



**EPA Ignored Its  
Scientific Advisors in  
Approving Bt Corn  
Genetically Altered to  
Resist Rootworm**

A new strain of Bt corn genetically altered to resist rootworm, a major corn pest, has won approval from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. According to a story in *Nature* (March 6), scientists who were consulted before the February 25 decision said the agency had “ignored their advice and is doing too little to ensure that insects don’t develop resistance to the insecticide produced by the plant.” Ten of 13 members of a scientific review panel had urged that the altered corn be grown only if farmers planted an equal area of non-transgenic corn next to it; this requirement would have discouraged farmers from planting the new variety, however, and EPA ruled that a 20 percent ‘refuge’ area would suffice. The new corn, expressing a toxin gene from the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt), targets an insect that costs U.S. farmers \$1 billion annually in lost yields and pesticide treatments. The scientists who criticized the EPA decision said that data submitted by Monsanto, which designed the new strain, showed that it produces much less toxin than existing Bt crops, so sizable refuge areas are needed to delay the development of resistance by corn rootworm.

**Supporters of Country-  
of-Origin Food Labeling  
Say USDA Inflated  
Costs, Ignored Benefits**

Congressional and other supporters of country-of-origin food labeling say that the USDA’s cost estimates for implementing the program are grossly inflated and fail to account for the potential benefits for U.S. farmers and ranchers, as well as the nation’s food security (AP, March 3; *Prairie Star*, March 24, [www.theprairiestar.com](http://www.theprairiestar.com)). As mandated in the 2002 Farm Bill, the provisions will require meat, fish, and fresh fruits and vegetables sold in stores to be labeled to identify their source in the U.S. or elsewhere. Last month, a dozen U.S. senators stated in a letter to Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman that the agency’s nearly \$2 billion estimate, released last November, is widely viewed as an “indefensible exaggeration,” and they faulted USDA officials for consulting only with several meat industry groups that oppose labeling. Americans for Country of Origin Labeling (ACOL), an alliance of 60 farm, rural, and consumer groups, has cited the benefits of a simple and efficient labeling system for consumers who are concerned about production practices, food quality, and sanitation. In a February 3 letter to members of Congress, the alliance claimed that USDA’s estimates fail to consider existing food industry practices, including seven state programs, which would assist in extending labeling nationwide. ACOL’s letter is available online at [www.floridafarmers.org/news/articles/implementation.htm](http://www.floridafarmers.org/news/articles/implementation.htm), or contact Bill Bullard, phone (406) 252-2516; information on USDA’s series of listening sessions (through June) on country-of-origin labeling, set to become law in September 2004, is online at [www.ams.usda.gov/cool](http://www.ams.usda.gov/cool).

**USDA Rejects  
Moratorium on  
‘Biopharm’ Crops,  
Tightens Rules to  
Protect Food Supply  
from Contamination**

Rejecting a moratorium on ‘biopharm’ crops sought by both food manufacturers and public interest groups, the USDA announced last month it will tighten its oversight of field trials of experimental corn and other crops that are genetically engineered to produce pharmaceuticals or industrial chemicals. The new rules include stricter segregation requirements, better training for farmers and biotechnology company employees, and a seven-fold increase in inspections by the agency. The USDA will double the buffer zones between modified and ordinary corn—up to a mile in some cases—to prevent pollen transfer; require field test sites to lie fallow for food or feed crops the following year; and require special equipment or cleaning methods for crop harvesting and storage. According to a *Washington Post* article (March 7), the new rules “may hold greater implications than [are] immediately evident,” by imposing additional production costs in the midwestern Corn Belt and potentially driving companies “to consider growing their crops in places such as Arizona or Hawaii, where little food corn is grown.” More information on the strengthened permitting requirements is available online from USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service at [www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq/biotech](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq/biotech).

**European Union Agrees to Phase Out Aldicarb as Part of Broad Pesticide Review**

The European Union agreed last month to phase out aldicarb, an insecticide used on potatoes, carrots, and other root vegetables, because of concerns about its toxicity for humans and wildlife (Reuters, March 20; Greenwire, March 25). The phase-out, part of a broad effort begun in 1993 by the EU to review and limit the use of certain pesticides, could lead to the ban of more than 300 chemicals by the end of this year and more than two-thirds of those used in 1993 by the end of 2008. EU farm ministers backed a proposal that would allow eight member states to apply aldicarb for “essential uses” until December 31, 2007, while other EU markets must remove it by mid-2007. The World Health Organization ranks the chemical, which moves easily through and persists in soil, as one of the most acutely toxic pesticides still in use. Aldicarb is classified as a ‘restricted use’ pesticide in the U.S., used mainly on cotton as well as fruit and vegetable crops. The U.S. EPA currently limits aldicarb application near drinking water wells and in areas prone to contamination, and expects to complete a health and safety review of the pesticide by 2004. More information on the EU pesticide review legislation, Directive 19/414/EEC, is online from Pesticide Action Network at [www.pesticideinfo.org/Docs/Docs/ref\\_regulatoryEU.html](http://www.pesticideinfo.org/Docs/Docs/ref_regulatoryEU.html).

