

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

Quote of the month:

"Choosing organic food is an easy way for parents to protect their families while giving them delicious foods and an understanding of the need to protect our environment." *Katherine DiMatteo, OTA's executive director (US).*

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PESTICIDES

UK: Latest pesticide residue data

Data published by the Pesticide Safety Directorate shows that last year 43 per cent of fresh produce contained pesticide residues, which was higher than the 39 per cent the year before. Residues were found in 36 per cent of apples, 80 per cent of oranges, and 69 per cent of nectarines. See www.pesticides.gov.uk for more details.

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USA: OTA Applauds lawsuit seeking to protect children from pesticides

The Organic Trade Association (OTA) has applauded four states and a coalition led by the Natural Resources Defense Council for filing lawsuits that draw attention to how the use of pesticides can adversely affect children. "Protecting children from the risks of ingesting harmful pesticides should be a priority for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and all of our society," said Katherine DiMatteo, OTA's executive director. The lawsuits, filed Sept. 15, ask the court to force EPA to comply with provisions in the 1996 Food Quality Protection Act requiring a tenfold safety factor concerning pesticide levels for infant and children. "The states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York, and the coalition of conservation, public health and farm worker organizations led by the Natural Resources Defense Council are to be commended for bringing this issue to national attention," DiMatteo added.

Minimizing children's exposure to toxic and persistent pesticides is a priority for the organic industry, which refrains from their use. Buying organic products is a way for parents to minimize the risks associated with pesticide exposure. OTA has posted resources from its Organic for Kids information campaign concerning this topic on its consumer web site, The O'Mama Report (<http://www.theorganicreport.org>), and has scheduled a Sept. 23 roundtable teleconference for journalists on "What is the True Cost of Organic?" that will discuss this further. See the OTA website at <http://www.ota.com>

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Denmark: Monsanto's Round-up banned

Denmark has imposed a ban on the spraying of glyphosates - the active ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup herbicide (RR) - following the release of data which showed that they have been contaminating the drinking water resources of the country. The chemical has been sieving down through the soil and polluting the ground water at a rate of five times more than the allowed level for drinking water, according to tests done by the Denmark and Greenland Geological Research Institution (DGGRI). (Third World Network Website: <http://www.twinside.org.sg>)

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UK: Toxic politics: Pesticide policy has to change to protect public health

A prominent pesticide campaigner is asking the Government to explain why they launched a Consultation on crop-spraying with the claim that there is no risk to health for people in the countryside and that pesticides are safe, when there is no evidence to support this view. Georgina Downs has conducted a determined campaign to change Government Policy that has at last forced this matter into the public arena. In her response to the Government's Consultation on public access to information on pesticide use she has stated that the claims made by DEFRA in launching this Consultation are not only factually inaccurate and seriously misleading to both farmers and the public, but are obviously downright dangerous. Ms. Downs says that she does not believe based on the evidence that these claims would stand up in a court of law.

"The Advisory Committee on Pesticides has stated on a number of occasions that science cannot guarantee complete safety or zero risk," Ms. Downs explains, "so why then did DEFRA launch this Consultation stating that there is no risk to people in the countryside from crop-spraying and that pesticides are safe? There has been over 50 years of documented scientific and medical evidence in relation to pesticides and their damaging effects on human health, including from Government's very own documentation." Ms. Downs says that there are many questions that need to be asked regarding DEFRA's overall handling of the Consultation process. In responding to the Consultation proposals Ms. Downs has criticised the existing regulations and monitoring system as "totally inadequate." She says that the current system is completely unacceptable for public health and fully welcomes the Government's proposals to rectify the situation, as members of the public have a fundamental right to know what chemicals they are exposed to.

Ms. Downs fully supports the Government's proposals for mandatory disclosure of spray records as well as prior notification of all spray operations along with the information on the chemicals to be used. She states "the current voluntary and self-regulatory measures like the Green Code are completely unacceptable in this situation. Therefore the introduction of statutory measures is essential." She states that this information is also vital for the correct assessment and treatment of a patient if adverse health effects are suffered which is imperative for feeding back into the monitoring system otherwise "pesticide related ill-health statistics will never have a hope of being accurate or complete."

She recommends that full disclosure of spray records should be made directly to any member of the public who enquires, as well as to any other parties who may have been appointed by an enquirer to act on their behalf. (i.e. doctors/medical professionals/lawyers etc.) She recommends the use of a Hotline system and warning signs in the area to give residents and other members of the public prior notification before any spraying and to provide information on the chemicals to be used. She believes that the Government should provide financial assistance where needed. She recommends that such notification could be the subject of a

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new schedule provision with the legal basis like that for aerial spraying and that the statutory conditions of use in the approval for all pesticides (and not just sulphuric acid) should also contain the same detailed requirements. The Green Code should have legal status, with amendments that would incorporate these requirements as well.

