



ORGANIC PRODUCTION AND MARKETING NEWSLETTER



J. J. FERGUSON, Editor
Professor and Extension Horticulturist
UF/IFAS - Horticultural Sciences Dept.
PO Box 110690/Gainesville FL 32611-0690
JJFN@IFAS.UFL.EDU

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide production/marketing information about organic and related sustainable farming practices.

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Challenge to Organic Farming Standards

New USDA guidelines issued in April allowing limited use of pesticides and antibiotics in organic farming provoked a quick response from organic farming advocates. The guidance statements and enforcement directives would have allowed:

- 1) Organic producers to use pesticides that may contain inert chemical ingredients even if a reasonable effort fails to identify the inert ingredients. Pesticide makers are usually not required to list all inactive ingredients in their products, but material approved for organic farming must have inert ingredients identified and approved as well as the major component of the product.
- 2) Milk producing cows to be treated with drugs, like antibiotics and growth hormones, 12 months before milk from the cow is sold as organic.
- 3) Ground fish to be used as a protein supplement in livestock feed. The issue here would have been that fish from aquaculture farms or even marine sources could contain synthetic preservatives and contaminants like PCBs and mercury.

Barbara Robinson, a deputy administrator in charge of the USDA's National Organic Program, said the National Organic Standards Board, which consults with the USDA on organic farming standards, was not consulted beforehand because USDA officials thought they were defining the limits of existing regulations, not establishing new ones.

On May 27, Secretary of Agriculture Ann M. Veneman, announced that the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, the agency in charge of the National Organic Program, would rescind these changes and work more closely with the National Organic Standards Board. Senator Patrick J. Leahy, Democrat of Vermont and the prime congressional sponsor of the National Organic Program since the 1990s, called the new regulations "unilateral fiats" and worked with other congressmen to urge the Secretary to rescind these controversial regulations.

In April, 2003, another challenge to the National Organic Program, the "Fiedale Loophole", was issued. In February, Representative Nathan Deal, Georgia Republican, inserted a measure into a federal spending bill that would have allowed a Georgia poultry producer, Fiedale Farms, to use a less expensive non-organic livestock feed instead of more expensive organic feed to produce organically grown chickens. This would have undermined National Organic Standards and Patrick Leahy again successfully repealed this provision. (NY Times - May 26-27, 2004)

GMO-Food Labeling Begins in Europe

All food sold in the European Union with genetically modified ingredients must now say so on the label, under rules that went into effect on Sunday (April 17) and restaurants serving genetically engineered food must identify it on the menu. France, Italy and five other countries unofficially banned the sale of any new genetically altered crops five years ago.

Products with modified ingredients have been sold before in the Union, which will expand from 15 to 25 members on May 1. However, the new rules apply to items like cereal, frozen pizza, baby formula, etc. in which more than 0.9 percent of the ingredients have been genetically engineered but meat, eggs and milk are not subject to labeling, even from animals raised on genetically modified feed. (New York Times - April 21, 2004)

Narrow Path for New Biotech Food Crops

Agricultural biotechnology acreage is increasing in the US and around the world and perhaps is becoming more accepted. Biotech corn, cotton, and soybeans were grown on a bout 85 million acres in the US in 2003 and along with canola on about 63 million acres in the rest of the world. And on May 19, 2004, the European Commission allowed imports of a genetically engineered sweet corn developed by the Swiss company, Syngenta, ending a six-year moratorium on the approval of biotech food. But, a New York Times article on May 20 pointed out that this growth is in a narrow range, with 99 percent of the crops grown in six countries (the US, Argentina, Canada, Brazil, China, South Africa) and most of the acreage devoted to only four crops (soybeans, corn, cotton, and canola). Furthermore, only the two major traits, insect resistance and herbicide resistance, have been engineered into these crops. These four crops are used primarily for animal feed, clothing, or to make oil and other ingredients for processed food rather than being eaten directly - something that has helped them gain acceptance. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN also recently issued a report saying that despite its promise, this technology was not being applied to crops like potatoes, cassava, rice, wheat, millet, and sorghum grown in developing countries. Virus-resistant, genetically engineered potatoes were developed but were taken off the market by Monsanto after big potato processors and fast-food companies told growers they did not want them.

Recent attempts to genetically engineer other crops have met resistance by food companies and farmers. Furthermore, the time and money needed to pass regulatory hurdles make it too costly to apply biotechnology to relatively more minor crops than the four major ones already mentioned. Some companies budget an additional \$50 million above what they would spend on a conventional crop to bring a biotech seed to market.

