

This free monthly newsletter is provided by the FQH association to keep researchers, the industry and other interested parties abreast of the latest news in organic food quality, research, health, diet and other relevant issues. Comments and contributions are welcome, or if you find an item of news that you think should be included, please email news@organicfqhresearch.org

Quotes of the months:

"Organic: I know what I eat". *The Belgian organic federation's new motto as part of their new consumer information programme.*

"Organic, really logical." *The slogan of a new Dutch government consumer education programme supporting organic food and farming*

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PESTICIDES

UK: Blood tests reveal contamination is common

Environment journalist John Vidal, along with 150 other people, had his blood tested to measure levels of three groups of chemicals – organochlorines, PCBs and flame retardants. The Worldwide Fund for Nature organised the tests to see how loaded people were with pesticides, insecticides, and other widely used chemicals.

Although the results, unsurprisingly, revealed a wide range of contamination levels in the 150 test volunteers, Vidal points out that they only tested for a total of 72 chemicals: there are 100,000 synthetic, manmade ones, and 30,000 of them are traded in commercial quantities in the EU alone. One of the consultants taking Vidal through his results said that they fell "well within the safe limits". However, she admitted that very little was known about the chemicals' long term effect on human health, including whether the effect of the chemicals - individually or together - might lead to illnesses or cancers.

Vidal says that the tests did produce some shocking results:

- Everyone tested had measurable quantities of all three groups of chemicals in their blood.
- The chemicals all accumulate in baby fat and are readily passed onto babies by their mothers – a first child can expect to inherit up to 30% of the chemical load of its mother.
- Dangerous, banned chemicals, such as PCBs which were banned in the 1970s, were still detectable in people's blood.

The consultant advised people to wash food, avoid garden sprays, and, above all, be careful what they eat: "My advice is go organic. It's the best way to clear your system and to protect yourself and others. You never know what's out there." (The Guardian)

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US: Study of harmful effects of herbicide atrazine undermined by manufacturer Syngenta

By *GOLDIE BLUMENSTYK, CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION*

Tyrone Hayes wasn't all that concerned about who was signing the checks when he agreed to do some consulting on one of the most widely used pesticides in the country. And when the early studies from his laboratory at the University of California at Berkeley began producing hints that the product, the herbicide atrazine, might be inhibiting the sexual development of male frogs, he was excited. Maybe, he thought, his research would lead to some breakthrough findings. He never imagined just how unenthusiastic his research sponsors --- and others with a financial stake in atrazine --- would be about his discovery. Six frustrating years later, Mr. Hayes and his defenders say they know only too well the lengths to which those companies will go to undermine his findings that atrazine may be harmful. This week the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is expected to make its final ruling on the reapproval of atrazine. Mr. Hayes and some other

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scientists believe that the campaign to discredit him will have played a part in helping the herbicide's primary manufacturer, a company called Syngenta, win that approval.

His colleagues here at Berkeley and around the country say the story is a classic example of the subtle and not-so-subtle tactics that companies sometimes use to influence the outcome of university research that they pay for. Mr. Hayes maintains that Ecorisk Inc., the consulting company that hired him and several other academic scientists to study atrazine on behalf of Syngenta, stalled and delayed his research progress once he began finding that the substance had damaging effects on frogs. It turned out that in the contracts covering Mr. Hayes's work and that of many of the other researchers, Syngenta and Ecorisk retained final say over what and whether the scientists could publish.

Even after he quit working as an Ecorisk consultant, in November 2000, he asserts, the company tried to buy his silence: He says the Ecorisk consultant in charge of the atrazine studies told him that it would arrange with Syngenta to provide him with as much as \$2-million in lab support if he would continue his research "in a private setting," unencumbered by the academic ethos that promotes publication of results. The Ecorisk consultant, Ronald J. Kendall, of Texas Tech University, says the charge is "absolutely" untrue. Whatever the truth of that allegation, what happened next is undisputed: Freed from the contractual constraints on publication and confidentiality, Mr. Hayes repeated and expanded upon the original frog studies. He continued to find damaging effects of atrazine at low levels.

