



Organic Food Quality & Health

Organic Food Quality News

APRIL 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

Quote of the month:

"If you want to change the world, start with yourself." Leo Tolstoy

Contents

1. [Pesticides](#) - Pesticides common in European blood; Harm to US farm workers from pesticide exposure
2. [Additives](#) -
3. [Antibiotics](#) - Antibiotic found in UK eggs
4. [GMOs](#) - GM corn feeding trial on rodent testicular development; Argentinian environmental crisis due to GM farming; Bayer abandons GM maize plans in UK; EU lifting GM moratorium?; GM trials all but abandoned in UK; UK supermarkets continue to shun GM ingredients; Australian approval not given for Monsanto trial; Spanish fear of GM contamination; New Canadian GM-free labelling rules allow 5% contamination; European GM maize approval;
5. [BSE](#) - BSE in UK sheep?; USDA seeks info on slaughter methods; USDA disallows independent BSE testing; UK OTM rule questioned
6. [Nutrient content](#) -
7. [Health & Diet](#) -
8. [Research](#) - European archive of organic studies; Social science of organics studied; Top 5 US university organic research programs listed
9. [Promotion](#) - International organic food association launched, UK organic demand strong; French organic market growing at 18%; Swiss organic market grows 7%; European market growing, but price still an issue; EU organic logo to become compulsory
10. [Politics](#) - Is organics the future of farming?

1. PESTICIDES

EU: Pesticides common in blood

A huge cocktail of chemicals can be found in every adult's blood, according to research commissioned by WWF and the Co-operative Bank. In the study 47 volunteers from 17 European countries provided blood samples which were tested for the presence of 101 man made chemicals. Researchers found 76 of the chemicals, with an average of 41 in the blood of each person. Among the chemicals detected were OCP pesticides [a class of chlorine-containing compounds like DDT which tend to persist in the environment and have the ability to disrupt endocrine systems] which were mostly used in the 1970s, and DDT which is still used for mosquito control, and may be found in imported meat and vegetables. (Soil Association UK: Daily Mail)

US: Harm to farm workers from pesticide exposure

By Don Lotter / The Rodale Institute March 19, 2004

Criteria for sustainability of agricultural systems usually are things like erosion, runoff, and yield stability. Citing these, some "experts" think that current conventional agriculture is relatively sustainable. In fact, a professor of agriculture at UC Davis told me that just the other day. The Achilles heel of the "conventional agriculture is sustainable" argument may be farm worker health (I would say it is just one of several Achilles heels, aquatic pollution is another huge one). If the levels of pesticides going into the foods we eat are too low to cause immediate measurable health problems, the experts will say that the food system is safe. And this is what they do, even though they do not know the long-term consequences of low-level exposure. Farm workers, however, are showing up with immediate and rather alarming health problems, associated with pesticide exposure.

A team of researchers from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences did neurobehavioral tests on a large group of farm workers (288), mostly Latino, in Florida and compared them with an identical group from the same community who had never done farm work. They found a significant degradation of performance on neurobehavioral tests in farm workers compared to the control group, and the more years of farm work they did, the more degraded was their performance. The farm workers had worked in three types of agriculture: ornamental fern production, nurseries, and citrus harvest. The subjects were carefully screened for traits that could skew the results -- for instance farm workers who had experienced acute pesticide poisoning were rejected, since the objective was to determine the effects of chronic exposure. The battery of neurobehavioral tests were all well established tests designed to evaluate a range of neurological health criteria. They have technical names like digit span, symbol digit latency, vibrotactile threshold, visual contrast sensitivity, tapping, Santa Ana pegboard test, grip strength, and postural sway. Fern work was particularly strongly related to lessened neurobehavioral performance. Fern production is pesticide intensive and the workers handle the ferns intensively. Poor neurobehavioral performance correlated with the number of years of farm work in both current and former farm workers. Some tests showed no effect from farm work. The tests that were affected by farm work were digit span, tapping, Santa Ana pegboard test, and postural sway. The fact that the researchers excluded subjects who had experienced acute pesticide poisoning in the past is important, as agrichemical industry scientists have in the past attacked studies that included acute poisoning subjects, saying that the acute poisonings cause the neurobehavioral problems and that chronic exposure is harmless.