The first genetically engineered crop, the Flavr Savr tomato, was introduced in 1994, and some gmo papaya and squash are on the market. Field trials have also included broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, cucumbers, eggplant, kale, lettuce, onions, peas, peppers, squash, and watermelon.

But according to a recent article in California Agriculture, the number of US field trials of biotech fruit and vegetables has fallen from about 120 in 1999 to about 20 in 2003 and only two crops have been entered into consultation with the Food and Drug Administration in the last three years. However, Syngenta is developing the Stayripe Banana which would add about 5 days to the time before which the fruit would not be edible. Monsanto is also developing soybeans containing more healthful oils that would reduce harmful trans fats and promote heart health, but conventional breeding rather than biotechnology will be used to develop this cultivar. (New York Times - May 20, 2004)

Organic Fruit Production More Difficult than Row Crops

(The Packer - May 3, 2004)

Fruit and nut growers, both conventional and organic, make a larger investment in crop inputs, time, and long-term labor than vegetable growers. For example, after planting, citrus and peach trees may not come into commercial bearing for

three to five years, with larger trees like pecan taking seven to 10 years. Many vegetable crops are harvested within 30 to 120 days after planting compared with fruit crops that may need much longer to mature. Many citrus varieties bloom in Florida during March-April and are harvested before December, but the main Florida orange processed for juice, Valencia oranges, bloom during March-April but may not be harvested the following summer, 15 to 18 months after initial bloom.

Olson Family Farms in Kingsburg, California, grows several varieties of peaches, plums, nectarines, pluots (a cross between peaches and apricots), and apricots on about 700 organic acres in central California. They carefully select the cultivars they grow to provide a consistent fruit supply from May to September. At the retail level, individual organic fruit is frequently packaged and labeled with a Universal Product Code so the cashier records the correct price, usually higher than conventionally grown fruit. Retailers are often reluctant to offer bulk organic fruit because possible misidentification of organic fruit at the checkout counter. Other options include a four-count clamshell container that offers a better view of the fruit and is easy to scan correctly at the checkout counter.

Organic Horticulture at the July Meeting of the American Society for Horticulture Sciences [ASHS]

(July 17-21 in Austin, Texas)

At the ASHS meetings in July in Austin, Texas a workshop on "*Serving Organic Growers Through Innovative Outreach and On-farm Research*" will be presented as well as papers on the following topics:

- Evaluation of Organic Herbicides
- Control of the Foliar Disease, Septoria lycopersici, in Organic Tomato Production
- Comparison of Polyphenol Contents and Anti-oxident Activity of Apple Fruits by Organic Cultivation
- Soil Organic Matter Content Effects on Apple Root Dynamics
- Total Phenolic and Flavonoid Contents of Organically and Conventionally Grown Lettuce, Collards and Chinese Cabbage
- Organic Cultivation of Radicchio rosso di Chioggia (Chicorium intybus var. silvestre) in Iowa
- Response of 'Nocellara del Belice' Olive Trees to Organic Foliar Fertilization
- Organic Options for Managing Weeds in Highbush Blueberries
- Reaching Midwest Organic Growers through On-Farm Partnerships
- OASIS: Organic Vegetable Production Teaching Endeavor and Community Supported Agriculture Venture

The Organic Revolution Goes Mainstream on Main Street

An eight page advertisement in this past Sundays New York Times magazine section, prepared by Spirit Journal, Inc., features add copy for organic eggs, Horizon and Organic Valley Milk, Whole Foods Market, Annie's Home Grown products, soyburgers, and moisturizing creams, nestled among softly focused images of citrus, roosters, buffalo, pigs and goats. Capping it off is a burly, white-bearded farmer, leaning on the hood of his vintage pickup with the caption: "Still farming after all these years". (New York Times Magazine Section - April 25, 2004)

Organic Sales of Packaged Produce

(The Packer - May 3, 2004)

SPINS, a San Francisco market research firm that provides data to the health food industry, reports that sales of packaged organic produce at natural and health food stores grew from \$70.2 million in 2001 to \$88.6 million last year. Data were based on sales from 874 stores with annual sales of more than \$2 million each.

