



Organic Food Quality & Health

# Organic Food Quality News

JUNE 2004

This monthly newsletter, edited by nutritionist and independent organic researcher Shane Heaton, 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 [shane@dontjustsurvive.com](mailto:shane@dontjustsurvive.com)

## Quote of the month:

**Man-made chemicals in everything from videos, TVs, computers to soft furnishings, car seats, and furniture are harming the development of children's brains**, according to a report – 'Compromising our Children' – published by WWF in June. It says that 70,000 chemicals are on the market but very little is known about the health implications.

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## Contents

1. [Pesticides](#) - Report commissioned on health risks of pesticides; BNN satisfied with monitoring results
2. [Additives](#) - Additives and hyperactivity – jury still out
3. [Food safety](#) - European Union documents food safety; Food safety focus for fresh produce
4. [GMOs](#) - GM-contaminated maize widespread in Mexico; FAO concedes GM food currently 'not needed' ; GM wheat shelved
5. [BSE](#) - EU Commission to promote prion research; UK FSA looks into BSE testing failures; GM cows?; New cattle disease?
6. [Nutrient content](#) - Vitamin E conference; Minerals in Australian fruits and vegetables 'not declining'; Researchers discover how wine resveratrol kills cancer
7. [Health & Diet](#) - New vegetable: French Fries; Better nutrition could save millions of children
8. [Research](#) - Nitrogen supply from fertility building crops review; Brussels invests in agricultural research; EU project to improve organic food chain;
9. [Promotion](#) - European action plan for organic farming passed ; New Organic Centre website; Increasing organic demand in East Germany; information on the Swiss organic market; UK Organic Week; Higher-value

10. **organics**  
**Politics** - **8 years imprisonment for organic fraud**

# 1. PESTICIDES

## **UK: Report commissioned on health risks of pesticides**

The UK Government has announced that it will commission a new report on health risks of pesticides from the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. In addition, new legislation will be introduced to make it mandatory for farmers to keep spray records and provide access to the public via 'third parties', such as GPs or lawyers, and a pilot study will look at the practicality and costs to farmers of providing advance notification to the public of spraying. However, the government's Advisory Committee on Pesticides, an independent expert body, has concluded there are no health justifications for the introduction of no spray buffer zones. In response to this, pesticides campaigner Georgina Downs has said that she will be leading a legal challenge against the Government on behalf of people living near fields that are regularly sprayed with "cocktails" of poisonous chemicals. Georgina lives next to a conventional lettuce farm and her family has had health problems such as headaches, sore throats and blisters as a result of spraying of lettuces. A video story on this issue is available via <http://news.bbc.co.uk/> (SA)

## **GERMANY: BNN satisfied with monitoring results**

The results for 356 fruit and vegetable samples from all over the world have now been stored on completion of the third quarter of the "Monitoring System for Fruit and Vegetables in the Organic Retail Trade" operated by the German Manufacturing and Trade Association for Natural Food and Products (BNN). The current results confirm the trend of the first two quarters: In some 91 per cent of all analyses the laboratories have found no pesticide residues or only very low traces in the order of the BNN guide value. The "Monitoring System for Fruit and Vegetables in the Organic Retail Trade" was started in summer 2003 with the aim of improving quality assurance in the organic food market. Products from the current organic market range are selected and analysed every three weeks. Every residue found results in thorough research into the cause. In this way the project leads to distinct improvements in quality assurance - both among farmers and on the way to the customer. (BioFach newsletter) See <http://www.n-bnn.de>

[-back to contents-](#)

# 2. ADDITIVES

## **UK: Additives and hyperactivity – jury still out**

Parents concerned that additives in the diets of their young children may be having an adverse effect on behavioural patterns may be right – although clinical studies failed to support their concerns, say researchers about to embark on a secondary investigation. Scientists from the University of Southampton in the UK recruited 277 three-year-old children from the Isle of Wight, whose parents kept them on a diet carefully chosen to be free of the additives. In certain weeks, the children were then given a daily drink that either contained the additives and a benzoate preservative or an identical looking and tasting fruit drink. Neither the parents nor the children knew which type of drink was being given although the study design meant that they knew when they were being tested.

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Reporting their findings in the June 2004 issue of the Archives of Disease in Childhood journal, the scientists said that while most parents did indeed report more disruptive and inattentive behaviours on those weeks the children received the drinks with additives (even though the parents did not know which drink was being taken), some also reported poorer behaviour by their children even when they had only been given the pure fruit drink. Furthermore, clinical tests failed to detect any signs of hyperactivity among those children who had been given the additives, even when their parents had reported the change in behaviour. The findings suggest that benefits may arise from removing these additives from children's diet, but the researchers stressed that a number of questions remained to be answered, not least why parents reported a noticeable effect from the drinks but clinical tests failed to show any behavioural differences. One possibility, put forward by the scientists, is that the tests were not sufficiently reliable with children of this young age, although it could also be the case that those families completing the study may not have been representative of all families or that the effects produced by the pure fruit drink (a placebo effect) were large. The scientists said that it was important to conduct further work to determine whether behavioural changes can be found in older children and to try to confirm the effects reported by parents by other means, for example by observing the children's behaviour at school. Reducing the level of placebo effects would also give a more accurate reflection of the effect of additives.

