

This 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:

“The meatrix is all around us...it is the story we tell ourselves about where meat and animal products come from”. See www.themeatrix.com for a very entertaining depiction of the decline in family farms and the rise of industrial farming.

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PESTICIDES

UK: Round up more toxic than glyphosate alone

There is more alarm about the commonly used herbicide, Roundup (glyphosate), following new research from the UK and France. Speaking at a Pesticide Action Network (PAN) conference last week, expert endocrinologist Professor Gilles-Eric Seralini presented the new study showing that Roundup (in formulation) is more toxic than glyphosate alone. He said: "Roundup has some hormonal perturbing (disrupting) effects. These...could account for sperm decline, increase in sexual malformations, and an increase in cancers." (PAN press release) [Issue also covered on Farming Today - Saturday 29 November] see www.pan-uk.org for more information.

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ANTIBIOTICS

Switzerland: Chickens and antibiotic resistance

More than 40 per cent of bacteria found in chicken on sale in Switzerland is resistant to at least one antibiotic, researchers from the Swiss Federal Veterinary Office have revealed.

The bacteria, *Campylobacter*, causes between 5 and 14 per cent of all diarrhoeal illness worldwide and in Switzerland, 1 in 1,086 people suffer from a *Campylobacter* infection every year. The most common sources of infection are inadequately cooked meat, particularly poultry, unpasteurised milk and contaminated drinking water. Although the illness normally clears up after a week without treatment, small children and people with a weakened immune system often take antibiotics to prevent the infection from spreading to the bloodstream – and causing life threatening septicaemia. Researchers from the Swiss Federal Veterinary Office collected raw poultry meat samples from 122 retail outlets across Switzerland and Liechtenstein, and tested their antibiotic resistance. From 415 meat samples, they isolated 91 strains of *Campylobacter*, 59 per cent of which were sensitive to all the antibiotics tested. According to the results, 19 strains - 22 per cent - were resistant to one antibiotic, 9 strains - 10 per cent - to two antibiotics, and 8 strains - 9 per cent - were resistant to at least three antibiotics. Two strains were resistant to five antibiotics. One of these showed resistance to ciprofloxacin, tetracycline and erythromycin – the most important antibiotics for treating *Campylobacter* infection in humans.

"The level of antibiotic resistance in Campylobacter depends on the amount of antibiotics that the chickens received.....It's possible that chickens raised in an animal-friendly way are more healthy, so they need less treatment with antibiotics and so their Campylobacter are less resistant to antibiotics. But the other side of the story is that these chickens go outside more often, so they are in more contact with wild birds, which is the reservoir of Campylobacter," commented Danuser.

Although the findings are of some concern for Swiss consumers, the researchers claim that the picture for other countries is even bleaker. *"The high prevalence of Campylobacter in raw poultry meat samples found in this study agrees with data from other studies,"* they said. In the US, 90 per cent of *Campylobacter* strains isolated from poultry meat had resistance to at least one, and 45 per cent to at least two antibiotics, commented the researchers. Worries over antibiotic resistant bacteria led the EU, in 1999, to ban the use

of four antibiotics as growth promoters in chickens. The US Food and Drugs administration (FDA) followed their lead in late 2000 by banning the use of a particular class of antibiotics called fluorquinolones in poultry farming. foodnavigator.com. 09/12/2003

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GMOs

Germany: Cows fed on GM maize die mysteriously

Berlin, 8 Dec. - Fifteen Greenpeace activists are today protesting with a cow's skeleton in front of the Robert-Koch Institute in Berlin. A banner questions the safety of genetically engineered feed. The protest is being made because the institute has not yet clarified the puzzling circumstances, which led to twelve cows dying on a farm in the state of Hesse, although it is officially the institute's responsibility to do so.

The animals were fed genetically manipulated maize between 1997 and 2001. The Robert-Koch Institute is responsible for authorising the GM maize and has so far refused to instigate further investigations to clarify what has happened. Greenpeace is calling for a full investigation into the deaths of the cows and an immediate ban on the GM maize concerned, the Syngenta company's "bt176" maize.