His work, which has appeared in Nature and other journals, has been attacked by Syngenta and a host of other critics --- including the Kansas Corn Growers Association, a Fox News commentator known for minimizing the potential threat of global warming, and the Center for Regulatory Effectiveness, an organization based in Washington that is challenging the use of academic studies in federal rule making. As part of its rebuttal of Mr. Hayes's work, Syngenta cited studies by three other teams of university scientists, working for the company through Ecorisk, who could not replicate his findings showing the same effects at low doses. Several of those academics, contacted by The Chronicle, said that Syngenta did not influence the outcome of their work. They also take pains to describe their differences with Mr. Hayes as an example of the kind of scientific disagreement that is typical of academe. If the debate is heated, they say, that is largely because the stakes are so high. Atrazine, an important product for Syngenta, is widely used by farmers to kill weeds. Mr. Hayes says some of those studies are flawed, and he has gone public with allegations that Ecorisk was interested only in bending its panel of scientists to benefit Syngenta. "It's very directly involved with the hubris of corporations that think, 'We can fund the research we want,'" says Sheldon Krimsky, a professor at Tufts University who studies conflicts of interest in academe. "Corporations think they can fund academic science in their own interests. Hayes is a case where they made a miscalculation. For every miscalculation, how many accurate ones are out there?"

The case is not the first in which Berkeley scientists have found themselves entwined in a controversy involving Syngenta. This is the same university that was pilloried, sometimes unjustly, for an unusually close \$25-million research relationship with another arm of Syngenta that began in 1998. But that association, which involved biologists from another college in the university, had nothing to do with the Hayes research. Swiss-based Syngenta was formed in November 2000 from the merged agriculture operations of two other companies, Novartis and Zeneca. Mr. Hayes says he probably never would have begun looking at atrazine had Ecorisk not approached him. He knew very little about the herbicide at the time. Criticism of Mr. Hayes's new study also appeared on the Fox News Web site, where the commentator Steven Milloy said he'd "rather kiss a frog" than trust the professor's peer-reviewed studies. Mr. Milloy is founder of a Web site he calls Junk Science, on which he mocks studies he says are used by "lawsuit-happy trial lawyers, the 'food police,' [and] environmental Chicken Littles."

(THE AGRIBUSINESS EXAMINER by A.V. Krebs avkrebs@earthlink.net
<http://www.ea1.com/CARP/>)

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France: Pesticides in majority of water samples

Pesticides were present in the majority of samples taken from water testing stations in 2001, more frequently in surface water (in 73% of the stations concerned, at least one of the required active substances was found) than in subsoil waters (57%), at levels which can disturb the aquatic environments or which are above acceptable thresholds for the production of drinking water without specific treatment for the excessive pesticides.

The only monitoring of drinking water quality highlights well protected resources that allow production of drinking water without specific treatment for pesticides and which feed a great number of water networks. Nevertheless, about half of the surface water volume used for drinking water does require specific pesticide treatment.

<http://www.natexpo.com>

<http://www.ifen.fr/pestic/2003/pestic2003.htm>

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US: New wallet-sized pesticide guide launched

WASHINGTON, Oct. 21 /PRNewswire/ --

In celebration of the one-year anniversary of the national organic standards, Environmental Working Group (EWG) today released its newest findings on pesticides in produce. EWG researchers analyzed over 100,000 U.S. government pesticide test results and found 192 different pesticides on 46 popular fresh fruits and vegetables. Now consumers can shop their way to reduced pesticide exposure with the new Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce. For years, shoppers have been able to choose foods that contain less fat, cholesterol or

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artificial additives. With the Shopper's Guide, people concerned about pesticides can make choices to reduce the number of pesticides they eat.

Stonyfield Farm, the nation's leading organic yogurt manufacturer, created the convenient wallet-size Guide to deliver this information to consumers.

Downloadable from both <http://www.foodnews.org> and <http://www.stonyfield.com>, the Guide lists the 12 produce items that are consistently most- and least-contaminated with pesticides.