Ms. Downs also points out that although the measures proposed will help provide the necessary information to members of the public who are exposed, the fundamental point remains that they should not be exposed in the first place. Therefore she recommends that a ban on crop-spraying near human habitation is essential and an urgent priority. Ms. Downs states, "The fact that there is no existing law to protect members of the public from exposure to known hazardous chemicals is unacceptable, especially in relation to babies, children, pregnant women, the elderly and those who are already ill. People are not being informed about the true dangers and risks that are inherent in the spraying of over 25,000 tonnes of agricultural chemicals on British farmland every year. Yet members of the public have a fundamental right to know the information necessary to make informed and knowledgeable decisions to protect their own health."

The deadline for the first Consultation has now been extended to September 30th and Ms. Downs urges anyone who lives or works near regularly sprayed areas who also have the direct experience of this situation to respond to Russell Wedgbury (russell.wedgbury@psd.defra.gsi.gov.uk 01904 455749) or Caroline Kennedy (caroline.kennedy@psd.defra.gsi.gov.uk 01904 455706) of DEFRA's Pesticides Safety Directorate in York. The deadline for the second Consultation remains the 31st October. DEFRA launched a Consultation on Crop-spraying on July 21st. The DEFRA News Release and Consultation links are at:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2003/030721a.htm> The Consultation Information is available at: <http://www.pesticides.gov.uk/applicant/aahp/aahl0320.htm>

Further information in relation to Ms. Downs' submission to the Government's Consultation "Plans for Greater Access to Information about Crop-Spraying" is available on request. Contact: Georgina Downs, Telephone: 01243 773846, Email: georgied@tiscali.co.uk

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ANTIBIOTICS

USA: USDA finds fewer E. coli contaminated beef samples

US food safety inspectors have been finding a much lower rate of E. coli contamination in ground beef products this year than last year, the US Department of Agriculture has said. The USDA said the decline was due to increased inspections of US beef plants, following the record amount of meat recalled last year. "The agency's sampling data suggests that initiatives begun in the past year are beginning to pay dividends," Garry McKee, administrator of the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service, was quoted by Reuters as saying. Of 4,432 beef Organic food quality and health research newsletter: www.organicfqrsearch.org

samples tested in the first eight months of this year, 0.32% tested positive for E. coli 0157:H7, compared to 0.78% reported for the whole of 2002. E. coli can cause nausea and diarrhoea, but the bacteria is destroyed if meat is cooked to at least 160 degrees Fahrenheit. The USDA said there had been 45 meat recalls during the first eight months of this year, compared to 76 recalls in the year-ago period.
Source: just-food.com

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UK: Pig drug use increases

Antibiotics are still being used to force pigs to grow unnaturally quickly, despite a ban and amid fears about the impact on human health. Since 1999, it has been illegal for farmers in the EU to use certain antibiotics to make pigs grow faster but the Soil Association has warned that sales of these drugs (antibiotic growth promoters) have rocketed. There is evidence that antibiotics used in pig feed can make it more difficult to treat the hospital superbug VRE. A Government committee has also warned that the effectiveness of a drug used to treat food poisoning in children could also be affected. The World Health Organisation has recently called on all countries to ban the use of antibiotics for growth promotion to protect public health. The Soil Association is concerned that some pig farmers are using a loop-hole to continue feeding these drugs to their animals. Although the drugs cannot legally be used to promote growth, they can be prescribed by a vet as a prophylactic (to prevent disease in healthy animals) and sales have more than doubled in recent years. Disease can spread rapidly when animals are kept indoors, in cramped conditions.

Richard Young, the Soil Association's policy advisor said, "These drugs are becoming ineffective against major pig diseases due to over use. We suspect that they are secretly being used for growth promotion. It is inevitable that animals become ill when they are kept in crowded conditions which is why the intensive pig industry is still hooked on antibiotics." One problem drug is Tylosin, a member of a group of antibiotics called macrolides. Government figures show that the amount of macrolides prescribed by vets increased from 23 tonnes in 1998 to 55 tonnes in 2001. The Soil Association has repeatedly asked the Government's Veterinary Medicines Directorate for precise figures on the past use of Tylosin for growth promotion but has been told that this information is commercially confidential. British pig farmers use four times as many antibiotics than their intensive Danish counterparts and Britain uses more antibiotics per tonne of meat produced than any other EU member state.