"The Robert-Koch Institute manages genetic engineering instead of actively ensuring safety and the scrutiny of its use," says Henning Strodthoff, genetic engineering expert at Greenpeace. "The GM maize should never have been approved. Even the US has now taken it off the market. The incident in Hesse again shows how lightly the risks of genetic engineering are considered. In this situation no new licences for GM plants should be issued," Henning Strodthoff went on, "and certainly not by this institute."

The investigations made so far for the most part rule out the possibility of common diseases or errors in feeding the animals as the cause of the cows dying. Syngenta gave the farmer partial compensation in 2002 but refused to recognise the GM maize as being the cause. The farmer called in vain on the authorities and Syngenta to provide more support in making a full investigation into the case, and has now made the details of it available to Greenpeace.

This GM maize is in Europe only grown commercially in Spain. Studies on bt176 maize have again and again made surprising findings. The newly created Bt protein which is in fact supposed to protect the maize from particular insects that feed on it, for example, becomes degraded more slowly than had been anticipated. It is found in cows' stomachs, intestines and excrement. Experiments on mice show that it may function similarly with mammals, something which had always been ruled out. The case is particularly explosive because the EU is discussing a new application for another Syngenta GM maize. This bt11 maize is intended for human consumption, and forms the same poisonous protein.

There are in Germany only a few companies and chain stores like the Metro group that want to use genetic engineering in the products they sell and market. Metro also does not rule out the possibility that genetic engineering is already present in its own brands. In Germany genetic engineering gets into consumers' food via animal feed.

SOURCE: Greenpeace e.V. - Germany

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redaktion@greenpeace.de
<http://www.greenpeace.de>

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EU: Round up ready maize safe, says European Food Safety Authority

The first GMO opinion from the European Food Safety Authority's (EFSA) Scientific Panel on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) will open the way for the Commission to draft proposals on authorising NK 603 maize for consultation by member states in a regulatory committee, the decision could be as early as January or February next year. These opinions relate to the risk assessment of a NK603 "Roundup Ready" maize and of food and feed products derived from it. This maize type has been genetically modified to provide tolerance to the herbicide glyphosate (commonly formulated as "Roundup"). The stated purpose of this modification is to allow farmers to manage weeds more effectively in maize fields during cultivation.

The risk assessment is based on two questions raised by the Commission related to applications for the placing of the maize on the market by Monsanto under Regulation (EC) No 258/97 on novel food and under Directive 2001/18/EC on the deliberate release of genetically modified organisms into the environment. *"Having considered all of the evidence provided, the Panel concluded that NK 603 maize is as safe as conventional maize and therefore the placing on the market of NK 603 maize – for import for processing and food or feed use—is unlikely to have an adverse effect on human or animal health, or in this context, on the environment,"* Dr Harry Kuiper, chair of the Scientific Panel on Genetically Modified Organisms told a press conference.

He emphasised the approach of the scientists to adopt a comparative assessment of the GM maize, in other words, to look at any differences which might arise between the nearest conventional line and the GM version. Anticipating anti-GM campaigners who will be disappointed by the EFSA opinion (a 'yes' could ultimately clear the way for the product on the market) Geoffrey Podger, executive director of EFSA, told the press conference: *"We are very much aware of the sensitivities of the consumer, and without fear or favour we have carried out the assessment."* Stressing the role of EFSA as concerned with risk assessment rather than risk management, Podger added: *"We are not the risk managers and we do not have a timetable. Responsibility now falls on the Commission to take it further in the European Union."*

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Australia: Arnott's Biscuits announces GE-free policy