**Environmental Groups Challenge CAFO Rule Regulating Runoff from Factory Farms**

The Bush Administration needs to rewrite the rules for controlling manure runoff from the nation’s largest cattle, hog, and poultry farms, three environmental groups said last month in announcing a lawsuit to overturn the rules (ENS, March 10, <http://ens-news.com>; *Washington Post*, March 11). The plaintiffs charge that the regulations, issued by the U.S. EPA last December, will not address the growing problem of animal waste generated by confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs), and favor large multinational corporations that already benefit from sizable government subsidies. According to the lawsuit filed by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), Sierra Club, and Waterkeeper Alliance, the CAFO rule gives feedlots too much authority in writing nutrient management plans, fails to make large meatpackers share responsibility for pollution when they subcontract with farmers to raise livestock, bars the public from weighing in on how animal waste is managed, and exempts contaminated runoff from protections authorized by the Clean Water Act. For more information, contact NRDC’s Melanie Shepherdson, (202) 302-7306.

**Farming Groups Petition USDA for Impact Studies of Transgenic Wheat**

Five farming groups, represented by the Center for Food Safety, filed a petition on March 11 asking the USDA to withhold approval of Monsanto’s transgenic wheat, a hard spring wheat modified to tolerate the herbicide glyphosate, until more is known about possible environmental and economic risks. The groups fear that Monsanto’s modified wheat will be difficult to segregate from conventional wheat, causing damage to domestic and export markets, and may lead to serious environmental harm, including spread of the herbicide-resistance trait to other plants. The petitioners cited a February 6 report from Iowa State University economist Robert Wisner, which found that hard spring wheat exports could drop by 33 to 52 percent, and prices drop by one-third, if Monsanto’s transgenic variety was introduced in Montana or North Dakota in the next 2 to 6 years. A large share of U.S. wheat exports go to Europe and Japan, where consumers are wary of gene-modified foods. A news summary from *Bridges Trade & Biological Resources News Digest* is online at [www.ictsd.org/biores/03-03-21](http://www.ictsd.org/biores/03-03-21); the groups’ petition and the economic report are available from Western Organization of Resource Councils, [www.worc.org/issues/gmo\\_temp.html](http://www.worc.org/issues/gmo_temp.html) or (406) 252-9672, which joined the petition and also sponsored the Wisner study.

**Oxygen-Depleted Waters May Disrupt Hormones and Reproduction in Fish Populations—New Research**

New research shows that low-oxygen levels disrupt hormones in fish and impair their ability to reproduce in the laboratory, suggesting that oxygen-depleted waters, which are widespread around the world, may pose a serious threat to fish populations (March 11, [www.scientificamerican.com](http://www.scientificamerican.com)). While hypoxic conditions, arising mainly from nutrient overload in the form of agricultural runoff and sewage, have been linked to fish kills around the globe, the new study is thought to be the first evidence that endocrine disruption may be a contributing factor. Researchers found that carp raised in low-oxygen waters had much lower sex hormone levels and diminished sex organs compared to those raised in normal oxygen conditions; in addition, less than 5 percent of larvae hatched by the hypoxic fish survived, compared to 90 percent for normal fish. The report appeared in the journal *Environmental Science & Technology* (March 15 print edition); for a reprint, contact lead author Rudolph S.S. Wu, City University of Hong Kong, e-mail [bhrswu@cityu.edu.hk](mailto:bhrswu@cityu.edu.hk).