Under organic standards, animals must be treated with appropriate veterinary medicine when necessary, but cannot be given drugs routinely, or to accelerate growth. Organic farmers aim to rear healthy pigs by ensuring they are kept free-range, and have access to growing green food among other measures. All organic farms are inspected at least once a year to ensure that standards are maintained. Richard Young said, "The government has taken some important steps to address the problem of antibiotic resistance. It must now set up an independent committee of experts to consider the problems associated with Organic food quality and health research newsletter: www.organicfqrsearch.org

routine prophylactic use of antibiotics and the current trend in this usage. The situation makes a mockery of the growth promoter ban, which was brought in because of concerns from scientists, despite strong industry opposition."

The World Health Organisation has recently called for much stricter controls on the routine use of drugs to suppress the diseases of intensive farming and in the UK, reports from two independent government advisory committees have made a strong case for reducing use. Last year the Curry Commission, in its report Farming and Food: A Sustainable Future, warned DEFRA and the Food Standards Agency to make sure that farmers do not simply increase their use of therapeutic antibiotics but make fundamental changes to their production systems instead. The Commission's proposals now form the basis of Government food and farming policy. In 1992, the independent Lamming Committee which considered issues relating to the livestock feed industry, said the prophylactic use of antibiotics should be reconsidered. Soil Association.

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HORMONES

USA: FDA tells dairy firms to stop labelling milk as hormone-free

15 Sep 2003 The US Food and Drug Administration has told four dairy products firms to stop labelling their products as being free of hormones. The FDA said no milk product could be labelled hormone free because all milk contained naturally occurring hormones. "FDA is committed to assuring that consumers are provided with truthful information on product labels," FDA Commissioner Dr. Mark McClellan was quoted by Reuters as saying. Source: just-food.com

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ADDITIVES

Germany: New process for pest control

A new pasteurization technology using a "saturated steam process" in a vacuum eliminates germs and pests without loss of sensory qualities, as reported by BNN News (Aug. 03). The new process with an effective treatment time of a few minutes at 80 to 120°C is suitable for organic products like dried fruit, spices, teas, cereals, nuts, kernels and dried vegetables. www.steamlab.de/index-eng.htm

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GMOs

UK: GM science review deeply flawed

The GM Science Review, perhaps the most important of the three strands in UK's public 'consultation' on GM, released its First Report in July 2003 amid accusations of pro-GM bias. One member of the review panel resigned because of pressures on him to toe the pro-biotech line, and another complained that attempts had been made to undermine his research funding and career prospects. Dr. Mae-Wan Ho of ISIS, The Institute of Science in Society, rejects the review, saying it "Sidesteps fundamental criticisms of GM technology", "fails to take the full range of scientific evidence into account", and is "riddled with misrepresentations, half-truths and worse". She writes:

The most serious shortcoming of the GM Science Review is that it entirely ignores the substantial body of evidence on the proven successes and benefits of organic farming, agroecology and other forms of sustainable agriculture. Not even to consider these, while dealing at length with the projected potential benefits of GM is to restrict the scope of the debate from the very outset. At first glance, the Report looks reasonable enough. Chapters 5, 6 and 7, each 50 pages long, claim to address all the objections that critics have raised on health and environmental impacts and gene flow from GM to non-GM crops and wild weedy relatives. They contain sections with such promising titles as, "Possible nutritional toxicological differences in GM food", "Food allergies for GM crops", "The fate of transgenic DNA", "The effect of GM-derived feed in the food chain", "Invasiveness/persistence of GM plants", "Toxicity to wildlife", "Can DNA from GM crops transfer to soil microbes?" and "Can genetic material in GM plant transfer to viruses?" But the promise the headings is not fulfilled by the contents. No one can be surprised that the industry-dominated review panel found no evidence that GM crops pose a threat to health or the environment, as widely reported in the media. The precise wording (p.10), however, is full of qualification and equivocation, and this runs through the entire report: "To date there have been no verifiable untoward toxic or nutritionally deleterious effects resulting from the cultivation and consumption of products from GM crops. However, absence of readily observable adverse effects does not mean that these can be completely ruled out and there has been no epidemiological monitoring of those consuming GM foods."

The Review does not give blanket approval for growing GM crops in Britain. Instead, it recommends that each application for approval should be considered and assessed for risks on its own merits. This may sound reassuring, but in fact it is not. For the "case by case" approach that is being advocated is based on the unsupported assumption that there is nothing wrong with GM technology in general. The most that is being investigated is whether any particular crop presents specific hazards. At no point are the important and fundamental issues addressed. Worse, each application that is approved serves as a precedent for approving later ones, and in the end, it will be claimed that the entire technology has been properly investigated and approved when in fact it was never investigated at all. And sure enough, the Review states openly (p24) that the

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"appropriate agriculture for the UK" would be, among other things, one that would "allow coexistence of farming systems." In other words, the Review clearly accepts from the outset and the principle that GM crops based on current technology should be grown in Britain - which is precisely the point that they were supposed to be deciding. The only question is whether some individual crops might be excluded.