EWG and Stonyfield recommend fresh fruits and vegetables as part of a healthy diet. Consumers who are concerned about eating pesticides can either buy organic produce or use the Shopper's Guide to choose conventional foods that contain the least pesticide residues. Using this tool can reduce the number of pesticides in produce a person eats by up to 90 percent. A growing body of scientific literature points to the benefits of eating pesticide-free food. In 2002, a University of Washington study found that children who ate mostly organic produce had far lower levels of pesticide byproducts in their bodies. Over the past six years, the federal government has banned or restricted the use of over a dozen pesticides because of their health risks. While more and more pesticides are being investigated and banned, consumers can use the Shopper's Guide now to make informed decisions in the produce aisle.

EWG Senior Vice President Richard Wiles said, "Consumers should eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, whether or not they are concerned about pesticides. But for people who are concerned, now there's the Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce." Increasingly, consumers are demanding healthier choices in the supermarket. Organic products are one of the fastest-growing segments of the food industry, with compounded sales of organic products having grown at a rate of 22 percent annually for over 10 years. Gary Hirshberg, President and CEO of Stonyfield Farm, pointed out that, "When consumers 'vote with their wallets' they are helping to solve a global problem with a local solution. Corporate America sees that the demand for pesticide-free foods is driving the growth of the market. This fact should send a clear message that consumers want healthier food for their families, not the proliferation of pesticides. The Guide gives consumers the information they need to make informed purchases -- that's why Stonyfield Farm chose to fund this study."

<http://www.ewg.org>.

<http://www.stonyfield.com>

<http://www.stonyfield.com/Organic/EWGShoppersGuide.pdf>

<http://www.foodnews.org>

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ANTIBIOTICS

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EU: Crackdown on salmonella

European Commissioner David Byrne welcomed the Agriculture Council's decision this week on new rules to cut the incidence of foodborne diseases in the European Union. Salmonella alone costs the EU an estimated 2.8bn Euros...

<http://www.foodnavigator.com/news/news.asp?id=8453>

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ADDITIVES

GMOs

UK: GM crops fail key trials

Two of the three GM crops grown experimentally in Britain, oil seed rape and sugar beet, appear more harmful to the environment than conventional crops and should not be grown in the UK, scientists have told the government. The third crop, GM maize, allows the survival of more weeds and insects and might be recommended for approval, though some scientists still have reservations.

The study includes eight peer-reviewed papers about the effect of growing GM crops and accompanying herbicides on the plants and animals living in the fields around. The papers compare the GM fields with conventional crops grown in adjacent fields. The Royal Society refused to publish a ninth paper produced by the scientific group and so the scientists involved will now themselves publish this summary at the same time as the other eight papers, concluding that two of the three crops should not be grown.

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BSE

NUTRIENT CONTENT

HEALTH & DIET

US: New review on benefits of fruit & vegetables

Hu FB, 2003, Plant-based Foods and Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease: An Overview, Am J Clin Nutr 78(suppl):544S-51S

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Evidence from prospective cohort studies indicates that a high consumption of plant-based foods such as fruit and vegetables, nuts, and whole grains is associated with a significantly lower risk of coronary artery disease and stroke. The protective effects of these foods are probably mediated through multiple beneficial nutrients contained in these foods, including mono- and polyunsaturated fatty acids, n-3 fatty acids, antioxidant vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals, fibre and plant protein. In dietary practice, healthy plant-based diets do not necessarily have to be low in fat. Instead, these diets should include unsaturated fats as the predominant form of dietary fat (eg fats from natural liquid vegetable oil and nuts), whole grains as the main form of carbohydrate, an abundance of fruit and vegetables, and adequate n-3 fatty acids. Such diets, which also have many other health benefits, deserve more emphasis in dietary recommendations to prevent chronic diseases.