The UK Food Standards Agency, which funded the original study, has now awarded the research team a further contract to investigate these questions as part of the Food and Behaviour in Children (FABIC) study. This new research will also allow the investigation of children's biological reactions to food additives and how these might influence behaviour. Professor Jim Stevenson of the University of Southampton's School of Psychology said that the further research posed a real challenge. "If we can demonstrate whether or not these food additives have a detrimental effect on children's behaviour, then this will be a significant step forward," he said. Professor John Warner of the University's School of Medicine added that the work was the culmination of long history of research on this question. "This further study funded by the Food Standards Agency should be able to tell us more conclusively whether these food additives are affecting children's behaviour." (*FoodNavigator.com 28/05/2004*)

[-back to contents-](#)

### **3. ANTIBIOTICS/FOOD SAFETY**

#### **EU: European Union documents food safety**

It is often suspected in the organic industry that frequent violations of food safety regulations occur in the conventional food market. Which products are actually withdrawn from the market due to unlawful action can be seen in the weekly reports of the European Commission. The violations include mercury in Indonesian swordfish, Sudan red in ground Italian chilli pepper and cadmium in Chinese food supplements. Salmonellae, listeria and aflatoxins are also the order of the day.

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/food/rapidalert/archive\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/food/rapidalert/archive_en.htm)

#### **US: Food safety focus for fresh produce**

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A better insight into how harmful food pathogens such as E.coli and Salmonella survive on fresh fruits and vegetables is the key to stemming the rising tide of human disease outbreaks linked to fresh produce. Recent trends in global food production, processing, distribution and preparation are creating an increasing demand for food safety research in order to ensure a safer global food supply. Food and waterborne diarrhoeal diseases are leading causes of illness and death in less developed countries, killing approximately 2.2 million people annually according to the World Health Organisation, most of whom are children. Recent advances in food safety research are enabling plant pathologists to gain insight into how dangerous human pathogens, such as strains of E.coli and Salmonella, can survive on fresh fruits and vegetables and what can be done to control future outbreaks. In order to cut the potential for the transfer of pathogens to fresh produce, plant pathologists are stressing the need to implement and maintain sanitary growing and harvesting conditions worldwide. Using techniques developed by plant pathologists, scientists are just beginning to understand how human pathogens colonise leaf surfaces, and how their survival can be influenced by manipulating leaf surface microflora and environmental conditions, added the scientist. Earlier this month a cluster of Salmonella Enteritidis (SE) cases - marked by a distinctive pulsed-field gel electrophoresis (PFGE) pattern - were identified in the US and traced back to the consumption of natural raw almonds. The almonds, from Paramount Farms, California, were sold across the US under several brands and exported to China, Taiwan, Democratic Republic of Korea, France, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico and the UK. Other foodborne pathogens are emerging because they are new microorganisms or because the role of food in their transmission has been recognised only recently. Infection with Escherichia coli serotype O157:H7 (E. coli) was first described in 1982. Subsequently, it has emerged rapidly as a major cause of bloody diarrhoea and acute renal failure. The infection is sometimes fatal, particularly in children. Outbreaks of infection, generally associated with beef, have been reported in Australia, Canada, Japan, United States, in various European countries, and in southern Africa. Outbreaks have also implicated alfalfa sprouts, unpasteurised fruit juice, lettuce, game meat and cheese curd. At an upcoming conference in Anaheim, California plant pathologists will present more on food safety and fresh produce during the 'Food Safety as Influenced by Phyllosphere Microflora' symposium at the American Phytopathological Society annual meeting from July 31 - August 4, 2004.

[-back to contents-](#)

## 4. GMOs

### **MEXICO: GM-contaminated maize widespread**

Conventional maize contaminated with genetically modified material has been detected in nine Mexican states, according to Liza Cervantes Torres, coordinator of the Genetic Engineering Campaign at Greenpeace Mexico. Torres revealed the findings at a meeting of farmers' organisations, environmentalists, local people and scientists about problems facing the maize industry. The meeting called on Mexican authorities to limit the growing of GM maize in Mexico and encourage organic maize farming, reported the Latin American News Digest. The contaminated maize was found in the highest volumes in Chihuahua, the Federal District, Hidalgo, Oaxaca, Puebla, Tlaxcala and Veracruz.

