



NEWS BRIEFS

Deep Spending Cuts in Rural Development, Conservation, and Renewable Energy Approved by House Panel

The House Appropriations Committee last month approved a \$17 billion fiscal year 2004 USDA spending bill that, according to the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (SAC), seeks to “slash funding for key family farm, rural development, conservation, and research farm bill programs by \$445 million.” Based on SAC’s analysis of Congressional Office Budget figures, the House bill reduces rural funding by 99 percent, agricultural research by 98 percent, renewable energy by 31 percent, and conservation by at least 17 percent, from levels set in the 2002 Farm Bill. It eliminates the Conservation Security Program (\$53 million) and Value-Added Producer Grants program (\$40 million), among others, and blocks funding to implement country-of-origin labeling for meat. SAC has strongly criticized the panel’s targeting of farm bill spending that protects the environment and supports rural communities and family farms, while leaving untouched commodity program funds accounting for nearly three quarters of expenditures. The full House votes on the bill in July; for information on protecting key programs, contact SAC, (202) 547-5754 or msawg@aol.com.

Global Treaty Governing Biosafety of GMOs Will Take Effect in September

A new global treaty giving support to nations taking precautionary trade measures against the environmental risks of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) has gained the 50 signatures needed for it to take effect in September 2003. The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, a supplement to the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity, sets out the “first comprehensive regulatory system for ensuring the safe transfer, handling and use of [GMOs], with a special focus on movements ... across national borders” (June 13, www.un.org/News/). The agreement creates a biosafety clearinghouse allowing governments to share information on potential and documented risks of GMOs, requires that international shipments be labeled, and allows member nations to bar imports of bioengineered seeds, microbes, crops, or animals when safety information is lacking. While the U.S. has not ratified the treaty, it must adhere to its provisions when shipping GM products to participating nations, including most of its major trading partners (Greenwire, June 17).

Changes in Global Nitrogen Cycle Have Increasing Negative Effects on Human Health, Review Suggests

Humans are dramatically expanding the rate of nitrogen fixation into more reactive forms, with increasing negative effects on human health, finds a scientific review in *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* (June 2003). Conversion of atmospheric nitrogen (N) to inorganic fertilizers is “the single largest alteration of the N cycle,” and half of all inorganic N use on the planet has occurred in the last 15 years. At lower levels of fertilizer usage, higher crop yields can lead to improved food availability and overall nutrition, the authors wrote; yet higher levels are linked to negative health effects, directly through air and water pollution and indirectly through unhealthy diets and ecological changes that foster disease. While the environmental effects of altered N cycling are becoming well-documented, “the full scope of connections between a changing N cycle and human health is not yet widely appreciated,” the study noted. For a copy of the journal article, contact Alan Townsend, University of Colorado at Boulder, alan.townsend@colorado.edu.

Washington Apple Growers Use Less Pesticide, More IPM Practices, Survey Finds

A recently published survey of apple growers in Washington, part of a larger study of orchard pest management patterns in the state, shows an increase in integrated and non-conventional practices over a recent 10-year period (*Agrichemical & Environmental News*, May 2003, www.aenews.wsu.edu). The 2000 survey indicates that over 90 percent use integrated pest management (IPM) methods including orchard monitoring, pheromone traps, economic thresholds, and degree-day models. Since the prior survey in 1990, growers have increased their use of biological control and alternative row spraying, and reduced pesticide chemical rates overall. Apple growers “involved in organic production to some degree” increased from 1.4 percent in 1989 to 10.5 percent in 2000. “Pest Management Practices Survey 2000 Results” are online linked from the website above; or contact Jay Brunner, WSU Tree Fruit and Extension Center, jfb@wsu.edu or (506) 663-8181.