Frank B Hu, Department of Nutrition, Harvard School of Public Health, Boston, USA

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US: Study shows synergistic benefits of antioxidant phytonutrients in foods

Liu RH, 2003, Health benefits of fruits and vegetables are from additive and synergistic combinations of phytochemicals, Am J Clin Nutr 78(suppl):517S-20S

Cardiovascular disease and cancer are ranked as the first and second leading causes of death in the United States and in most industrialised countries. Regular consumption of fruit and vegetables is associated with reduced risks of cancer, cardiovascular disease, stroke, Alzheimer disease, cataracts, and some of the functional declines associated with aging. Prevention is a more effective strategy than is treatment of chronic diseases. Functional foods that contain significant amounts of bioactive components may provide desirable health benefits beyond basic nutrition and play important roles in the prevention of chronic diseases. The key question is whether a purified phytochemical has the same health benefit as does the whole food or mixture of foods in which the phytochemical is present. Our group found, for example, that the vitamin C in apples with skin accounts for only 0.4% of the total antioxidant activity, suggesting that most of the antioxidant activity of fruit and vegetables may come from phenolics and flavonoids in apples. We propose that the additive and synergistic effects of phytochemicals in fruit and vegetables are responsible for their potent antioxidant and anticancer activities, and that the benefit of a diet rich in fruit and vegetables is attributed to the complex mixture of phytochemicals present in whole foods.

Rui Hai Liu, Department of Food Science and the Institute of Comparative and Environmental Toxicology, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, USA

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RESEARCH

EU: European Commission calls for research proposals

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The European Commission has published on the 10th October 2003 a call for research proposals to support Common Agricultural Policy Reform. One of the tasks in chapter 1.2 (task 2), invites proposals on "European Action Plan of Organic Food and Farming: Development of criteria and procedures for the evaluation of the EU Action Plan" (deadline for submission: 13 January 2004.) For more information see http://fp6.cordis.lu/fp6/call_details.cfm?

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Australia: New organic R&D advisory committee announced

The Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation (RIRDC) has just announced the new members on the Advisory Committee which oversees all research into organics in Australia which RIRDC either commissions or funds following successful application. The new committee is as follows:

Organic Program Manager: Denise Millar (Manager)
Committee: Don Fraser (Chairperson), Geoff Babidge (So Natural Foods), Viv Burnett (Department of Primary Industries, Victoria), Prof. Peter Cornish (University of Western Sydney), Jan Denham (Karra Karra Farms – organic citrus grower), Andre Leu (Daintree Tropical Fruit Orchards), Steve McCoy (Agriculture Western Australia), Dr Andrew Monk (Biological Farmers of Australia).
(The Organic Advantage from the BFA <http://www.bfa.com.au>)

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EU: Commission for long-term experiments in organic farming established

In ISOFAR, the International Society of Organic Agriculture Research, a Commission for Long-term Experiments (LTE) in organic farming has been established with the following objectives:

- promoting the fruitful international co-operation of researchers involved in LTE dealing with organic farming;
- sharing experiences, knowledge, insights and positions on LTE with colleagues on an international level;
- compiling present results of LTE;
- developing common research questions and methods;
- envisaging new projects with our experiments.

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USA: University of California likely to cut organic agriculture programmes

Among the possible casualties of an effort by The University of California to save \$4 million is the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program at Davis, which promotes the reduced use of farm chemicals, organic farming and soil management. Created by the legislature and the university in 1986, the program's multidisciplinary approach is recognized as a national leader. "The university is dismantling its most effective tool for reducing environmental and public health risks posed by agriculture at a time when California growers and the environment need them the most," said Jonathan Kaplan, spokesman for the Natural Resources Defense Council in San Francisco.

California's 1,000 organic farmers and others trying to meet stricter environmental mandates rely on the programs, which would be consolidated or eliminated under a plan being assessed this week by top university officials. Pamela Kan-Rice, spokeswoman for the UC Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, said the university is maintaining its environmental commitment. "What we are trying to do is reduce administrative costs without losing program excellence," she said. The current proposal calls for consolidating or eliminating 22 state-wide special programs, along with several committees, workgroups and administrative offices. Survivors would be merged into four new entities.

The reorganization proposal and public comments about it are posted online at <http://groups.ucanr.org/directions/>.