The "case by case" approach is thus a slowly-but-surely tactic for commercial approval of GM crops. We are given plenty of false reassurances - repeated with monotonous regularity at the end of every subsection. It goes like this.

- "Is there general scientific agreement?" Yes, generally, after paragraphs riddled with equivocation, misrepresentation, omission, half-truths and worse, that the risk from eating GM food, horizontal transfer of transgenic DNA, or of allergy, toxicity, cross-pollination, whatever, is very low, as the perceived hazard is very rare, if it happens at all.
- "Is the issue unique to GM?" No, not at all, or not in many cases, or not usually.
- "Are there gaps in our knowledge or scientific uncertainties and are they important?" Yes and no. We should proceed with caution on a "case by case" basis.
- "Likely future developments"? Looks good if not great, they will overcome the uncertainties and bring many potential benefits. At one point (pp74-77), the Report even promises "safer, nutritionally enhanced" GM foods, including "golden mustard" as follow-on from "golden rice", supposedly to cure vitamin A deficiency in the Third World, and failing to mention that "golden rice" has already been widely exposed to be worthless. Many kilograms of the rice would have to be consumed each day to get the minimum daily requirement of vitamin A, while leafy greens that can be grown in every backyard would provide a much richer source of the vitamin plus other essential vitamins, minerals and micronutrients.
- "Where there is important scientific uncertainty, what is the way forward?" Research and more research, and regulation, with "cautious commercial approval" and "post-release monitoring" and yes again, a "case by case" approach. The "case by case" approach is not just a tactic for commercialising GM crops. It is also a subterfuge for sidestepping fundamental criticisms of the GM technology itself, which the Report has singularly failed to acknowledge. In other words, it has given blanket approval for GM technology, which can only be justified by ignoring critical scientific evidence.

Some of the most powerful critics - the two dozen prominent scientists who have constituted themselves as an Independent Science Panel (ISP) on GM who oppose the official GM Science Review - are saying that the GM technology is inherently unsafe, that the hazards are unique to GM, and that the evidence, incomplete though it is, already supports that view, but is being obfuscated, suppressed, or otherwise not addressed by the pro-GM establishment.

To have a useful, informed debate, the key areas of scientific disagreement must be clearly laid out before the public, as is done in the ISP Report, The Case for a GM-Free Sustainable World, released on June 15, 2003 (<http://www.indsp.org>), which includes extensive review of the evidence on the successes and benefits of non-GM sustainable agriculture as well as the many problems and hazards of GM crops. The ISP Report, widely adopted by civil society organisations in Britain and around the world, was submitted to the GM Science Review, but it has neither been acknowledged nor posted on the official website. Our closely argued case as a whole also remains to be answered. It will be instructive to give some glaring examples of how the Report sidesteps the major scientific criticisms in its attempt to ultimately mislead and cajole the public into accepting the commercialisation of GM crops. Evidence that GM is inherently unsafe remains unanswered

1. GM is distinct from conventional breeding methods, including mutations induced by X-rays or chemicals. It is unreliable, uncontrollable, unpredictable and unstable; and introduces new risks.
2. GM greatly increases the scope of horizontal gene transfer and recombination, which pose the most insidious dangers.
3. GM DNA is definitely not the same as non-GM or natural DNA.
4. Many GM DNAs possess 'recombination hotspots' making them extra-unstable, and hence extra-prone to horizontal gene transfer and recombination, with all the attendant risks.
5. Direct evidence of hazards inherent to the technology is swept aside and misrepresented.
6. Positive evidence of horizontal gene transfer denied and dismissed as "very rare".

Full explanations for each of these points are included in the full "GM science review deeply flawed" document available on the ISIS website <http://www.isis.org.uk>

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UK: GM crop trials have uncertain future

Bayer has pulled out of GM crop trials in the UK – the last remaining company – but has said it will resume when conditions are "more favourable". Most GM crop trials have been sabotaged. The company blamed Margaret Beckett for her insistence that the location of trial sites are made public. Until last week, Bayer believed it was close to a deal that would allow GM crop test sites to be kept secret. (The Observer)

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UK: Public rejects GM food in national 'debate'

The "GM Nation?" public debate report was published yesterday and showed the public to be overwhelmingly against GM crops ('GM crops? No thanks' -The