*(Source: just-food.com 21 Jun 2004)*

### **UN: FAO concedes GM food currently 'not needed'**

The head of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation, Jacques Diouf, has clarified the organisation's stance on GM. Last month, the FAO published a report which endorsed GM foods and advised poor countries to start their own GM growing projects. Replying to critics, Jacques Diouf now says GM is "not needed to meet current UN targets of halving hunger by 2015". (*The Guardian, UK*)

The FAO report, "The State of Food and Agriculture 2003-04" is available online at <http://www.fao.org/docrep/006/Y5160E/Y5160E00.HTM>.

### **Global: GM wheat shelved**

Anti-GM feeling combined with commercial apprehension last month led biotech giant Monsanto to shelve all efforts to introduce the world's first GM wheat onto the market. As part of the process, the firm this week advised Australia and New Zealand's food authority to remove the wheat application. Monsanto has informed Food Standards Australia New Zealand that it would remove its application for the 'food derived from herbicide-tolerant wheat MON71800'. Spokesman Chris Horner said that Monsanto had asked for government approvals for the GMO wheat in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, South Africa and Columbia, and that the company and regulators in the countries "mutually agreed" that Monsanto should withdraw its submissions.

Environmentalists and anti-GM campaigners, eager to see all genetically modified foodstuffs cleared from the food chain, celebrated the Monsanto move. Canadian and US farmers, who feared they would lose access to the European wheat market, also welcomed the withdrawal. The European bakery industry uses about \$300 million worth of North American wheat a year. Hugh Grant took over as chief executive of Monsanto last year. Observers note that in a bid to turn the much battered image of Monsanto around, Grant has shifted the company's strategy to focus on developing GM products with clear consumer benefits - such as vegetable oils with low trans fatty acid levels. (*FoodNavigator.com*23/06/2004)

[HYPERLINK \l " top"-back to contents-](#)

## **5. BSE**

### **EU: Commission to promote prion research**

The European Commission last week launched a new research network which it hopes will become the world's leading resource on prion diseases such as BSE – evidence that while 'mad cow' fears might have diminished, the threat is still considered to be a major one. The network was officially launched last Friday by European Research Commissioner Philippe Busquin, and consists of 52 laboratories in 20 countries, bringing together 90 per cent of the European research teams working on BSE (Bovine Spongiform

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Encephalopathy), vCJD (variant Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease, the human form of BSE), scrapie (a sheep prion disease) and other types of prion diseases. The European Union research budget will provide €14.4 million over five years to the network, and a new prion research facility will also be launched at the CEA (Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique), a major multidisciplinary research organisation in France and the institution co-ordinating the NeuroPrion network. *"The European Commission has made a sustained effort to tackle the BSE crisis on several fronts,"* said Busquin. *"This has included a special action plan for research, launched in 1996, which rapidly mobilised €50 million worth of research involving more than 120 laboratories throughout Europe. As part of the European Research Area, the NeuroPrion network of excellence is the logical next step. The network will bring together Europe's top experts to tackle prion diseases in terms of prevention, control, treatment and risk analysis."* Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy (TSE) is the generic name for the spectrum of diseases which are all thought to be caused by the abnormal folding of the prion protein. TSEs include BSE, vCJD, scrapie and other forms, such as Chronic Wasting Disease in deer and elk. BSE was first identified in 1986. Since then, 180,000 cases of BSE have been diagnosed in the UK alone. Only four out of the 25 EU Member States have not yet declared any cases. A number of countries outside Europe have also found cases, making this a global disease. The impact of BSE on European society has been far reaching with a devastating impact on vCJD patients and their families. Some 146 cases of probable and confirmed vCJD have been reported.

BSE has affected the entire beef food chain, from producer to consumer. Farmers have watched their animals slaughtered in their thousands and seen their livelihoods jeopardised. A European Association of Animal Production report has estimated the cost of BSE to the states of the 15 member EU at more than €90 billion. In addition, the BSE crisis has had a significant impact on public trust in government and governmental scientific advice. The exact function of normal prion protein is not known. In disease, the malformed protein accumulates in the brain causing dementia. A number of animal species may carry different genes encoding subtly different forms of prion protein, some of which make them more susceptible to developing disease. This can occur spontaneously, or, as in the case of BSE, as a result of being exposed to modified prions from an infected animal. The European NeuroPrion network has been established to help scientists better understand how prion modifications occur, how they develop in animals, how they are transferred to humans and how they affect human health and in particular the brain and nerve cells. It aims to create a research infrastructure that will attract private investment, during and beyond the five-year funding allocated by the EU. The group has identified areas where novel, applied research is needed, and areas where greater co-ordination of research would be beneficial. The most urgent research needs concern diagnosing prion diseases well in advance. Detection methods, involving the analysis of easily accessible body fluids early on in the incubation period, will be developed by the NeuroPrion network. Such tests could be used to screen both people and animals. Early diagnosis in humans will increase the likelihood of the success of therapeutic interventions and in animals will enhance food safety even further. But surveillance and the analysis of risk from prion diseases both require international co-ordination. NeuroPrion encompasses all national surveillance centres for vCJD and will also link animal surveillance. Institutes will share training, exchange staff and have access to a specially designed website, while tissue and fluid banks will also be shared and standard methods agreed. Genetically altered mice strains held by different institutions will be made available to partners, since they can be engineered to carry prion genes from other species and can be used to model the disease over a much shorter timeframe. (*FoodNavigator.com 01/06/2004*)