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EU: Farm to fork gets fund injection

The European Commission has earmarked €1 66m in funding for a range of projects under the 'food quality and safety' priority of the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6). Thirty-six projects have the stamp of approval, unveiled this week by the Commission. A number of [projects](#) selected for funding identify and assess potential health risks associated with food processing methods. The focus of one project in particular is on the recently discovered health risks associated with hazardous compounds in heat-treated carbohydrate-rich foods, where substantial amounts of acrylamide and similar compounds can be formed. In order to assess the potential risks, the project will explore cooking and processing methods in industry and households with the aim of controlling and minimising the formation of hazardous compounds. Compounds such as acrylamide, unsaturated carbonyl compounds and furans, formed during heating, will go under the microscope.

Two projects - a concerted action (CA) and a specific targeted research project (STREP) - will tackle the issue of preventing human degenerative diseases, focusing specifically on the influence of nutrition and lifestyle on healthy ageing. The first project aims to improve the understanding of how diet can promote healthy ageing. It is hoped that by coordinating research in this area, the project will help improve quality of life of the elderly; reduce public health costs through the prevention of nutrition-related diseases; and encourage the development of nutritionally-balanced food products specially designed for the elderly.

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The second project will study the nutritional impact of zinc, an area where no focused research has been conducted thus far. Zinc is known to be a beneficial nutrient that controls the development and function of the immune cells, and helps to maintain genomic integrity and stability. However, during ageing, the intake of zinc decreases due to inadequate diet and intestinal malabsorption, causing frailty, general disability and increased incidence of age-related degenerative diseases such as cancer and atherosclerosis. Zinc deficiency in the elderly will be evaluated and the results will form a rationale for the promotion of healthy ageing through a zinc supplementation, as well as the development of new zinc related anti-ageing drugs.

In addition to assuring health and well-being of European citizens through a better understanding of the influence of food intake and environmental factors on human health, the first set of projects also pays particular attention to improving animal welfare. In this context, one Integrated Project has been selected to develop robust on-farm welfare assessment methodologies, together with information frameworks and an array of targeted welfare improvements. The Commission hopes that by establishing a better dialogue between the farmers, consumers and scientists, production methods will improve and animal welfare, as well as food quality, will be respected.

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PROMOTION

Belgium: New marketing programme launched

The organic federation in Belgium has introduced a new consumer information programme to the public in October. The motto of the action: "Organic: I know what I eat". A staff of two, Wouter Vankeirsbilck for the Flemish region and Catherine Watteyne for Wallonia, has been engaged to co-ordinate the association's future activities and act as contact for politics and the public. In connection with the marketing action, the Flemish Agriculture and Environment Minister has called upon the Belgian government to consider a reduced tax rate for organic food. The measures are financed by funds from the EU, the Belgian government and the association's own resources. <http://www.Bioforum.be>

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Netherlands: New government-backed marketing strategy launched

The Dutch government together with trading partners and farmers started its support campaign - described as a pull strategy - to promote the demand for organic products at the end of 2001. Under the slogan "Biologisch, eigenlijk heel logisch" (organic, really logical), a programme was created to support marketing measures by the food trade and organic food trade.

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This campaign costing a total of approx. 10 million EUR will be stepped up appreciably in 2003 and 2004. The advertising campaigns on television and in magazines are paid for by the state. Support is also provided if trading partners enter into package deals on long-term targets for expanding sales. This is intended to simplify the start-up and expansion of organic channels in the conventional trade. The planning body for the marketing programme is the steering committee comprising the chairmen of the organizations involved, which meets twice a year. The fine tuning is done by the Task Force Market Development Organic Food, which meets once a month, reports organizer Uli Schnier.

<http://www.eigenlijkheellogisch.nl>

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USA: More Americans are consuming organic food

14 October, Whole Foods Market

More than one-half of Americans (54 percent) have tried organic foods, with nearly one-third (29 percent) claiming to consume more organic foods and beverages than one year ago, according to the 2003 Whole Foods Market Organic Foods Trend Tracker. In addition, Americans are expanding their horizons beyond traditional gateways to organic foods such as produce and dairy. The survey, which was released one year after the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Organic Standards went into effect, shows organic options including snacks, ready-to-go and packaged goods have increased in the last year. In addition, across all product channels, sales of 100 percent "certified organic" products are growing at 21 percent, according to data released this month by SPINS.

