Farmland Trust, 1-800-370-4879; [www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org).

■ **Exploring Sustainability in Agriculture** (16 pgs) is free from USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program, (301) 504-5236; [intern@sare.org](mailto:intern@sare.org).

■ **Farms and Land in Farms 2003** (18 pgs), an annual survey of farm numbers in the U.S. and 50 states, from USDA's National Agricultural Statistics

Service, is online at <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/reports/nassr/other/>.

■ **Impacts of Agriculture on Water Quantity in the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence River Basin** (18-pg summary) is online at [www.environmentalobservatory.org/Library/listContent.cfm](http://www.environmentalobservatory.org/Library/listContent.cfm); for the full report, contact Jim Kleinschmidt, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, (612) 870-0453.

■ **Livestock Agriculture: Increased EPA Oversight Will Improve Environmental Program for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations** (25 pgs, GAO-03-285) is online at [www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-285](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-285); a print copy is free from U.S. General Accounting Office, (202) 512-6000.

■ **Natural Controls for Noxious Weeds**, 30-minute video on advantages of non-chemical weed control methods for western rangelands, is \$15.95 plus \$3 S/H from Central Rocky Mountain Permaculture Institute, (970) 927-4158; [jerome@crmpi.org](mailto:jerome@crmpi.org).

■ **Nutrient BMP Endorsement**, a new insurance tool to boost farm profits and limit nutrient pollution, from American

Farmland Trust and Agflex Inc., and approved by USDA's Risk Management Agency, is available to IA, MN, WI, and PA farmers; contact (608) 232-1528; [tom.green@agflex.com](mailto:tom.green@agflex.com); or Brian Brandt, AFT, (614) 221-8610 ext. 201.

■ **Organic Fertility Management** (96 pgs), and **Organic Weed Management** (96 pgs), both projects of NOFA/Massachusetts Chapter, are each \$7.95 plus S/H from Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 1-800-639-4099.

■ **Pharming the Field: A Look at the Benefits and Risks of Bioengineering Plants To Produce Pharmaceuticals** (38 pgs), from a July 2002 workshop, is online at <http://pewagbiotech.org/events/0717/ConferenceReport.pdf>; or contact Pew Initiative, (202) 347-9044; [dnordquist@pewagbiotech.org](mailto:dnordquist@pewagbiotech.org).

■ **Teaching Organic Farming and Gardening: Resources for Instructors** (600 pgs) is online at <http://zzyx.ucsc.edu/casfs/training/manual/contents.html>; a print copy is \$45 from Center for Agroecology & Sustainable Food Systems, UC Santa Cruz, (831) 459-3240; [martha@zzyx.ucsc.edu](mailto:martha@zzyx.ucsc.edu).

## CALENDAR

### April

2–4: 2003 Spring Ag In-Depth, hosted by Cornell Cooperative Extension, including one-day workshop on “Agriculture and the Environment” and one-day session on “Natural Resource and Economic Opportunities for Farms,” in Ithaca, NY; contact Nicki Nedrow, (607) 255-2291; [nln1@cornell.edu](mailto:nln1@cornell.edu).

4–6: “Biodiversity and Biotechnology and the Protection of Traditional Knowledge,” a conference presented by Washington University’s Center for Interdisciplinary Studies, in St. Louis, MO; <http://law.wustl.edu/centeris/upcomingevents/biodivsp02.html>.

4–6 and July 9–11: “Fundamentals of Plant Improvement for Organic Agriculture,” a 3-day intensive course for seed growers, in Port Townsend, WA; contact Matthew Dillon, (360) 385-5660; [alsf@olympen.com](mailto:alsf@olympen.com); [www.abundantlifeseed.org](http://www.abundantlifeseed.org).

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; [www.conted.uiuc.edu/ipm/](http://www.conted.uiuc.edu/ipm/).

11: Proposal submission deadline for NCR SARE Professional Development Program grants; [www.sare.org/ncrsare/cfp.htm](http://www.sare.org/ncrsare/cfp.htm); or contact Paula Ford, Kansas State University, (785) 532-5328.

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).

31: Abstract submission deadline for “Towards a Global Future: Linking Economics, Environments, Resources, Communities and Cultures through Science and Technology,” ICAST 2003 Conference, October 12–15 in Houston, TX; [www.2003icast.org/mainframe.htm](http://www.2003icast.org/mainframe.htm); or W.E. Fox, Texas A&M University, (979) 845-3765.

### May

1: Proposal submission deadline for University of California-Davis statewide Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program grants on (1) direct or regional marketing/distribution systems or (2) social and economic analyses of conventional and alternative food systems; contact Gail Feenstra, SAREP, (530) 752-8408; [gwfeenstra@ucdavis.edu](mailto:gwfeenstra@ucdavis.edu); [www.sarep.ucdavis.edu](http://www.sarep.ucdavis.edu).

2–3: Organic Beekeeping Workshop, in Chestnut Ridge, NY; contact Pfeiffer Center, (845) 352-5020; [beework@pfeiffercenter.org](mailto:beework@pfeiffercenter.org); [www.pfeiffercenter.org](http://www.pfeiffercenter.org).

3–4: “Heartland Celebration” of food, farming, and healthy living in California’s Central Valley, in Stevinson, CA; contact Ecological Farming Association, (831) 763-2111; [info@eco-farm.org](mailto:info@eco-farm.org); [www.eco-farm.org](http://www.eco-farm.org).

7–9: 33rd Annual BioCycle National Conference, in Denver, CO; contact BioCycle, [biocycle@jgpress.com](mailto:biocycle@jgpress.com); [www.jgpress.com](http://www.jgpress.com).

14–17: “Reconciling Holism and Reductionism: The New Science and Practice of Health Care, Organic Agriculture and Nutrition,” a conference in Wageningen, Netherlands; contact Louis Bolk Institute, [info@louisbolk.nl](mailto:info@louisbolk.nl); [www.suchislife.nl](http://www.suchislife.nl).

14–18: “All Things Organic” Conference and Trade Show, in Austin, TX; contact Organic Trade Association, (413) 774-7511; [info@ota.com](mailto:info@ota.com); [www.ota.com](http://www.ota.com).

18–20: “A New Age in Agriculture: Working Together to Create the Future and Disable the Barriers,” World Agricultural Forum 2003 World Congress, in St. Louis, MO; [www.worldagforum.org](http://www.worldagforum.org).

27–30: 5th Conference on Organic Agriculture, in Havana, Cuba; for details, [foodfirst@foodfirst.org](mailto:foodfirst@foodfirst.org); or [www.foodfirst.org/cuba/events/2002/conferencev.html](http://www.foodfirst.org/cuba/events/2002/conferencev.html).

28–31: “Symposium on Sustainable Natural Resource-Based Enterprises,” in Mississippi State, MS; contact James E. Miller, MSU Extension, (662) 325-3174; [http://msucares.com/wildfish/economics/pdfs/first\\_call\\_for\\_papers.pdf](http://msucares.com/wildfish/economics/pdfs/first_call_for_papers.pdf).



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