Australian biscuit manufacturer Arnott's has announced a commitment to ensuring that genetically modified ingredients do not enter its supply chains. "We continue to audit all our suppliers to seek to ensure our products contain ingredients derived from non-genetically modified crops. And we have sought, and will continue to seek, assurances from our suppliers of animal-derived products that they not use feed that contains genetically modified material," Arnott's said in a letter that was forwarded to environmental lobby group Greenpeace. The new policy statement was prompted by concern over public protests by a New Zealand community group (PMEA) who this weekend planned to launch a public campaign against Arnott's, Greenpeace said. "Over the last year we've seen a

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real shift in the Australian food industry, with many major brands and most of the dairy industry moving to GE-free policies. " Greenpeace spokesperson, John Hepburn said. Greenpeace is currently campaigning against poultry giant Inghams, which it says is using unlabelled GE ingredients in its poultry feed.

12 Dec 2003 Source: just-food.com

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UK: Blair responds to scientists' call over GMOs

UK prime minister Tony Blair has responded to a letter sent to him on behalf of 114 scientists, criticising his handling of the debate over genetically modified organisms (GMOs), saying that the government would make its decision on the basis of 'sound science'.

Blair said that he read the letter with interest and added that: *"The reason why we have not yet made a formal response to the results of the farm scale evaluations is that we are waiting to hear the assessment of the advisory committee on releases to the environment."*

The prime minister Blair made it clear, however, that consumer concerns are not the only arguments that will influence the government's decision.

"I strongly believe that science and technology are vital to our country's future prosperity. As a government, we need to ensure that the UK continues to be one of the top countries in the world for scientific research," he said.

13/11/2003 FoodNavigator.com

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HEALTH & DIET

US: Tomatoes reduce prostate cancer but isolated lycopene does not

A team of American researchers recently announced that eating tomatoes reduces prostate cancer but taking lycopene, the red pigment from tomatoes, does not. The study was performed because of observations that men who ate tomatoes every day had a lower risk of later developing prostate cancer. However, because most of the lycopene in our diet comes from tomatoes, it is almost impossible to determine from any study of men if it is indeed lycopene or something else in tomatoes having the effect.

Rats that were fed tomato powder had a significant 26 percent reduction in prostate cancer. Those getting a lycopene supplement had just slightly fewer prostate tumors than the control group. The study was published in the November 5, 2003 edition of the Journal of the National Cancer Institute.

<http://jncicancerspectrum.oupjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/jnci;95/21/1578>

As this study was done with rats we can't be sure the same results would be found with humans. Yet it does support the view that combinations of nutrients in foods are the key to health benefits, and individual, isolated nutrients often don't have the same effects. It may also be that we don't yet know all the nutrients in foods that are beneficial to our health – in this case, tomatoes, the health benefit may have little or nothing to do with lycopene. It

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remains highly significant that organic fruits and vegetables tend to contain 10-50% higher levels of known antioxidant phytonutrients, as we are clearly not yet nearly as clever as nature at providing the nutrients needed for human health.

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RESEARCH

EU: Major organic research project likely to get funding

Twenty-one research proposals have been short listed for funding under the EU 6th Framework Programme Priority 5: "Food Quality and Safety" , including Topic 1, which aims to study and improve various aspects of organic agriculture, which are also relevant for other forms of "low-input" agriculture.

Topic 1 - Food from low input and organic production systems: ensuring the safety and improving quality along the whole chain

The objective of this topic is to improve the quality and safety, and to reduce the production costs from foods derived from lower input and organic food production systems. The activities will cover the full chain from consumer to farm.

This Integrated Project (33 participants) aims to lead to new technologies and systems for organic and low input production systems. One of its strengths is a matrix structure whereby the research will encompass the whole food chain from fork to farm for a number of sectors including protected crops (tomato), field vegetables (lettuce), fruit (apple), cereal (wheat), pork, dairy and poultry. It addresses consumer attitudes and expectations, impact of organic foods on nutritional, sensory, microbiological and toxicological quality/safety of foods, development of new technologies and identification of socio-economic, environmental and sustainability impacts of innovations. This project has the scientific rigour to provide the meaningful information that is lacking on the extent to which differences in production systems affect nutritional value, taste and safety of food. It is expected to make a significant impact on increasing the competitiveness of the organic industry in a number of sectors to the benefit of the European consumers.

