



NEWS BRIEFS

Draft Rules from USDA Would Limit Conservation Security Program

USDA announced on December 17 the completion of draft rules allowing the Conservation Security Program (CSP) to move forward as a “limited entitlement” program. The rules would pay farmers \$20,000 to \$45,000 annually for stewardship practices on working lands under crops, pasture, and range. USDA’s approach is to “reward the best and motivate the rest” by directing limited funding to targeted watersheds. On initial review, some CSP supporters say the rule has moved away from the original legislation, and have faulted most strongly the agency’s plan to deny access to qualified farmers by limiting the program to unnamed, priority watersheds. The authority to severely limit the program in this way does not exist under current law or by the terms of the pending omnibus spending bill, the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition said. The draft rules make no mention, for instance, of management-intensive grazing and resource-conserving crop rotations, both cited in the 2002 Farm Bill as practices qualifying for “enhanced” CSP payments. Public comment on the 32-page rule (linked from www.nrcs.usda.gov/program/farmbill/2002) is due by March 2; more detailed analyses will be available from SAC, (202) 547-5754, or Land Stewardship Project, (612) 722-6377.

Hormones in Runoff from Cattle Feedlots Found to Alter Sexual Characteristics in Wild Fish

Hormonally active agents contained in waste from high-density cattle operations may be another potential source of contamination of surface waters, according to paired reports published last month in *Environmental Health Perspectives* (Dec. 1, www.ehponline.org). The researchers identified a potent mix of hormones seeping into sites downstream from cattle feedlots on Nebraska’s Elkhorn River, which altered the sexual characteristics of wild fish. Male minnows collected from contaminated sites had testes half as large as fish from upstream sites and females contained up to 45 percent more testosterone than unexposed fish. The research did not attempt to determine whether the changes in fish were caused by naturally produced hormones or by the synthetic androgens and estrogens used to promote growth in 90 percent of U.S. beef cattle. Anna Soto of Tufts University and Edward Orlando of St. Mary’s College of Maryland led the two studies.

EPA Drops Plans To Limit Clean Water Act Protection of Wetlands

EPA has dropped plans for regulatory changes that would have sharply reduced the number of federally protected streams and wetlands, “in response to strong opposition from environmentalists, sportsmen, lawmakers and state officials” (*Washington Post*, Dec. 17). The policy change announced by EPA administrator Mike Leavitt (Dec. 16, www.epa.gov/newsroom) “effectively repudiated an internal draft regulation that proposed withdrawing federal protections from many isolated wetlands and intermittent streams, including many small waterways in the arid West” (*New York Times*, Dec. 17). Some environmental groups remain concerned, however, that EPA has left in place a January 2003 directive to agency staff that ignores Clean Water Act protections for up to 20 million acres of wetlands and thousands of miles of headwater and seasonal streams. More information on the wetlands issue, including legislation seeking more comprehensive Clean Water Act protection of the nation’s waters, is online from Clean Water Network at www.cwn.org.

Draining Florida’s Wetlands Has Worsened the Effects of Crop Freezes

Converting south Florida’s wetlands to agricultural use, undertaken in part to escape damaging winter freezes to the north, has inadvertently worsened the effects of crop-damaging freezes in key areas used to grow winter produce and sugarcane, new research shows (*New York Times*, Nov. 25; *Miami Herald*, Nov. 6). According to a synopsis in the journal *Nature* (Nov. 6), investigators used a computer modeling system to recreate weather and land-surface conditions during several freezes since the 1980s, including a “surprise freeze” in 1997 that cost \$300 million in crop losses and displaced 100,000 migrant workers. “The natural land cover holds more heat, making the freezes less frequent and their durations shorter,” co-author Roger Pielke Sr. explained. The study sought to learn how human-induced changes to the landscape alter climate and may help farmers to better forecast killing freezes. For more information, contact lead author Curtis Marshall, email curtis@atmos.colostate.edu.