**Pew-Sponsored
Negotiators Fail to
Compromise on
Improving Agricultural
Biotechnology
Regulations**

A two-year negotiation effort between the agricultural biotechnology industry and its critics, sponsored by the Pew Initiative on Food and Biotechnology, has failed to produce a compromise on improving U.S. policies and regulations. "The talks foundered ... amid a dispute over whether to seek legislation from Congress that would have given the Food and Drug Administration strong power to judge the safety of foods containing biotech ingredients," the *Washington Post* (May 30) reported. In the short term the failure to agree "will leave intact a status quo widely perceived as favoring the biotech industry," since environmental and consumer groups will be unable to present a united front in pressing Congress and the regulatory agencies for stronger oversight; the *Post* story suggests that industry representatives, led by Monsanto Company, opposed regulatory changes that might undermine the Bush Administration's pending legal case against the European Union. The Pew Initiative reportedly spent \$2 million to support the negotiation process; its 34-page final report, "The Stakeholder Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology: An Overview of the Process," is online at <http://pewagbiotech.org>, or phone (202) 347-9044.

**'Safety First Initiative'
Will Develop Community
Standards for
Genetically Engineered
Foods**

A partnership process that brings together representatives from business, science, and public interest groups is moving forward to develop industry-wide safety standards for genetically engineered foods. As described in *Nature Biotechnology* (June 2003), the 'Safety First Initiative' is forming work groups to set standards for building human and environmental safety into the development of two classes of foods: transgenic fish and crops altered to produce pharmaceuticals. The teams will develop standards for safety criteria, verification, monitoring, and leadership, in order to form the basis for regulating gene-altered products in the same way that general food safety is now regulated and monitored. Citing "the need for a new approach to governing biotechnology that breaks free of acrimonious debate and regulatory stalemate," the University of Minnesota's Anne Kapuscinski emphasized that the new process would ensure public participation. Led by UM scientists, the initiative's advisory and steering groups include representatives from the Union of Concerned Scientists and Consumers Union; Dupont and other companies; and farming and food industry groups. More information (including the journal article) is online at www.fw.umn.edu/ISEES.

**Ban on Antibiotic
Growth Promoters Has
Not Increased Food
Poisoning Bacteria,
Danish Analysis Finds**

Contrary to some predictions, a complete ban on the use of antibiotics as growth promoters on Danish farms, adopted in 1998 in response to public concerns about drug resistance transferring to people, has not led to increases in food-poisoning bacteria. As reported in *Emerging Infectious Diseases* (April 2003), Danish researchers looking for trends in the prevalence of food-poisoning species in meat samples taken from 1995 to 2001 found a significant decrease in *Salmonella* in chickens and pigs, and no change in *Campylobacter* in chickens. While there has been a 50 percent rise in antibiotic use to control disease since the Danish ban, overall use has declined by more than half since peak use in 1994. The Danish ban has not markedly affected animal health or retail meat prices, and higher feed costs have been offset by savings on antibiotics, the team reported to a conference last year (*Washington Post*, March 27, 2002). "The Danish experience is seen as a test case for an impending European Union ban" on growth-promoting antibiotics, *New Scientist* (May 3) reported. To request a copy of the journal article, contact M.C. Evans, Danish Veterinary Institute, mce@vetinst.dk.

**Concentrated Livestock
Operations Lower
Property Values, from
Pennsylvania Study
Comparing Land Uses**

A study by Pennsylvania State University researchers has found that in Berks County, Pennsylvania, where rapid farmland development is occurring, open space increases property values for nearby housing, while landfills and concentrated livestock operations lower housing values. Land uses including forested acreage and grass, pasture, and cropland located within a quarter mile of a house had the largest positive effect; while medium- or large-scale animal facilities—including dairy and beef cattle, hog, and poultry operations—within a half mile lowered housing prices by 4 percent or \$1,800. By comparison, sewage treatment plants had a less depressing effect. An official with Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future (PennFuture, www.pennfuture.org), which co-funded the study, said the findings lend further support for policies allowing local communities and residents to protect themselves from the negative health, environmental, and economic impacts of factory-style farms. The full report is online at www.landuse.aers.psu.edu.