## **UK:FSA looks into BSE testing failures**

Food safety concerns rise in the UK as the Food Standards Agency launches an investigation into the apparent failure by the meat hygiene arm of the food watchdog to test some casualty cattle aged between 24 and 30 months for BSE before they entered the food chain. In 1992 at the peak of the BSE - bovine spongiform encephalopathy - epidemic the UK recorded 37, 000 clinical cases of BSE and about 60,000 of the highest risk animals went into the food supply, compared with less than one a year today. FSA largely attributes the significant drop in cases of BSE to the feed ban, effective in 1996, that prohibited the feeding of meat-and-bone-meal derived from mammals to all farm animals. On the eve of the investigation into Meat Hygiene Service (MHS), an executive agency of the FSA, the food body tried to reassure industry and consumers, claiming that any risk that might have arisen from these animals entering the food chain without having been tested 'was minimal'. *"Action has been taken to ensure that the testing requirements are now being fully met,"* claimed the FSA.

*"This is because specified risk material controls (SRM) had been applied, which remove at least 99 per cent of any infectivity that may be present, and the fact that no cattle under 30 months have shown clinical BSE symptoms in the UK for eight years,"* said the FSA confidently. The removal of SRM - including brain and spinal cord - is the main BSE control measure and according to the FSA should slice away at least 99 per cent of any BSE infectivity that may be present in cattle entering the food supply. The FSA claims there are 'no BSE positives' in the 2,800 casualty cattle tested to date in Great Britain. The requirement to test these cattle was introduced by the European Commission in June 2001 to 'provide an early warning system of any unfavourable trend in the incidence of BSE'. Before that requirement, these cattle entered the food chain without testing although, as today, with all SRM removed. As the UK starts to fully recover from the damaging impact of the BSE epidemic on the beef industry, in December 2003 the US government confirmed the country's first mad cow case in a Holstein dairy cow in Washington state. US officials believe the 6 1/2-year-old cow was imported into the US from Alberta, Canada, in 2001. The news sparked global bans of US beef worth an annual €3 billion in trade and a rise in organic beef sales. A recent report from UK market analysts Organic Monitor reveals clear opportunities in the beef market with sales of organic meat products in Canada expanding by 35 per cent in 2003 mainly because of the recent BSE scare there. Many Canadian retailers reported record sales of organic beef this year due to BSE elevating consumer demand. Sales of organic beef in the US could double in 2004 if suppliers can get sufficient volume into the retail trade, claims the report.

The discovery of the first case of BSE in the US highlights the need for countries to strengthen their BSE control measures and reduce risk, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) warned recently. *"When it comes to prevention, the situation is still confused,"* said the United Nations-backed body. Reassuring a concerned consumer can only come about with better controls, more surveillance and testing, stressed the group. *"Countries that have already been exposed to BSE – for example the UK – have since applied good preventative measures,"* an FAO spokesman told FoodNavigator.com at the time. Other countries also exposed to the disease – such as the Czech Republic, Japan, Israel and Poland – are coming on board, added the spokesman. And there are many other countries that can not afford to be complacent. Essentially, the FAO believes that no country can claim to be BSE-free, unless the claim has been validated through internationally recognised survey methods, a status possible through clearance by the Office International des Epizooties (OIE) - the World Animal Health Organisation. (FoodNavigator.com 23/06/2004)

### **UK: GM cows?**

The claim that cows genetically modified to be immune to BSE will soon be born in the UK is misleading, according to an article in the New Scientist. In practice, engineering such animals is time-consuming and very costly, and research is less advanced than was reported in the UK national press. (SA)

### **UK: New cattle disease?**

A possible new cattle disease which might pose a risk to human health is being urgently investigated by government vets. Tests on a heifer that died after five to six days of weakness in its legs and progressive paralysis have failed to identify any known condition, including BSE. A viral infection that damaged the white matter in the cow's brain is thought responsible for the death more than two months ago. The animal was at first thought to have died from botulism, but that test proved negative. Officials were last night unable to say where the affected farm was but said no meat from the cow had been allowed into food. Other vets and farmers will soon be alerted to the case via the Veterinary Record journal, typical of the more open attitude demanded by the inquiry into the BSE disaster. (The Guardian, SA)