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Independent, 'A wary public says no to GM crops' – Daily Telegraph, 'Frankenstein food revolt' – Daily Mail, 'Only 2% of public would eat GM food' – The Times). "Every single group was broadly negative in its feelings about every GM issue," said the report which found the numbers opposed to GM outweighed those who may have supported it by 5 to 1. (The Guardian)

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BSE

EU: BSE declining in France & Germany

The cattle epidemic BSE is on the retreat in Germany and France, reports the magazine "Lebensmittelzeitung". Whereas well over one hundred cases were reported in 2001 and 2002 (125 and 106 respectively), only 25 cases have been registered in Germany so far this year. This compares with 65 cases of BSE in the same period of the previous year. A total of 263 cases of the disease have been detected in Germany since 2000. 93 cases have been recorded in France since the beginning of the year. There were 239 cases of cattle infected with BSE in 2002 and 274 the year before. The authorities have now recorded 848 cases since the start of statistics in France in 1991.

The continued presence of new BSE cases, not only in Britain but also throughout Europe has maintained a very low profile. Given the ongoing problem with BSE in Europe and the uncertain risks to humans, it continues to be highly significant that BSE has never been found in any animal born and reared organically.

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US: New generation of prion tests

New knowledge on mad cow disease emerges as researchers across the Atlantic claim to have developed a faster test for identifying the disease, possibly even in living cows. The standard immunoassay tests used to identify the infectious prion proteins that cause mad cow disease have been criticised by some as inadequate for large scale screening of cattle - accused as producing false readings and can also take a week to yield results.

The new test - the conformation-dependent immunoassay (CDI) - can detect prion proteins with 100 per cent accuracy at much smaller levels than conventional tests and only takes about five hours to produce results, according to researchers at the University of California-San Francisco who presented their findings this week at the 226th national meeting of the American Chemical Society. Like conventional tests, the new test is designed for detecting prions in the brain tissue of cows only upon
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autopsy. It also shows promise for detecting the proteins in muscle tissue and even blood while the animal is still alive, claim the scientists. If so, it could be used to identify precisely which animals are infected before they show symptoms and could help end the current practice of slaughtering whole herds, the scientists say.

"*This represents a new generation of prion tests,*" said project leader Dr. Jiri G. Safar, an associate adjunct professor at UCSF. He added that the test - funded in part by the UK's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs - has been used in a field trial to check for signs of the disease in the brains of 11,000 slaughtered cows in Spain, the United Kingdom and Germany. Results were compared to those from standard immunoassays performed on the same animals. There were no discrepancies between the tests, he says. The research group plans to use the test on an even larger scale among European cattle herds within the next year, checking them for signs of the disease upon autopsy. If further tests prove successful, Safar hopes it will eventually be used to evaluate dead cows in the US for mad cow disease, also known as bovine spongiform encephelopathy, or BSE. CDI technology is now licensed to InPro Biotechnology, of San Francisco. (foodnavigator.com)

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NUTRIENT CONTENT

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HEALTH & DIET

Denmark: Human feeding trial comparing organic vs non-organic foods

There aren't many studies of this kind around, so each one is very interesting, and this one's no exception:

16 healthy Danish people ate an identical 100% organic diet or 100% conventional diet for 3 weeks and had their urine tested before and afterwards. The diets were analysed for five flavonoids and the organic diet was found to contain significantly higher levels of the antioxidant quercetin, which was found in significantly higher concentrations in the urine of those eating the organic diet. The authors concluded that "the growing conditions of fruits and vegetables (conventional vs organic) affected the content of five selected flavonoids and resulted in differences in the urinary excretion of major dietary flavonoids." Blood samples were also taken to measure antioxidant capacity of the blood with mixed results. Unfortunately they were taken after 12hr fasts, despite Serafini et al. (2002) showing that the effect of antioxidant-rich foods on the antioxidant capacity of the blood is

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transient and likely to have passed before the sampling after a 12 hour fast. No wonder then that the results were confused, and the authors acknowledged that "other factors may have affected this marker".

GRINDER-PEDERSEN et al. (2003) Effect of Diets Based on Foods from Conventional versus Organic Production on Intake and Excretion of Flavonoids and Markers of Antioxidative Defense in Humans; J. Agric. Food Chem. 51, p5671-5676.