## WALLACE CENTER/WINROCK NEWS

### Performance-Based Environmental Policies for Agriculture Is Focus of March Workshop

More than 100 scientists, farmers, and representatives from government and non-governmental groups met in Washington, DC, last month to explore the development of performance-based environmental policies for U.S. agriculture. By creating incentives that link producer decisions to environmental outcomes, performance-based approaches hold promise for promoting more flexible, less costly, and more effective agricultural conservation programs. Through presentations and small group sessions, the participants identified important issues, existing constraints, and possible strategies, and discussed policy approaches for improving water quality in five specific watersheds around the nation. The two-day meeting was sponsored by the Farm Foundation and organized by the Wallace Center in collaboration with USDA's Economic Research Service, the Center for Sustainable Resource Development at the University of California-Berkeley, and Defenders of Wildlife. More information on the workshop and follow-up activities is online at [www.winrock.org/events/pepa](http://www.winrock.org/events/pepa), or contact Jon Winsten, (703) 525-9430 ext. 687, [jwinsten@winrock.org](mailto:jwinsten@winrock.org).

## RESOURCES

■ **Awakening the Dead Zone: An Investment for Agriculture, Water Quality, and Climate Change** (24 pgs) is online at <http://pdf.wri.org/hypoxia.pdf>; a print copy is \$5 plus S/H from World Resources Institute, 1-800-537-5487.

■ **Food from Our Changing World: The Globalization of Food and How Americans Feel About It**, 17-pg summary from a national survey led by Ronald Wimberly, North Carolina State University, is online, <http://sasw.chass.ncsu.edu/global-food/foodglobal.pdf>; or contact [global-food@sa.ncsu.edu](mailto:global-food@sa.ncsu.edu).

■ **The Grape Grower: A Guide to Organic Viticulture** (304 pgs) is \$35 plus S/H from Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 1-800-639-4099; [www.chelseagreen.com](http://www.chelseagreen.com).

■ **Organic Agriculture & Food: Past, Present, Future** (40-minute video) is \$49.99 (with nonprofit discounts) from California Certified Organic Farmers, (831) 423-2263; [helge@ccof.org](mailto:helge@ccof.org); a 2-minute clip is online at [www.ccof.org](http://www.ccof.org).

■ **Organic Farming and Genetic**

■ **Engineering: How To Keep Organic Farming GMO-Free**, a 23-pg dossier from Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), Berlin, Germany, is 5.60 Euro plus S/H from FiBL, [admin@fibl.ch](mailto:admin@fibl.ch); or £5 from Elm Farm Research Centre, Hamstead Marshall, Newbury, Berkshire, RG20 0HR UK; [vanessa.g@efrc.com](mailto:vanessa.g@efrc.com).

■ **Pasture-Raised Products: Consumer Focus Group Study** (20 pgs) on marketing grass-fed meat and dairy products in the Midwest, from FoodRoutes Network and multi-state Midwest Collaborative, is online at [www.leopold.iastate.edu](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu); for a print copy, contact Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, (515) 294-3711; [leocenter@iastate.edu](mailto:leocenter@iastate.edu).

■ **The Private Lands Opportunity: The Case for Conservation Incentives** (21 pgs) is online at [www.environmentaldefense.org](http://www.environmentaldefense.org); or contact Center for Conservation Initiatives, Environmental Defense, 257 Park Ave. South, New York, NY 10010; (212) 505-2100.

■ **Protecting Water Quality on Organic Farms** (36 pgs) is online at

[www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/om-waterquality.pdf](http://www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/om-waterquality.pdf); for a free print copy, contact ATTRA, 1-800-346-9140.

■ **Sustainable Agriculture Movement Database** is online at [www.sustainableagriculture.net](http://www.sustainableagriculture.net); to become a participating partner, contact National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture, (845) 744-8448; e-mail [partners@sustainableagriculture.net](mailto:partners@sustainableagriculture.net).

■ **Water Quality Initiatives and Agriculture** (40-pg reference guide) and **Agricultural Air Emissions Effects on Water Quality** (bibliography, 1992–2002) are free from Water Quality Information Center, National Agricultural Library, (301) 504-6077; [jmakuch@nal.usda.gov](mailto:jmakuch@nal.usda.gov); [www.nal.usda.gov/wqic](http://www.nal.usda.gov/wqic).

■ **World of Organic Agriculture 2003: Statistics and Future Prospects** (5th edition, 130 pgs) is online at [www.soel.de/oekolandbau/weltweit.html](http://www.soel.de/oekolandbau/weltweit.html); a print copy is 16 Euro from International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, Tholey-Theley, Germany, [HeadOffice@ifoam.org](mailto:HeadOffice@ifoam.org).

## CALENDAR

### May

2–3: “Reconciling Rural Poverty Reduction and Resource Conservation: Identifying Relationships and Remedies,” an international workshop, in Ithaca, NY; contact Andrea Marshall Besley, Cornell University, (607) 255-1406; alm62@cornell.edu.