[HYPERLINK \l " top"-back to contents-](#)

## **6. NUTRIENT CONTENT**

### **USA: Vitamin E conference**

Experts from around the world in the fields of medicine, nutrition, chemistry and biology met recently to share research findings and to move towards a consensus on the specific biological functions and relative potencies of the various forms of vitamin E in the human body. The discussions could impact the recommended intake levels for the nutritional supplement, which has been widely celebrated for its antioxidant properties and potential to prevent cancer and cardio-vascular disease. The round table meeting, initiated by the Oxygen Club of California in cooperation with Germany's BASF Aktiengesellschaft, came one day in advance of the vitamin E and Health Conference in Boston, MA, which was sponsored by the New York Academy of Sciences. "Recent research is revolutionising our understanding of the numerous forms of vitamin E and expanding the recognised benefits of vitamin E intake for human health and disease prevention," the meeting's chairman Lester Packer said. "This is not the time to take a narrow view of vitamin E potency and efficacy, either as researchers or on nutrition labels." A consensus statement of recommendations from the round table will be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal for publication. "The panel identified several new and exciting directions for future research," Packer said. "Our shared vision embraces both fundamental research and investigations into the biomedical implications of vitamin E as an agent to maintain good health and protect against disease." (15 Jun 2004 Source: *just-food.com*)

### **AUSTRALIA: Minerals in fruits and vegetables 'not declining'**

*Cunningham JH et al, 2004, Minerals in Australian fruits and vegetables –a comparison of*

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*levels between the 1980s and 2000, Food Standards Australia and New Zealand, April. Available to download in full at [www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au)*

### **Abstract**

Potassium, sodium, calcium, magnesium, iron and zinc levels in 44 types of Australian fruits and vegetables were measured in samples purchased in Melbourne, Australia in 2000 or 2001 and compared with the results of analyses conducted between 1981 and 1985 for the same items of produce purchased in Sydney, Australia. A comparison of values at the two time periods does not indicate that there have been significant or consistent changes in the content of these minerals over this time. Overall mean potassium content of these items in 2000/01 and 1981-85 respectively was 230 and 220 mg/100 g, sodium was 9 and 8 mg/100g, magnesium 15 and 11 mg/100 g, calcium 18 and 16 mg/100 g, iron 0.3 and 0.5 mg/100 g and zinc 0.2 and 0.3 mg/100 g. Comparisons of mineral levels measured at these two times must be made with caution as samples were collected in different locations, sometimes at different times of the year, possibly at different stages of ripeness and in many cases were different varieties. In addition, the older analyses were conducted using a less sensitive analytical technique than the method used in 2000-01. Any minor changes from year to year in mineral levels in these foods would be very unlikely to be of dietary significance.

Editors comment: *This paper is an Australian follow-up to the British paper (Mayer 1997) that showed significant reductions in the mineral contents of fruit and vegetables. However there are a number of serious short-comings with this study. The authors concede that "Firstly, the samples have been purchased in different locations in Australia (Sydney vs Melbourne), sometimes in different seasons, possibly at different stages of ripeness and almost certainly from different growing regions with different soil and climatic conditions." Furthermore, the study compared only 4 macro-minerals and 2 trace minerals (Fe, Zn). It's the trace minerals that are suspected of being depleted in soils, as modern fertilisers don't replace them. K, Ca & Mg are usually in concentrated chemical fertilisers, so it's no surprise they've not declined. Na is irrelevant – fruit and vegetables aren't major sources of it in the diet. In this study both iron and zinc, the only two trace minerals compared, have fallen by 40-50%! Might all the other trace minerals (such as copper, chromium, iodine, manganese, molybdenum and selenium) also be declining? This makes the claim in the paper itself and the press release 'there does not seem to be any evidence that mineral levels in Australian horticultural produce are changing' a gross and inappropriate extrapolation from comparison of a very limited number of macro minerals, most of which are usually added in chemical fertiliser, and is not true of the two trace minerals compared.*

### **US: Researchers discover how resveratrol kills cancer**

Scientists have discovered a possible mechanism for the anti-cancer activity of resveratrol, the compound found in red wine and thought to be responsible for the drink's widely reported health benefits. The discovery has important implications for increasing the effectiveness of cancer therapy, with some clinical trials using resveratrol already showing encouraging results. But it could also explain how resveratrol helps to control atherosclerosis, heart disease, arthritis, and autoimmune disorders, say the researchers. Marty Mayo, assistant professor of biochemistry and molecular genetics at the University of Virginia, and his team report that the compound helps to starve cancer cells by inhibiting the action of a key protein that feeds them. The protein, called nuclear factor- kappa B (NF-kB), is found in the nucleus of all cells and activates genes responsible for cell survival. "We used physiologically-relevant doses of resveratrol and found dramatic effects on human cancer cells," said Mayo.