The overwhelming majority (69 percent) of "frequent organic eaters" (eat organic several times a week) claim they are eating more organic foods than one year ago; meanwhile, 43 percent of "occasional organic eaters" (eat organic several times a month) and 16 percent of "infrequent organic eaters" (have tried, but do not consume regularly) report eating more organic foods than one year ago. Overall, 14 percent of the U.S. population is eating more organic foods than they were one year ago.

The 2003 Whole Foods Market Organic Foods Trend Tracker is an annual survey commissioned by Whole Foods Market. The survey of 1,000 Americans, now in its second year, was conducted by Synovate in August 2003 and is representative of the United States adult population and individual questions returned statistical errors ranging between +/- 3% to 6%.

Approximately one year after the USDA-mandated National Organic Standards required "clearer labeling," one out of three Americans (29 percent) believe the new logo and/or clearer labeling has an impact on their decision to purchase organic foods. Nearly one-half (47 percent) of those claiming to consume more organics than they did one year ago say that clear, credible organic labeling makes them more inclined to purchase organic foods.

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"It is refreshing to see consumers reflect what we anticipated with October 2002's National Organic Standards labeling compliance. Americans are excited about organic foods and introducing them into their varying lifestyles," said Margaret Wittenberg, vice president of governmental and public affairs for Whole Foods Market. "The mainstreaming of organics has created a gateway for consumers to expand their horizons with organic food choices with an eye toward maintaining their budgets."

The Cost of Organics

Even though one out of five Americans (19 percent) is more inclined to purchase organic foods regardless of price point, price still remains the biggest barrier for consumers who do not eat organic foods to try organic foods. Nearly, seven out of ten (69 percent) who do not eat organic foods claim price is a major factor in their decision.

"Organic, not conventional foods, are the bargain when all of their effects on human, animal and environmental health are factored in," said Katherine DiMatteo, executive director, Organic Trade Association, the business organization representing the \$13 billion organic industry in North America. "Organic food prices represent the true cost of production. Conventional prices do not. They fail to incorporate \$10 billion a year in externalities, the costs passed onto society at large." (To review the OTA's recent organic-conventional food price analysis by ecologist/author Sandra Steingraber, Ph.D., visit www.ota.com or www.theorganicreport.org)

Due to the industry growth and consumer demand, the price of organic foods is becoming more competitive while availability and variety of products is increasing. Whole Foods Market has been on the vanguard of providing organic options for budget-conscious shoppers. Working closely with local farmers and vendors, the company has brought a wide array of organic choices at the best prices in the marketplace. To accommodate consumers for whom cost may still be a barrier, the company launched its own house brand, 365 Organic Everyday Value™ line, now the largest line of everyday-value organic items in the country, ranging from produce to pantry-stock items.

Whole Foods Market's Whole Kids™ Organic line, the first and only organic foods made especially for—and taste-tested—by kids, and the Authentic Food Artisan™ collection complement the company's 365 Organic Everyday Value products.

The Mainstreaming of Organics

Produce continues its reign as the primary gateway to organics. However, consumers are purchasing more organic foods in expanding categories. The category with the most growth over the year is "snacks," with 18 percent of infrequent users claiming to purchase organic snacks. The biggest gateway for infrequent users remains produce (63 percent), followed by bread or bakery

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products (21 percent) and then non-dairy (e.g. juice or soy) beverages (20 percent).

According to this year's survey, consumers who buy organics claim to purchase the following organic products:

Categories of organic food and beverages purchased:

Produce 72%
Bread or bakery 30%
Non-dairy beverages (such as soymilk or juice) 29%
Packaged goods such as soup or pasta 24%
Dairy 23%
Meat 19%
Frozen foods 17%
Prepared foods or ready-to-go meals 12%
Baby food 7%

From Farm to Store to Shopping Cart — A Commitment to Organic Integrity

This summer, Whole Foods Market became America's first national certified organic grocer, meaning retail operations have been certified organic by Quality Assurance International (QAI), a federally recognized independent third-party certification organization.