Carbon Uptake by Trees and Soils May Be Less Effective in Curbing Global Warming

Carbon uptake by terrestrial ecosystems may be less effective in curbing global warming than previously thought, according to separate analyses published in the journal *Science* (BBC News, Nov. 28, www.bbc.co.uk). Nitrogen, a limiting nutrient for plants and essential for their ability to absorb carbon, is too scarce to allow for large increases in carbon storage, concludes a research team led by Bruce Hungate of Northern Arizona University (*Science*, Nov. 28, 2003). Carbon uptake projected by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) would require 7.7 to 37.5 billion tons of nitrogen over the next century, while the new study estimates no more than 6.1 tons becoming available. Separate work on Amazon rainforest trees, led by Scott Saleska of Harvard University, suggests that drought and other disturbances lead to higher levels of carbon loss than shown by prior estimates. "The *Science* papers are pertinent," the BBC wrote, "because the idea of using forests to curb global warming forms a central plank of the Kyoto Protocol," currently being negotiated. The Kyoto treaty would allow wealthy nations to plant fast-growing trees and conserve old forests to offset their own carbon dioxide emissions.

UN Treaty Curbing Trade in Pesticides and Hazardous Chemicals To Become Law

The Rotterdam Convention, a United Nations-backed treaty regulating trade in pesticides and hazardous chemicals, was ratified by Armenia in November 2003, triggering a 90-day countdown for it to become law on February 24 (Greenwire, Dec. 1). The treaty, adopted and signed by the U.S. and a host of developing nations in September 1998, provides importing countries with "a major tool" to reduce pesticide-related risks for small farmers and citizens (UN Food and Agriculture Organization, Nov. 27, www.fao.org/english/newsroom). Signatory nations (currently numbering 50) will be able to decide which potentially hazardous chemicals they want to accept or exclude, and will receive labeling and safety information for chemicals accepted, including whether they have been banned in other countries. Currently the treaty covers 22 pesticides (including the highly toxic monocrotophos and parathion) and 5 industrial chemicals, with 5 more pesticides flagged for inclusion and "many more substances ... likely to be added in the future," FAO stated.

British Government Advisors Say Consumer Choice Must Govern GM Crop Policy

British government policy on the co-existence of genetically modified and other crops should safeguard consumer choice in buying British-produced, non-GM food, says an advisory group charged with assessing key issues raised by the prospect of growing GM crops in the United Kingdom. The Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission (AEBEC), in a 160-page report released in November 2003, recommends that farmers growing GM crops follow "legally enforceable" protocols to achieve at least the 0.9 percent threshold for GM content set by the European Union, and urges the creation of a government-backed fund to reimburse farmers who lose money because their crops are contaminated by GM varieties. The advisors agreed that it might prove impossible to reconcile the government's dual goals of expanding the organic sector and introducing GM crops, but failed to agree on whether organic agriculture should be protected from GM crops and on a possible compensation scheme for organic farmers (London's *Guardian*, Nov. 26). Additional recommendations are contained in the report, "GM Crops? Coexistence and Liability," available online at www.aebc.gov.uk; a print copy is free from AEBEC, 1 Victoria St., London, SW1H 0ET.

Conservation Biologists Debate Ecological Benefits of Shade-Grown Coffee

While traditional 'shade-grown' coffee cultivated under a diverse tree canopy is widely promoted as a means to protect tropical forests and migratory birds, conservation biologists disagree on whether it actually works. Debate on the issue, of importance since coffee production overlaps with many biodiversity 'hot spots,' is illustrated in two articles in the December 2003 issue of the journal *Conservation Biology*. Stacy Philpott and Thomas Dietsch argue that shade coffee gives farmers incentives to preserve tropical biodiversity, while noting that the keys to success are rigorous certification standards and mechanisms to ensure financial benefits for small, impoverished farmers. They urge linkage of shade standards with organic and fair-trade standards so farmers have economic reasons to avoid converting forest to sun-grown coffee, other crops, or pasture. Arguing against shade coffee's real-world conservation value, John Rappole and colleagues believe that market promotion has far outstripped certification and inadvertently encourages poor farmers to clear more native forest. The result, in their view, is extensive areas of multi-crop (though low-diversity) shade-coffee farms that may be a relatively benign form of agriculture, yet fall short in providing adequate refuge for birds and other forest wildlife.