The findings, which are published on the online edition of the Journal of the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO) demonstrated that cancer cells treated with resveratrol died because they became sensitive to a compound called Tumor Necrosis Factor alpha (TNF $\alpha$ ). The researchers found that resveratrol initiated a reaction in the NF- $\kappa$ B molecule that caused the cancer cells essentially to self-destruct in a process called apoptosis. *“Current studies are using compounds similar to TNF $\alpha$  in conjunction with resveratrol to kill cancer cells,”* Mayo said. *“Clinical trials using this approach in patients are showing encouraging results. This research may explain why this combined therapy is effective and why researchers are always looking for ways to improve cancer therapy,”* he added. Previous studies have also shown that resveratrol can help control atherosclerosis, heart disease, arthritis, and autoimmune disorders. Mayo believes the inhibition of NF- $\kappa$ B may be responsible in those disorders, as well, since NF- $\kappa$ B can control inflammatory responses. Mayo added that the total amount of resveratrol in one glass of wine three or four times a week is the right amount to block the protein from feeding cancer cells. However Mayo warned that drinking more than that would stop this effect and may actually lead to a greater risk of cancer.

Resveratrol is an antioxidant found in a number of plants, including grape skins, raspberries, mulberries and peanuts. Its job in nature is to fight fungus during the rainy season, and it is especially prevalent in grapes used in making red wine. The compound is also sold over-the-counter in the US as a nutritional supplement although concerns have been raised regarding its bioavailability in some of the products on the market. (*FoodNavigator.com 27/05/2004*)

*Editor: Organic red wine has been shown to contain higher levels of resveratrol.*

[HYPERLINK \l " top"-back to contents-](#)

## 7. HEALTH & DIET

### **US: New vegetable: French Fries**

A little-noticed ruling by the US department of agriculture has reclassified french fries as fresh vegetables. Arguing that the process of coating or battering a vegetable does not change the end product, the department has ruled that a chip is as fresh as, and indeed not that different from, a waxed lemon. The change was first proposed in 2002 after lobbying of the agriculture department by the Frozen Potato Products Institute (the US chip industry). The amendment to the perishable agricultural commodities act, which was drawn up in 1930 to protect fruit and vegetable growers, goes beyond potatoes to include most battered vegetables as well as products such as caramel-coated apples. The reclassification will be welcome news to the french fries industry, with consumption having dropped in the US. (*The Guardian – 16 June; SA*)

### **US: Better nutrition could save millions of children**

Malnutrition is to blame for more than half of all the deaths of children around the world -- including deaths caused by diarrhea, pneumonia, malaria and measles, researchers said Thursday. Poor nourishment leaves children underweight and weakened and vulnerable to infections that do not have to be fatal, the team at the World Health Organization and Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore found. They estimated that feeding all children worldwide an adequate diet would prevent about 1 million deaths a year from pneumonia,

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800,000 from diarrhea, 500,000 from malaria, and 250,000 from measles.

“Malnutrition does not have to be severe to have a significant impact on child health and survival,” said Laura Caulfield, an associate professor with the Bloomberg School’s Center for Human Nutrition who led the study. “Our analysis shows that even children who were small, but whose weight would not classify them as malnourished, were twice as likely to die as children in our reference group.” Her group analyzed the data from 10 studies of childhood deaths around the world, and used complex formulas to extrapolate the effect of weight on the likelihood of death. They estimate that 52.5 percent of all deaths in young children were attributable to undernourishment, with nearly 45 percent of measles deaths and more than 60 percent of deaths from diarrhea associated with low weight and poor nutrition. “These findings underscore the need to make the improvement of the nutritional status of children a priority,” they wrote in their study, published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition. (MSNBC June 17, 2004)

[HYPERLINK \l " top"-back to contents-](#)

## 8. RESEARCH

### **UK: Nitrogen supply from fertility building crops review**

As part of a major Defra-funded research project 'The development of improved guidance on the use of fertility building crops in organic farming', a comprehensive literature review has been completed. The review covers many aspects of fertility building crops in organic rotations, including how much N is captured, the effects of management practices, subsequent N release after destruction and the modelling approaches used to estimate N fixation. More can be found out about the project, and the full literature review can be downloaded from <http://www.organicsoilfertility.co.uk/home/index.html> (look under 'reports' for the literature review). Contact: Dr Mark Shepherd , ADAS Gleadthorpe Research Centre, Mansfield, Notts NG20 9PF, UK. Tel 01623 844 331, Fax 01623 844 472, Mob 07879 603 058 For more information, visit these sites: [www.adasenvironment.com](http://www.adasenvironment.com), [www.organicsoilfertility.co.uk](http://www.organicsoilfertility.co.uk), [www.whittledene.org](http://www.whittledene.org)