RESOURCES

■ **Audio tapes** from recent organic, small farms, biodynamic, and grazing conferences in the U.S. Midwest are available from Resource Express, 1-800-535-3830; info@rexp.com; www.rexp.com/organic.htm.

■ **Biologically Integrated Farming Systems (BIFS) Program, 2003 progress report** on projects to support agrichemical risk/use reduction, from University of California's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/BIFS/bifs03; limited numbers of print copies (122 pgs) are available from SAREP, (530) 752-7556; sarep@ucdavis.edu.

■ **Country-of-Origin Labeling: A Legal and Economic Analysis** (24 pgs), from University of Florida's International Agricultural Trade and Policy Center, is online from Western Organization of Resource Councils at www.worc.org/pdfs/IATPstudy.pdf, or contact WORC, (406) 252-9672.

■ **Cultivating Biological Connections: Proceedings of the Northwest Symposium on Organic and Biologically Intensive Farming** (48 pgs) from November 2002 conference, <http://csanr.wsu.edu/programs/Proceedings.pdf>; a print copy is \$5 from Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources, Washington State University, (253) 445-4626.

■ **The Explanatory Guide to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety** (295 pgs), www.iucn.org/themes/law/info04.html; a print copy is US\$25.50 plus S/H from World Conservation Union Bookstore, phone +44 1223

277894; books@IUCN.org; www.iucn.org/bookstore.

■ **Fighting for the Farm: Rural America Transformed** (352 pgs), a collection of writings exploring political dynamics transforming agriculture in the U.S. and Canada since 1920s, is \$22.50 plus S/H from University of Pennsylvania Press, (215) 898-6261; custserv@pobox.upenn.edu.

■ **Gene Wars: The Politics of Biotechnology** (2nd edition, 80 pgs) by Kristin Dawkins, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, is \$6.95 plus S/H from Seven Stories Press, 1-800-596-7437, or other book sellers.

■ **Getting a Handle on the Barriers to Financing Sustainable Agriculture: The Gaps Between Farmers & Lenders in Minnesota and Wisconsin** (29 pgs), www.landstewardship.org, or contact Land Stewardship Project, (507) 523-3366.

■ **GM Crops—Going Against the Grain**, 46-pg report on genetically modified crops and food security in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, www.actionaid.org/resources/pdfs/gatg.pdf; for print availability, contact ActionAid, Freepost BS4868, Chard, Somerset TA20 1BR United Kingdom; support erservices@actionaid.org.uk.

■ **Federal and State Legislative Activity (2001–2002) Related to Agricultural Biotechnology** (factsheet) and database tracking state legislation, www.pewagbiotech.org/resources/factsheets; or contact Pew Initiative on Food and Biotechnology, (202) 347-9044.

■ **Leopold Center's Progress Report 2003** (56 pgs), summaries of 13 research and education projects, is free from Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University, (515) 294-3711; leocenter@iastate.edu.

■ **New Genetics, Food and Agriculture: Genetic Discoveries—Societal Dilemmas**, a 58-pg synthesis of science-based reviews of gene-altered food crops, www.icsu.org/events; a print copy is free from International Council for Science, mari-lynn@icsu.org.

■ **Planting Trouble: Are Farmers Squandering Bt Corn Technology?**, An Analysis of USDA Data Showing Significant Noncompliance with EPA's Refuge Requirements (26 pgs), www.cspi.net.org; or contact Center for Science in the Public Interest, (202) 332-9110.

■ **Proceedings of the 14th IFOAM Organic World Congress, "Cultivating Communities"** (320 pgs), from conference held August 2002 in Victoria, Canada, are US\$20 plus S/H from Canadian Organic Growers, (506) 375-7383; office@cog.ca.

■ **Soil and Water Conservation Issues** (May 23, 2003 update), Congressional Research Service Report #IB96030, www.ncseonline.org/NLE/CRSreports/03Jun/IB96030.pdf.

■ **The Use of Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs in the Mid-Atlantic**, an 8-pg bulletin from Small Farm Success Project, www.smallfarm.success.info/FMNP.pdf, or free from the Wallace Center, (703) 525-9430 ext. 675; wallacecenter@winrock.org.