RESOURCES

■ **Agriculture of the Middle project** on strategies for regenerating mid-scale U.S. farms and food-related enterprises, including draft 'white paper' for public comment, www.agofthemiddle.org; or contact Steve Stevenson, Assoc. Director, Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, University of Wisconsin, gwsteven@wisc.edu; (608) 262-5202.

■ **An Assessment of the Environmental Impacts of Organic Farming**, 80-page report commissioned by UK's Dept. for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, available from Elm Farm Research Centre, www.efrc.com/updates_main.htm; or contact EFRC, elmfarm@efrc.com, or lead author Mark Shepherd, ADAS Consulting, mark.shepherd@adas.co.uk.

■ **Biofuels factsheet series** including focus on energy balance, air quality and public health aspects (upcoming), from Environmental Energy Study Institute, www.eesi.org/programs/Agriculture/Biofuels.htm; or contact Josh Alban, Agriculture & Energy Program, EESI, 122 C St. NW Suite 630, Washington, DC 20001; (202) 628-1400.

■ **Breaking New Ground: Carbon Management at the Farm Scale**, 15-pg project report, www.cfra.org/pdf/carbon_management_report.pdf; print copy is \$5 from Center for Rural Affairs, PO Box 136, Lyons, NE 68038; (402) 687-2100.

■ **Enhanced Nutrient Content of Grass-Fed Beef: Justification for Health Label Claim**, 11-pg review paper from California State University-Chico and University of California Cooperative Extension researchers,

available from Grassfed beef educational website, www.csuchico.edu/agr/grsfdbef; or contact Glenn Nader, UC Cooperative Extension, (530) 822-7515.

■ **Genetically Modified Crops and Sustainable Poverty Alleviation in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Assessment of Current Evidence** (92 pgs), <http://allafrica.com/sustainable/resources/view/00010161.pdf>; or contact Third World Network Africa (Ghana), fax (23 32) 151-1188; contact@twnafrica.org.

■ **Growing New Farmers Project and GNF Consortium**, regional services to support new farmers in 12 northeastern states, hosted by New England Small Farm Institute, www.northeastnewfarmer.org, or contact GNF Project/NESFI, (413) 323-4531; gnf@smallfarm.org.

■ **International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability**, peer-reviewed interdisciplinary research journal launched in 2003, edited by Jules Pretty of University of Essex; for introductory rates and sample of first issue, contact Channel View Communications, info@channelviewpublications.com; or online at www2.essex.ac.uk/ces/NewJournals/ijas.htm.

■ **Organic Agricultural Products: Marketing and Trade Resources**, 133-pg bibliography and resource guide, www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/AFSIC_pubs/OAP/srb0301.htm (or 133-pg version in PDF); also free on compact disc from M. Gold, Alternative Farming Systems Information Center, National Agricultural Library, (301) 504-6559.

■ **Organic agriculture policy statement** (Sept. 2003 draft) from National

Association of State Depts. of Agriculture, www.nasda.org/nasda/nasda/Calendar/NASDA2003_reports/policies/18.pdf; or contact NASDA, 1156 15th St. NW, Suite 1020, Washington, DC 20005; (202) 296-9680.

■ **The Organic Farmer's Guide to Oregon State University** (20 pgs), including analytical services, faculty contacts, <http://eesc.orst.edu/agcomweb/file/edmat/EM8835.pdf>; print copy is \$1.50 plus \$3 S/H from Oregon State Univ., Pubs. Orders, Extension and Station Communications, 422 Kerr Admin., Corvallis, OR 97331-2119.

■ **Returns to University of California Pest Management Research and Extension: Overview and Case Studies Emphasizing IPM** (285 pgs, ANR#3482) is \$15 plus \$4 S/H from ANR Communications, 6701 San Pablo Ave., 2nd Floor, Oakland, CA 94608-1239; danrcs@ucdavis.edu.

■ **The Struggle to Reduce Reliance on Pesticides in World Bank Projects: Can Community-Based Monitoring Lead to Improved Policy Compliance?** (23 pgs), www.panna.org/campaigns/docsWorldBank/WBStruggle.pdf or contact Pesticide Action Network North America, (415) 981-1771.