### **EU: Brussels invests in agricultural research**

The European Commission used an international food conference last week to announce its readiness to award €192 million to new food-related research projects and networks. At a meeting organised by the Irish Presidency Brussels said the funding will go to 31 projects and networks and 13 smaller support actions. Among the subjects tackled by ten Integrated Projects will be chemical contaminant screening in food, obesity, traceability in food, nutrition in early life, food allergy and emerging pathogens. Opening the Dublin conference, Ireland's minister for Agriculture and Food, Joe Walsh, said that the food safety scares over the past decade have highlighted to everyone that developments must be underpinned by the application of the highest possible standards and the best possible scientific advice. “Now, more than ever, research in agriculture and food safety is critical to ensure the quality of life and safety of all citizens in an enlarged Europe,” echoed EU

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Research Commissioner, Philippe Busquin. The two Networks of Excellence selected for EU support will address food information, and cancer risk from nutrition and the environment. Smaller projects, known as specific targeted research projects (STREPs) will tackle such topics as animal diseases, biotoxins in seafood, flavonoids, reducing and recycling food production wastes and nutrition during adolescence. Four Coordination Actions and 13 Specific Support Actions will also receive funding. A total of 185 proposals were submitted to the Commission and 141 were rejected for funding. According to CORDIS, the funding success rate - just 23.7 per cent - was kept low by budgetary constraints, making it impossible to fund some 'very good' proposals, according to the Commission. The next call for proposals is due to be published on 7 July.  
(*FoodNavigator.com 21/06/2004*)

### **EU: Project to improve organic food chain**

Under the thematic priority 'Food Quality and Safety' the European Commission is funding an Integrated Project called 'Quality Low Input Food'. It aims to improve quality, ensure safety and enhance productivity in organic food supply chains in Europe. Over the next five years, the project will receive 18 million EUR to carry out research across the food chain, from fork to farm. The focus will be on farm-based research in cereals, vegetables, dairy, poultry and pork production. For example, agronomists will test different management strategies for improvements in soil fertility and control of disease, weeds and pests to improve yields of high quality. Livestock experts will assess how improved husbandry methods and feeding regimes can improve the nutritional quality of organic milk.

[http://dbs.cordis.lu/fep-cgi/srchidadb?ACTION=D&SESSION=52972004-4-22&DOC=3&TBL=EN\\_NEWS&RCN=EN\\_RCN\\_ID:21878&CALLER=FP6\\_NEWS\\_FOOD](http://dbs.cordis.lu/fep-cgi/srchidadb?ACTION=D&SESSION=52972004-4-22&DOC=3&TBL=EN_NEWS&RCN=EN_RCN_ID:21878&CALLER=FP6_NEWS_FOOD)

[HYPERLINK \l " top"-back to contents-](#)

## **9. PROMOTION**

### **EU: European action plan for organic farming passed**

The "European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming" passed on 10 June is a clear indication of the European Commission's commitment to organic farming. The 21-point action plan proposes concrete steps for boosting demand and improving production, but has no financial resources of its own. The Commission expects the targets to be implemented in the Commission offices, which are responsible for the planned actions. The Commission has refrained from stipulating the use of the EU logo for organic products.

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/qual/organic/plan/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/qual/organic/plan/index_en.htm)

### **US: New Organic Centre website launched**

The US Organic Center for Education and Promotion has a singular mission to provide consumers, health care professionals, educators, public officials, and government agencies with credible, scientific information about the organic benefit. The Center is a clearinghouse for this information, tracking research, both past and current, analyzing the

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results and providing it to the public, the media, and government agencies. The Center works with leading researchers to prioritize and fund new scientific investigations into the organic benefit. And it regularly disseminates it through educational, promotional and media related activities. See <http://www.organic-center.org>

### **GERMANY: Increasing organic demand in East Germany**

From a statistical viewpoint, retail organic food sales in the east of the Federal Republic of Germany are increasing more strongly than in the west, according to Gää Chairwoman Kornelie Blumenschein. Starting from an appreciably lower level, sales of the organic food industry in Saxony have grown by 24 per cent a year since 1997. Good structures have meanwhile been set up in the organic sector in the new German states. Saxon sales companies like NaturMarkt GmbH, the vegetable distributor bioFrische and the producer association Ökobauernhöfe Sachsen (ÖBS) in Dresden have marketed organic products regionally and nationally since 1994. A large part of the organic vegetables produced in the state are processed as frozen products directly in the Elb Valley in Saxony, stressed Blumenschein. The key sales areas are Dresden and Leipzig. The BioRing Chemnitz with around 20 organic companies, including several organic food retailers, was founded in Chemnitz at the beginning of the year with the aim of winning new customers.

### **SWITZERLAND: Report on the Swiss organic market released**

A comprehensive manual on the organic market in Switzerland has been published by FQH member institute, FiBL. The 132-page English manual in A4 format presents a detailed description of what to note concerning the import or export of organic products on the Swiss market and also deals with the characteristics of the Swiss organic market.