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Australia: Bioflavonoids reduce heart disease

More confirmation that polyphenols, generally higher in organic crops, are beneficial for human health: A recent meta-analysis by the University of Sydney of seven previously published studies has confirmed that consuming polyphenols and bioflavonoids (chemicals from plants that have health effects when we eat them) can result in a statistically significant 20 percent reduction in risk of heart disease. Over 100,000 individuals were in the studies and there were almost 2,100 fatal heart disease cases. The richest sources of flavonoids were tea (mostly black), onions, apples and broccoli. The research was published in the August 2003 edition of the European Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

<http://www.nature.com/cgi-taf/DynaPage.taf?file=/ejcn/journal/v57/n8/abs/1601624a.html>

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RESEARCH

UK: FSA Seeks views on organic research

17 September 2003

Views on proposals for research into organically produced food are being sought by the Food Standards Agency. The aim is to identify areas of study most likely to produce information that would be useful to people when they buy food. The Agency is planning to commission new research comparing the nutrient value and pesticide residue content of key organically and non-organically produced fruit and vegetables, as they would normally be eaten.

The FSA wants to hear what members of the public, consumer groups and industry think about the areas of research proposed so that it can be sure that any research undertaken is of most value to people when they are making choices about food. The proposals have been generated from discussions in a workshop the Agency hosted to encourage debate and explore new opportunities for research on organic food. Participants in the workshop concluded that unless specific health effects were identified, it would not be possible to test the hypothesis that organically produced food is generally 'healthier' than non-organic. But the workshop felt it was possible to identify a number of areas where research is practical and could be of interest and use to people.

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Views are being sought during the next three months. Any comments received, along with existing data that people may want to submit, will be taken into account before a formal call for research proposals is issued. The length and timescale of the new research will depend on the nature of the research projects that are finally commissioned. The results from this research will add to work the Agency has already commissioned. It is important that consumers already buying organic food should be able to do so with confidence that it has indeed been produced organically. Therefore, under the food authenticity research programme, the Agency is already funding the development of analytical methods that could differentiate organic meat and vegetables from non-organic meat and vegetables.

All comments and views should be sent to: Andrew Stephenson, Food Labelling and Standards Division, Room 115B, Aviation House, 125 Kingsway, London WC2B 6NH Fax: 020 7276 8193 E-mail: labelling@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk Responses are requested by: 19 December 2003

Consultation details

The Agency is proposing to carry out new research to compare the nutrient and pesticide residue content of key organically and non-organically produced fruit and vegetables, as consumed. The objective is to inform consumer choice, and there would not necessarily be any implications for human health. We are now seeking views on this proposal. We would particularly value your views on the following points:

- Would further research into the comparative nutrient content of a selected range of organically and non-organically produced fruit and vegetables make a significant contribution to informed consumer choice?
- Is it feasible to carry out such research in a manner which represents value for money?
- If so do you agree that the comparison should be made at the point of consumption, and do you have any views on the nutrients to be considered, or the fruits and vegetables which should be selected?
- Would research into the comparative pesticide residue content of a selected range of organically and non-organically produced fruit and vegetables make a significant contribution to informed consumer choice?
- Is it feasible to carry out such research in a manner which represents value for money?
- If so, do you agree that the comparison should be made at the point of consumption?
- Do you agree that the pesticides sought should include pesticides which may be used in organic production?
- Do you have any other views on the pesticides to be considered, or on the fruit and vegetables which should be examined?
- Should categories other than organic and non-organic be included, for example where production methods are claimed to 'minimise residues'

For more information read the consultation paper

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<http://www.foodstandards.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/organicresearch.pdf>

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UK: New food research initiative

A new body designed to ensure better coordination of and support for research and science in farming and food has been welcomed by the UK government. The industry-led Applied Research Forum - composed of representatives from agriculture and horticulture, farming unions, and food safety agencies - is part of efforts by the UK government and industry 'to rebuild our farming and food industries through new and better ways of working and cooperating.' Spear-headed by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, a key aim of the forum is to develop better 'cross-industry working and joint initiatives to create greater cohesion in farming and food research'.

"It is those parts of industry and the food chain which can respond to trends in science and research and use available technology that will improve productivity, efficiency and environmental protection, and be more able to meet market demands," said Food and Farming Minister Lord Whitty this week. Adding that the forum is part of a wider aim to improve the competitiveness and profitability of the UK's farming and food sectors. According to the UK food marketing agency Food from Britain, food and drink exports from the UK have more than doubled over the last 10 years, with the UK currently at number six in the world food and drink exporters' league. The total UK food and drink export market is worth approximately £9.2 billion (€13.3bn) and the primary export countries (in order of export value) are France, Ireland, the United States, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands, followed by Belgium and Luxembourg, Italy, Japan and Portugal.

Food from Britain predicts that increasing demand on the UK food and drink sector, particularly for value-added convenience products, is expected in the next decade and new, developing markets for export include Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Brazil. The first forum meeting will take place on 6 October.