■ **Where Rivers Are Born: The Scientific Imperative for Defending Small Streams and Wetlands**, 4-page brief from ecologists, plus supporting literature, sponsored by American Rivers and Sierra Club, www.sierraclub.org/cleanwater/reports_factsheets/; or contact Sierra Club Legislative Office, 408 C St. NE, Washington, DC 20002; (202) 547-1141.

CALENDAR

February 2004

1: Title submission deadline for presentations to 2004 Conference of the American Forage and Grassland Council, June 12-16, 2004, in Roanoke, VA; contact Kim Cassida, (304) 256-2956; kcassida@afsrc.ars.usda.gov; www.conted.vt.edu/afgc/papers.html.

2-8: "A Bounty of Golden Ideas," joint meeting of 19th annual North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Conference/Trade Show and California Small Farm Conference, in Sacramento, CA; contact Marcia Touchette, North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association, (413) 529-0386; www.nafdma.com/Conference/Sacramento/.

4-7: Annual Advanced Organic Vegetable Production Workshop, in East Troy, WI; contact Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, (262) 642-3303 x100; gkahovic@michaelfieldsagainst.org.

5-6: Connecting Illinois Watersheds Conference, in Peoria, IL; contact (217) 782-6515; jotate@uiuc.edu; www.watershed.uiuc.edu.

5-7: NPSAS 25th Anniversary Annual Winter Conference, in Mandan, ND; contact Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society, (701) 883-4304; tnpsas@drtel.net; www.npsas.org/Upcoming.html.

5-7: "Pathways to Prosperity: The New Face of Agriculture," 13th Annual Farming for the Future Conference including pre-conference workshops, in State College, PA; contact Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture, (814) 349-9856; www.pasafarming.org/index.htm.

9-11: 2004 Wisconsin Grazing Conference, in Stevens Point, WI; contact Paul Nehring, (715) 261-6009; www.grassworks.org/Conference/conference.htm.

9-11 and 17-18: NOFA-Connecticut 2004 Course in Organic Land Care, 5-day course on ecological land management, in New Haven, CT; contact (203) 888-5146; bduesing@cs.com; www.organiclandcare.net/calendar/009.php.

9-12: "Growing for the Health of New York," 2004 Empire State Fruit and Vegetable Expo, in Rochester, NY; contact (315) 687-5734; nysvga@twcny.rr.com; www.nysaes.cornell.edu/hort/04expo/assets/Expo04Program.pdf.

11-12 (Montrose, CO) and 19-20 (Colorado Springs, CO): First workshops in series on niche market beef production in Colorado and the West, sponsored by American Farmland Trust and partners; contact Jami Daniel, jdaniel@farmland.org; www.farmland.org/rocky_mountain/niche_beef.htm.

13-14: "30 Years Growing," California Certified Organic Farmers' 30th Anniversary Party and Annual Meeting, in Monterey, CA; contact (831) 423-2263; ccof@ccof.org; www.ccof.org.

15: Abstract submission deadline for presentations to "Strengthening Partnerships: New Paths to Rural Prosperity," 67th Annual Meeting of Rural Sociological Society, August 12-15, 2004, in Sacramento, CA; contact D.M. Parisi, (662) 325-8065; mimmo.parisi@ssrc.msstate.edu; <http://ruralsociology.org/annual-meeting/2004/index.html>.

19-22: BioFach 2004, World Organic Trade Fair, sponsored by International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, in Nuremberg, Germany; contact NurnbergMesse GmbH, email besucherinfo@nuernbergmesse.de; www.biofach.de.

20-21: 10th Annual Kansas Sustainable Agriculture Roundup, in Manhattan, KS; contact Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture & Alternative Crops, (785) 532-1440; jbeckma@oznet.ksu.edu.

20-21: Southeastern Idaho Small Acreage Farming Conference, in Idaho Falls, ID; contact Stuart Parkinson, Franklin County Extension, (208) 852-1097; sparkinson@uidaho.edu.

20-22: "The Western Sustainable Agriculture Movement: Building Relationships and Wielding Power," 10th Annual Meeting of Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, in Logan, UT; contact (406) 494-8636; wsawg@ncat.org.



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