During the same period, packaged organic sales like baby carrots and salad mixes with Universal Product Codes in conventional stores went from \$155.6 million in 2001 to \$273.5 million in 2003. Produce is seen as "the gateway to organics", according to the Natural Marketing Institute, a Pennsylvania-based consulting company focusing on the health and wellness market. A concern for health and wellness and a belief that organic produce tastes better were the reasons most cited by consumers of organic produce, whereas high prices and lack of availability were mentioned as reasons some consumers stopped purchasing organic produce.

Produce Sanitation

The International Fresh-cut Produce Association, the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association, and the Tri-State consortium (University of Florida, University of California Davis, and Texas A&M University) are collaborating to offer a workshop in Orlando, Florida on August 2, 2004 focused on fruit and vegetable sanitation from harvest to package.

The one day workshop, "*Sanitation Workshop for Packinghouses, Value-added Harvest and Fresh-cut Operations*," will be held August 2, 2004 at the Crowne Plaza Universal Hotel in Orlando from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The objective of the workshop is to provide an educational forum for grower/shippers, packinghouse operators, and fresh-cut processors to increase awareness and provide practical solutions to sanitation issues which may arise during harvesting, packing, and processing of fruits and vegetables. The workshop format is a morning session detailing the fundamentals of sanitation and three afternoon breakout sessions focused on the specific sanitation needs of packinghouses, in-field preparation/harvest operations, and fresh-cut processing plants.

Fees for the one-day workshop include lunch and are \$225 for members of IFPA, FFVA and \$275 for all others. Details are available on IFPA's web site: <http://www.fresh-cuts.org/files/Sanitation%20Workshop.pdf> or by calling Ms. Seneta Burns at (703) 299-6282.

USDA Organic Estimates (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Data/organic/>)

The most recent USDA Economic Research Service figures on US organic production (2000-2001) include 71,677 acres of certified organic vegetable production (3% of the overall organic production area) and 55,675 acres of certified fruit acreage (2% of the overall organic production area).

"While adoption of organic farming systems showed strong gains between 1992 and 2001, the overall adoption level is still low - only about 0.3 percent of all US cropland and 0.2 percent of all US pasture. Obstacles to adoption by farmers of organic production systems include high managerial costs, risks of shifting to new production practices, limited awareness of organic farming systems, lack of marketing and infrastructure, and inability to capture marketing economies. Factors favoring adoption include lower input costs, conservation of nonrenewable resources, high-value niche markets and increased farm income, especially as prices for staple commodities fall".

The above listed web site contains 82 tables listing production figures for a range of crops from 1997 to 2001.

Certified organic pasture and cropland 2001 from selected states				
State	Number of certified organic operations	Cropland	Pasture and rangeland	Total organic acreage
Alabama	2	35	-	35
Arkansas	25	24,769	426	25,195
California	1011	148,664	14,495	163,158
Florida	90	12,059	-	12,059
Kentucky	72	5,272	1,280	6,552
Louisiana	18	86	10	96
North Carolina	63	1,372	5	1,377
South Carolina	4	14	-	14

Carolina				
Tennessee	9	300	-	300
Texas	170	45,219	221,102	266,320
Source: Economic Research Service, USDA (http://www.ers.usda.gov/Data/organic/data/pastcrop01.xls)				

Among southern states Texas (170) and Florida (90) have the largest number of certified organic operations. Considering cropland acreage, Texas and Arkansas have much greater area in organic production. Texas also has the greatest pasture and rangeland acreage, followed by Kentucky, with Florida not having any such areas listed. In comparison, California has the largest number of certified operations and cropland.

The complete listing of all 50 states can be found at the website listed above. Compared with all 50 states, Florida ranks 20th in the number of certified organic operations, 22nd in cropland acreage and, along with 7 other states, has no pasture and rangeland listed. Florida also has 1,928 acres in mixed vegetables (0.67 % of total acreage), 6,056 acres in citrus (0.75 % of total acreage) and 98 acres in other fruits, 18 acres in herbs, nurseries and greenhouse, and 2,301 acres of unclassified crops, probably forested and woodland areas.

Vermont Requires Labels on BioTech Seeds

'Vermont is requiring that genetically modified seeds be labeled, becoming the first state to do so. Governor Jim Douglas, a Republican, signed the measure into law on Monday. "It showed that state legislatures can stand up to the biotech industry." said Ben Davis, environmental advocate for the Vermont Public Interest Research Group. Lisa Dry of the Biotechnology Industry Organization said farmers already knew when they were buying genetically engineered seeds because they had to sign agreements covering their use of the seeds.' (New York Times - April 29, 2004)

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