CALENDAR

August

7–10: “Harvesting the Fruits, Discovering Our Roots,” Northeast Organic Farming Association’s 29th Annual Summer Conference, in Amherst, MA; contact Julie Rawson, NOFA-Massachusetts, (978) 355-2853; nofa@nofamass.org.

11–12: 2003 Nebraska Grazing Conference, sponsored by Buffalo County Extension, in Kearney, NE; (308) 236-1235; www.grassland.unl.edu/grazeconf.htm.

13 through October: Public Seed Initiative (PSI) events including Cornell University field day, seed cleaning and processing workshops, a joint project of NOFA-NY, Cornell, and others, held in NY, PA, and Massachusetts; contact Mark Henning, (607) 255-1241; mjh7@cornell.edu; <http://nofany.org/projects/overview.htm>.

23–24: 8th Annual SolFest, renewable energy and sustainability festival, with workshops on food and farming (co-organized by Ecological Farming Association), in Hopland, CA; contact Solar Living Institute, (707) 744-2017; www.solarliving.org/solfest2003.cfm.

31: Abstract submission deadline for “Conserving Soil and Water for Society: Sharing Solutions,” 13th International Soil Conservation Organization Conference, to be held July 4–9, 2004, in Brisbane, Australia; contact ISCO 2004 Conference Secretariat, isco2004@icms.com.au; www.isco2004.org.

September

1: Submission deadline for presentations to 2003 Annual International Research Conference on Methyl Bromide Alternatives and Emissions Reductions, co-sponsored by Methyl Bromide Alternatives Outreach, Crop Protection Coalition, U.S. EPA, and USDA, to be held November 3–6, in San Diego, CA; contact Gary Obenauf, MBAO, (559) 322-2181; www.mbao.org/.

4–5: “Promoting the Use of State and Local Food Policy Councils,” National Workshop held in conjunction with Second Annual Iowa Food Policy Conference, in Des Moines, IA; contact Drake

University Agricultural Law Center, (515) 271-2065; www.statefoodpolicy.org/sfpc_conference.htm.

5–7: “Grow Biointensive” Sustainable Mini-Farming Workshop, in Willits, CA; contact Ecology Action/Common Ground, (707) 459-0150; www.growbiointensive.org.

5–7: “Organic Products Expo—BioFach America,” organized by BioFach International with New Hope Natural Media, in Washington, DC; for information, <http://www.ifoam.org/biofach/>.

9–11: University of Missouri beginning grazing school, a workshop on management-intensive grazing systems, in Linneus, MO; contact Missouri Forage and Grassland Council, (573) 499-0886; mfgc@mchsi.com.

15–17, “Feeding and Balancing the Soil,” 3-day introductory course in Albrecht-style soil fertility management, in Pittsburgh, PA; contact Acres U.S.A., 1-800-355-5313; meetings@acresusa.com.

19–21: 27th Annual Common Ground Country Fair, in Unity, ME; contact Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, (207) 568-4142; cgcfc@mofga.org; www.mofga.org.

21–24: National Public Policy Education Conference 2003, focusing on 5 issues: biotechnology and food system; impacts of aging population on rural communities; payment limits and other agricultural policy issues; urban growth and sprawl; and bioenergy options and consequences for U.S. agriculture, for Extension educators and interested others, in Salt Lake City, UT; contact Farm Foundation, (630) 571-9393; www.farmfoundation.org/nppeindex.htm.

26–28: 25th Annual Prairie Festival, in Salina, KS; contact The Land Institute, (785) 823-5376; theland@landinstitute.org.

30: Abstract submission deadline for “Working Together for Sustainable Land-Use System,” 1st World Congress of Agroforestry, to be held June 27–July 2, 2004, in Orlando, FL; contact P.K. Nair, Center for Subtropical Agroforestry, University of Florida/IFAS, (352) 846-0880; pkmenair@ufl.edu; <http://conference.ifas.ufl.edu/WCA/>.



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