<http://www.fibl.org/shop/show.php?sprache=EN&art=1171>

Included in its findings are that three out of four Swiss francs spent on organic products in the Alpine republic finish up in the conventional trade. Coop Switzerland holds a 50 % share of the whole organic market and Migros, the star of the food trade, has 25 %. The good to very good range of organic products stocked by the conventional retail food trade makes it corresponding difficult for the specialized organic retailers. Organic food stores and health food stores achieve a share of only 16 % of the Swiss market, direct marketing 5 % and the food craft trades (bakers, butchers) 4 %.

### **UK: Organic Week planned**

To mark the tenth national Organic Week (4 – 12 September 2004) – “the largest celebration of organic food and farming in the world” - events will take place around the UK. This year's theme is 'Love the taste' – highlighting the great flavour which is so influential in attracting shoppers to organic food. The event is organised by the Soil Association, the UK's main charity promoting organic food and farming. For more information on events happening in Organic Week visit [www.organicweek.org](http://www.organicweek.org) or call +44 117 929 0661

### **EU: Higher-value organics**

A new Europe-wide project will devote a £12 million budget to investigating the added-value that organic farming could bring to food products. The qualitative approach will give a boost to an industry starting to slow down in pace. Led by Newcastle university in the UK the QualityLowInputFood (QLIF) project will test organic and conventional crops - including cabbages, lettuces, carrots, potatoes and wheat – to compare factors such as taste and nutritional quality with overall aim to improve the safety, quality and productivity along the European organic food chains. “There are more and more indications that moving to natural production systems, such as organic farming, can improve food quality. This

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project will attempt to find out why this is the case, and how we can further improve on these production systems,” said project leader, Professor Carlo Leifert, leader of Nafferton Ecological Farming Group at the university of Newcastle. The EU organic market was worth around €10 billion in 2002, according to data from Organic Monitor, but growth has slowed in recent years: an increase of 8 per cent between 2001 and 2002 shrunk to an estimated 5 per cent between 2002 and 2003.

Earlier this month the organic industry received a major boost when the European Commission adopted a new action plan to promote the sector. The current challenge is to ensure, and maintain, consumer trust in premium-priced organics, but farmers in the new member states in particular are set to benefit if the plan is a success. The 21-point plan covers all areas of the organic trade – from rural development and improving farming standards to improving consumer information and the introduction of an EU-wide organic food label – and is said to be a reaction to increasing consumer demand for organic food, often considered ‘safer’ and ‘healthier’ than more mainstream food production methods, especially in the wake of various food scares. Organic production has grown steadily over the last 20 years. In 1985, just 100,000 hectares of EU farm land was certified organic – less than 0.1 per cent of total farm land. By the end of 2002, this figure had risen to 4.4 million ha or 3.3 per cent of total farm land. But there are still great disparities between the various EU nations. In Austria, Germany, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Sweden and the UK, organic farm land exceeds the EU-15 average, but in all the other nations, the levels are still well below average – indeed, with less than 1 per cent of farm land set aside for organic production, Greece and Ireland have barely progressed beyond the EU average of 1985. But persuading more farmers throughout the 25-nation bloc to convert to organic production – seen by the EU as a core means of sustaining growth in the agricultural sector over the years to come – will depend on persuading them that consumers actually want to buy organic foods. “Promoting environmentally friendly quality products is one major objective of the new, reformed Common Agricultural Policy,” said Franz Fischler, Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries. “This is why we want to boost organic farming by stepping up information for consumers, strengthening the control system and improving research.” The first set of results from the Newcastle project will be presented at a university conference - Organic Farming, Food Quality and Human Health Congress - from 6 to 9 January, 2005. The will be attended by leaders from the growing industry as well as academics.

*(FoodNavigator.com21/06/2004)*

[HYPERLINK \l " top"-back to contents-](#)

## 10. POLITICS

### **GERMANY: 8 years imprisonment for organic fraud**

An agricultural engineer has been sentenced to eight years imprisonment by the Bad Kreuznach district court for selling conventional corn as organic corn. The legal process took two and a half years. Hans-Ernst Bastian had falsely declared almost 23,000 t of corn as organic and made a profit of 2.5 million EUR. This particularly serious fraud has not only caused the industry in Germany economic damage, but also a great loss of image, said the presiding judge. After serving his sentence, the convicted person will be taken into preventive detention, as he has already committed a similar case of organic fraud, for

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which he was sentenced to six and a half years. The brother-in-law of the convicted agricultural engineer received four years and nine months imprisonment as accomplice. The corn was sold via Euro Bio Korn in Berlin. (BioFach newsletter)

[HYPERLINK \l " top"-back to contents-](#)

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