7–10: “Another World Is Possible: Let’s Build It Together,” Rural Coalition’s 25th Anniversary Assembly, in Louisville, MS; contact Rural Coalition, (202) 628-7160; ruralco@ruralco.org.

8–9: 26th Annual National Food Policy Conference, in Washington, DC; contact Art Jaeger, Consumer Federation of America, (202) 387-6121; www.consumerfederation.org/nfpc26.pdf.

16: Pre-proposal submission deadline for 2004 professional development grants from USDA’s Southern Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program; contact SSARE, (770) 412-4787; www.griffin.peachnet.edu/sare.

16: Pre-proposal submission deadline for 2004 research and education grants from USDA’s Northeast Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program; contact NESARE, (802) 656-0471; nesare@uvm.edu; www.uvm.edu/~nesare/grants\_r&e.htm.

31–June 1: “Farm Profits and Sustainability through Greener Pastures,” a 2-day practicum on grass-based livestock management and direct marketing, in West Fulton, NY; contact Central New York RC&D, phone (607) 334-3231 ext. 4.

### June

1–3: “Biotechnology: Science and Society at a Crossroad,” National Agricultural Biotechnology Council’s 15th annual public meeting; contact Sandra Ristow, Agricultural Research Center, Washington State University, (509) 335-4563, nabc15@wsu.edu; <http://arc.cahe.wsu.edu/nabc/>.

3 and November 18, Agritourism Conference, one-day workshops in Sedalia, MO; contact Missouri Department of Agriculture, 1-866-466-8283; [www.aginnovationcenter.org/events.shtml](http://www.aginnovationcenter.org/events.shtml).

6–7: “Creating Meaningful Solutions,” 3rd Annual Sustainable Hog

Farming Summit, co-sponsored by Delaware Riverkeeper Network, Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture, Animal Welfare Institute, and others, in Gettysburg, PA; phone (914) 674-0622 ext. 204; [www.waterkeeper.org/mainevent.aspx](http://www.waterkeeper.org/mainevent.aspx).

7–8: 5th Annual Landowners Conference on “income opportunities from field and forest,” in Hocking County, OH; contact Sustainable Forestry Program, Rural Action, (740) 767-2090; cynthiab@ruralaction.org; [www.ruralaction.org](http://www.ruralaction.org).

9–10: “Future Directions and Research Priorities for the USDA Biotechnology Risk Assessment Research Grants Program,” a stakeholder workshop co-sponsored by Information Systems for Biotechnology and USDA-CSREES, in Washington, DC; contact Conference Registrar, Outreach Program Services, Virginia Tech, (540) 231-5182; [www.isb.vt.edu/brarg\\_meeting.htm](http://www.isb.vt.edu/brarg_meeting.htm).

12–15: “Local Democracy: Sustaining Healthy Community through Ethical, Sustainable Food Systems,” Joint 2003 Annual Meetings of Agriculture, Food and Human Values Society and Association for the Study of Food and Society, in Austin, TX; for information, [www.clas.ufl.edu/users/rhaynes/afhvs/NextMeeting.htm](http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/rhaynes/afhvs/NextMeeting.htm).

14–18: “2003 Chapman Conference on Ecosystem Interactions with Land Use Change,” in Santa Fe, NM; contact AGU, (202) 777-7332; [mtaylor@agu.org](mailto:mtaylor@agu.org); [www.agu.org/meetings/cc03acall.html](http://www.agu.org/meetings/cc03acall.html).

16–18: 26th Annual Southern Conservation Tillage Conference for Sustainable Agriculture, in College Station, TX; for information, [www.ag.auburn.edu/nsdl/sctesa/index.html](http://www.ag.auburn.edu/nsdl/sctesa/index.html).

22–25: “Agroforestry & Riparian Buffers for Land Productivity and Environmental Stability,” 8th North American Agroforestry Conference, in Corvallis, OR; contact Steven.H.Sharrow@oregonstate.edu; [www.missouri.edu/~afta/Whats\\_New/2003call4papers.htm](http://www.missouri.edu/~afta/Whats_New/2003call4papers.htm).

29–30, July 1-3: 7th International Conference on Public Goods and Public Policy for Agricultural Biotechnology, organized by International Consortium on Agricultural Biotechnology Research, UC-Berkeley’s Center for Sustainable Resource Development, and others, in Ravello, Italy; for information, [www.economia.uniro.ma2.it/conferenze/icabr2003/call\\_for\\_paper.htm](http://www.economia.uniro.ma2.it/conferenze/icabr2003/call_for_paper.htm).



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