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US: Organic Trade Association Receives 'Quality of Life' Award

GREENFIELD, Mass. The Clements Agricultural Research Institute recently presented its annual "Quality of Life" Award to the Organic Trade Association for establishing The Organic Center for Education and Promotion. "The Organic Trade Association's vision for the Organic Center for Education and Promotion will play an important role in contributing to the earth and its creatures through education, legislation, communication and recognition of the importance of maintaining and improving the quality of the soils, the waters and the environment -- the goals recognized by our Quality of Life Award," said Mahlon Clements, president and chairman of the board at the Clements Agricultural Research Institute (CARI). The award
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presentation yesterday was part of CARI's annual Celebration of the Earth. CARI, located at Iroquois Farm adjacent to the St. Lawrence River in northern New York near Ogdensburg, itself focuses on organic agricultural research.

"The Organic Trade Association (OTA) is honored to receive recognition from this farm research facility which itself is doing work crucial to organic farmers," said Katherine DiMatteo, OTA's executive director. OTA is the membership-based business association representing all sectors of the organic industry throughout North America. It established the Organic Center for Education and Promotion to encourage scientific research on the benefits of organic agriculture and products, and to communicate those benefits to the public. Goals of the organic center include gathering a comprehensive set of credible, peer-reviewed scientific findings on the benefits of organic agriculture, and serving as a clearinghouse on such research. For further information on the Organic Center for Education and Promotion, go to <http://www.organic-center.org>. For more information about Iroquois Farm or CARI, contact Mahlon Clements at 315-375-6789.

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Australia: First national organic survey

The Australian Government is providing more than \$60,000 for a study designed to boost the growth of Australia's organic agriculture industry, the Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Senator Judith Troeth, announced today. Senator Troeth said organic produce is a small industry set for expansion in Australia, with 2,000 certified producers - including growers, processors and manufacturers, exporters and retailers. "The Australian Government is funding a nationwide survey of the organics industry to gather information needed to develop the tools to support its growth, such as a strategic plan and marketing strategy," she said. "Accurate and current information on our organic production and consumption is not readily available, which is an issue for the whole of Australia's organic industry."

Retail sales of organic produce in Australia are estimated to have increased from \$28 million in 1990 to nearly \$200 million in 2003, with global sales increasing from \$16 billion to \$50 billion during the same period. "However, if this promising industry is to continue to grow and reach its full potential, it needs to undertake strategic development activities at the national level," Senator Troeth said. "The project announced today will collect the latest information on organic production, consumption, sales, promotional activities, prices, imports and exports. This will help the industry members to identify opportunities in the market, which products are worth producing and those that are in oversupply." Senator Troeth said the project was initiated by the peak industry body - Organic Federation of Australia - and will be conducted by one of the co-authors of a recent study into the European market for organic food.

"This project will be headed by Dr Darren Halpin from the Centre for Social Research at Western Australia's Edith Cowan University, with support from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry," the Senator said. "Dr Halpin has Organic food quality and health research newsletter: www.organicfcresearch.org

an impressive track record, having previously worked for the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture in Switzerland, and with the University of Applied Sciences in Neubrandenburg, Germany, studying Europe's organic markets," Senator Troeth said. "He was one of the co-authors of a recent book detailing the findings of that study, Analysis of the European Market for Organic Food. "Whole-of-industry support will ensure the project develops as precise a picture as is possible of Australia's organic industry," Senator Troeth said. "I encourage all members of Australia's organic produce industry to assist Dr Halpin on this important project." Source: Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry – Australia

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PROMOTION

USA: OTA “Organic for Kids” program for Organic Harvest Month

An "Organic Family Menu Guide" by celebrity chefs, tips for getting organic food into the schools, and a cost analysis showing organic, not conventional, foods are the bargain are the key components of the "Organic for Kids" program launched by the Organic Trade Association (OTA) in honor of "Organic Harvest Month" this September. The program is posted on the OTA website, <http://www.theorganicreport.org> "Choosing organic food is an easy way for parents to protect their families while giving them delicious foods and an understanding of the need to protect our environment. The OTA's 'Organic for Kids' program helps parents incorporate organic food into their children's lives both at home and at school," said Katherine DiMatteo, OTA's executive director. DiMatteo noted that children are especially vulnerable to pesticides. Organic agriculture minimizes their exposure to toxic and persistent pesticides in the foods they eat, the soil in which they play, the air they breathe and the water they drink. Children who have organic diets have lower pesticide residues in their urine than children fed conventionally grown foods, according to recent research conducted by scientists at the University of Washington.