"This voluntary certification is just one more example of Whole Foods Market's commitment to the promotion of organic agriculture and the integrity of the USDA's certified organic label," said Wittenberg.

Throughout the more than 145 Whole Foods Market stores in the United States and at www.wholefoodsmarket.com, consumers can find detailed information about the new standards and how to preserve organic integrity of products in their own homes.

Survey Methodology:

Synovate, the new name for Market Facts, conducted the E-Nation Online Survey commissioned by Whole Foods Market in August 2003. The sample size of the nationally representative omnibus polls was 1,084 Americans aged 18 and individual questions returned error margins ranging between +/- 3% to 6%. The sample consists of individuals selected from the online segment of Synovate's Consumer Opinion Panel and is balanced to be representative of the general population based upon region, gender, age and household income data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Supporting Facts from Whole Foods Market 2003 Organic Foods Trend Tracker

Cost and availability continue to be key factors to purchase. Convenience and nutritional value are also trends that are becoming increasingly important to Organic food quality and health research newsletter: www.organicfcresearch.org

consumers. Organic foods and beverages will play a major role in this market segment. As the organic consumer becomes more involved in the lifestyle, they begin to look for a broader selection of products. According to the survey, following are reasons that would drive consumers to purchase organic products:

Likely to eat organic more often if... 2002

Prices were lower 86%
Could buy more of them in supermarkets 76%
Could buy a broader range of products 75%
They tasted better 60%
Quality was higher 58%

Organic Attributes

Organic means different things to different people. According to the Hartman Group research for Whole Foods Market, following are the perceived attributes of organics. Interestingly, there is a significant disparity between regular user and infrequent user for quality (85% vs. 46%) and taste (76% vs. 27%):

According to the survey, consumers who buy organics agree that organics are:

Attributes 2003

Products without pesticides 89%
Products without antibiotics/growth hormones 83%
Products found in the gourmet or specialty section of grocery store 72%
Products without GMOs 76%
Products that are fresh 71%
Products without irradiation 69%
Products grown on a small farm 57%
Products that have more nutrients 60%
Better quality products 58%
Better tasting products 42%
Products low in calories 28%
Web: <http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com>

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POLITICS

UK: Krebs squirms

John Krebs, chairman of the Food Standards Agency, comments on his assertion that there is no scientific justification to claim that organic food is healthier: "That is seen by the Soil Association as us making an anti-organic stance. It's a pro-consumer information stance." While he stands by his comments – calling them a "neutral, evidence-based objective stance" – he says he is keen to build bridges

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with the organic sector and move on, "rather than just stay in head-butting mode, I'd rather move onto a relationship that says: We have a disagreement, but can we do any research to resolve that disagreement? "Scientific research isn't stationary. It moves on. I don't rule out the possibility that it could do. I don't call that a U-turn. I call that responding to new scientific evidence as it emerges."

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Australia: Queensland government food safety regulator to certify organic

Queensland State Government's food safety regulator - Safe Food Queensland - has been approved to be an accredited organic certifying organisation, Primary Industries Minister Henry Palaszczuk has announced. SAFE Food Queensland has broadened its activities into what it sees as a 'logical extension' after receiving approval to act as an accredited organic certifying organisation.

Up to now, all organic certifying bodies operating in Queensland have come from the private sector, but there has been a significant commercial push for a suitable Government agency to also adopt the role. In some overseas markets, certification by a Government agency is regarded more highly than that by a private sector source. This is one reason why SFQ was approached by potential clients to move into organic certification. Currently SFQ has been approved by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service to deliver two organic certifications, for livestock processing and livestock production. However the range could expand over time. Phil Pond, SFQ's manager of development and regulatory policy, said the organisation had developed a food safety scheme for dairy products, and was completing similar food safety standards for seafood and eggs. "If we receive enough interest, we may well put an organic standard together for those other commodity groups," he said.

www.farmonline.com.au

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