The press release from the Commission is found at

ftp://ftp.cordis.lu/pub/food/docs/p5_1c_overview_en.pdf

For more information email Kirsten Brandt, Ph.D. kirsten.brandt@agrsci.dk

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PROMOTION

Germany: Organic films featured in German cinemas

Various films on organic farming were run in German cinemas between the end of October and mid December. Film students from all over Germany have tackled this theme from new and unusual viewpoints since the beginning of this year. Eighteen short films, spots and image films have been created with the support of the German Consumer Ministry. The best films were awarded prizes at the International Good Film Food Festival in Berlin

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in September, have now been combined on one reel of film and distributed by Edition Salzgeber to 80 cinemas throughout Germany.

<http://www.goodfilmfood.de>

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USA: Successful Biofach debut in Washington

The rush of visitors in the new Washington Convention Center exceeded all expectations: More than 20,000 trade visitors gathered information at the Organic Products Expo, the new organic exhibition at the beginning of September. 184 exhibitors from four continents presented their products in the capital for three days. The exhibition took place parallel to the Natural Products Expo and was organized jointly with the US exhibition partner New Hope Natural Media. Nine German companies used the opportunity to present their products to the trade public in a pavilion organized by Nürnberg Global Fairs. A supporting programme with seminars and workshops rounded off the event. The next BioFach America will take place from 15-17 October 2004.

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UK: Soil Association conference January 9-10

SOIL ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2004 ON ORGANIC FOOD AND FARMING – 'RECONNECTING THE PUBLIC WITH AGRICULTURE'
Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh.

This year's conference addresses the challenge of reconnecting farmers and consumers. How can we reawaken a passion for good food and good husbandry? How can producers enlist the support of consumers to build a future that is environmentally and economically sustainable?

A number of high profile national and international speakers are confirmed including:
Allan Wilson, Deputy Minister for the Environment and Rural Affairs, Scottish Executive
David Atkinson, Vice Principal, Scottish Agricultural College
Sir Don Curry, Chairman, Sustainable Farming and Food Implementation Group
Barbara Young, Chief Executive, Environment Agency
Gunnar Rundgren, President, International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements.

Tickets for the full conference cost £352.50 while the price for Soil Association members is £258.50. Reduced price tickets are available to small-scale organic businesses at £158.63. Delegates will be able to enjoy fully organic meals, a special Scottish slow food lunch and a performance by the Edinburgh String Quartet.

For further information: The Soil Association Events Department on 0117 914 2451 or email dlane@soilassociation.org. The conference programme and booking form are available from www.soilassociation.org/conference.

*For media enquiries: Sue Flook, Press Office, 0117 914 2448; sflook@soilassociation.org
The Soil Association's 16th Annual Conference on Organic Food and Farming is sponsored by Sainsbury's, the Scottish Executive and Triodos Bank.*

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POLITICS

UK: Food Standards Agency criticised by public watchdog

The Food Standards Agency has failed to show it is up to the job, according to the Commons Public Accounts Committee - Parliament's most powerful watchdog. In a hard-hitting report, the all-party committee said the FSA had not yet convincingly demonstrated it could take the lead on food safety issues. It also said the agency has neither impressed the public, or the organisations it is supposed to influence. Soil Association.

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UN: Organic production recommended to developing countries

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) is urging developing countries to increase organic tropical fruit production to seize growing export markets in the industrialised world, reports the Australian Organic Advantage. A detailed report says that demand is expected to grow 10-30 % over the next five to ten years. However, developing countries currently face serious difficulties in meeting technical requirements of importing countries. So the report recommends that developing countries implement food quality and safety programmes and try to conform to regulatory and market requirements. The complete study with 330 pages can be downloaded.

http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/ditccom20032_en.pdf

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