"There is no better time to celebrate children, our most important harvest, than during Organic Harvest Month. That is when we pay tribute to the bounty of organic agriculture, a system dedicated to protecting the earth for us, for our children and for generations to come," said DiMatteo. A tool kit of resources to help parents get organic foods into their children's school is offered in a series of articles provided by Elaine Marie Lipson, author of The Organic Foods Sourcebook. The greatest successes have been found on the college level with Stanford, Princeton, Colorado College, Bates and the University of Wisconsin among those taking the lead. The kit includes "Eleven Tips for Change" for getting organic foods into the schools. These advise parents to do their homework, avoid attacking foodservice staff, and "start small, but don't think small." An educational handout for parents to distribute -- "Organic Food and Children" -- covers the meaning of "organic" and explains why organic foods may matter most to children. Extensive resources listings are provided as well.

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Australia: Demand exceeds supply as market continues to grow

The turnover for organic products in Australia has risen to an estimated 250 million Australian dollars (160 million EUR). The growth in demand is 20-25 % a year and exceeds supply, which is increasing at the rate of 10-15 %. The export of organic beef is developing at an above-average level and becoming a permanent part of the export industry. Horticulture is the driving force behind the industry in Australia itself. Another 250 new organic farmers have been added, which corresponds to 10 % more. For more information see <http://www.bfa.com.au>

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Germany: Industry demands clear commitment to organic policy

Representatives of the German organic industry including organic federation Naturland and the umbrella group BÖLW have responded with sharp criticism to recent comments from the undersecretary of state Dr. Gerald Thalheim at the German Consumer Protection, Food and Farming Ministry. In a newspaper interview Thalheim announced the end of the agricultural policy shift in Germany and the promotion of organic farming as part of savings for the 2004 agriculture budget. Maintaining that funding must be for "all the agriculture in the country" he rejected further subsidization of the organic industry and declared the difference between conventional and organic agriculture was creating an "artificial conflict".

Naturland managing director Firos Holterman: "The Federal Government has defined the new agricultural policy as part of its overall programme. We demand that it retains this policy even in these economically difficult times. It concerns more than a few subsidies: It concerns jobs in agriculture, the protection of the consumers and our environment." Naturland is demanding that federal minister Renate Künast delivers a clear commitment to the new agricultural policy and disassociates herself from Thalheim's comments. Firos Holterman added: "with the introduction of the new agricultural policy many farmers decided to convert to organic farming. Ever more consumers are demanding organic products. This development is positive and must continue." Chairman of the BÖLW, Dr. Felix Prinz zu Löwenstein, said that the new agriculture policy is the condition to secure a future in Germany for farmers in the face of their global competitive disadvantage. He maintained that the policy is not only applicable in good economic times as the large market gives opportunities for German agriculture and that on a long-term basis organic farming saves costs which would otherwise result from the correction of environmental damage. Web:

<http://www.naturland.de>

Denmark: Organic sales increase

New statistics show that in the last six months Danish consumers have purchased more organic food products than ever before. This is a consequence of

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campaigns and the retail trade's efforts. In the first six months of 2003, the sale of especially organic meat, fruit and vegetables have risen significantly. New figures from GfK – a market research agency – show that the total market share has gone up from 5.4% in the first six months of 2002 to 5.6%. This is equivalent to an increase of about 4% in just six months. The figures include both retail sale and direct sales such as doorstep schemes, which Danish consumers have shown an increasing interest. But also the retail trade has made an extra effort, which is reflected in the improved sales figures. Irma is one of the retail chains that made an extra effort all through the spring. A whole new display design was created intended for organic fruit and vegetables; the new display boxes resulted in a far better exposure.

* There is no doubt that good product exposure is essential to sales development. Ever since we introduced the new display boxes the total turnover has risen by over 30%. Especially sales of the smaller items have improved, because the consumers have become more aware of their existence, says Hans Christian Ipland, Irma's purchasing manager.

* Since we launched the new extra low-fat jersey milk a month ago, our total turnover of milk has increased significantly. The product seems to meet a demand and it shows how important it is to develop new products constantly, if we want to expand the organic market, says Hans Christian Ipland. In the near future Organic Denmark will be developing new projects, eg new campaigns for dairy products, meat and fruit and vegetables. Web: <http://www.organic-denmark.com>

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POLITICS

UK: GM comments

The editorial comment in the Independent on Sunday is headlined 'We must ban all GM crops'. The paper also contains a scathing attack on the Government by Geoffrey Lean following the results from the GM Nation? debate. Lean writes, "Part of the problem is that ministers often get poor advice from official committees with too many members who have links to the industry in question." The Food Standards Agency also comes under fire, "[The FSA] shows little concern over GM or pesticide use on crops. Instead it concentrates much of its attention on apparently trying to undermine the case for organic foods."

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