Don Lotter has a Ph.D. in agroecology and has worked in sustainable agricultural development in North America, Latin America, and Africa over the past 25 years. He can be contacted via his website www.donlotter.com

[-back to contents-](#)

2. ADDITIVES

[-back to contents-](#)

3. ANTIBIOTICS

UK: Antibiotic found in eggs

The UK's Soil Association has published a report warning about residues of the antibiotic lasalocid in chickens' eggs. Three million eggs eaten every day could contain residues and babies could be at risk, along with people who eat a large number of eggs, such as those on the Atkins' diet, and people with certain heart conditions. Lasalocid can legally be used in the feed of chickens sold for meat, turkeys, pheasants and quail and is contained in ready-made feed sold to farmers for these purposes. However it is not licensed for use for chickens that lay eggs. It is likely that contamination is occurring at feed mills. The full report and press release are available from www.soilassociation.org/antibiotics]

[-back to contents-](#)

4. GMOs

US: GM corn feeding trial on rodent testicular development

This study from the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, South Dakota State University was published in April 2004...

The health safety of Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) corn (*Zea mays* L.) was studied using mouse testes as a sensitive biomonitor of potential toxic effects. Pregnant mice were fed a Bt corn or a nontransgenic (conventional) diet during gestation and lactation. After they were weaned, young male mice were maintained on the respective diets. At 8, 16, 26, 32, 63, and 87 days after birth, three male mice and an adult reference mouse were killed, the testes were surgically removed, and the percentage of germ cell populations was measured by flow cytometry. Multigenerational studies were conducted in the same manner. There were no apparent differences in percentages of testicular cell populations (haploid, diploid, and tetraploid) between the mice fed the Bt corn diet and those fed the conventional diet. Because of the high rate of cell proliferation and extensive differentiation that makes testicular germ cells highly susceptible to some toxic agents, it was concluded that the Bt corn diet had no measurable or observable effect on fetal, postnatal, pubertal, or adult testicular development. If data from this study were extrapolated to humans, Bt corn is not harmful to human reproductive development.

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Brake DG, Thaler R, Evenson DP; 2004; Evaluation of Bt (Bacillus thuringiensis) corn on mouse testicular development by dual parameter flow cytometry. J Agric Food Chem 52(7); p2097-2102.

Argentina: Environmental crisis due to GM farming.

The countryside is overrun with 'superweeds' and farmers are reporting health problems due to excessive use of herbicides. Since 1997, GM soya has been planted over almost half the country's arable land. Now farmers are having to use more and more herbicides to control the resistant weeds, damaging the soil's fertility for generations. Overuse of weedkillers is rendering the soil 'inert' – and directly affecting human health. Farmers and their families living near Argentina's GM fields complain of rashes, streaming eyes and other symptoms. Some have seen their livestock die or give birth to deformed young. Even Argentinian advocates of GM crops admit that today's farming methods cannot be sustained.

Monsanto has rejected claims that its GM soya has had a disastrous effect on farming and the environment in Argentina. Colin Merritt, Monsanto UK's biotechnology manager, attacked the report as 'lacking scientific rigour' and rejected claims of 'superweeds', although he acknowledged there were some difficulties with controlling GM volunteers. (Soil Association UK: New Scientist; Daily Mail – front page story – 15 April)

UK: Bayer abandons GM maize plans

German biotechnology giant Bayer CropScience has announced its maize variety Chardon LL has been left "economically non-viable" because of conditions Margaret Beckett, environment secretary, imposed when she gave it limited approval this month. Bayer warned that the UK's tough GM regulatory regime could jeopardise the adoption of the technology. It said: "New regulations should enable GM crops to be grown in the UK - not disable future attempts to grow them". The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, said: "We do not apologise for the fact there is a tough EU-wide regulatory regime on GMs." Bayer's decision to withdraw the crop from the UK and other European markets means GM crops are unlikely to be grown in the UK until 2008, when GM oil seed rape may be approved for cultivation. Bayer insisted it was committed to GM crops in the UK and the rest of Europe. It is trying to improve farming practices for GM oil seed rape to make it less environmentally damaging. Monsanto, its US rival, is making similar efforts to overcome the environmental handicaps of sugar beet. (Soil Association UK: Financial Times)

EU: Lifting GM moratorium?

The European Union is close to ending its six-year moratorium on genetically-modified food, with the expected approval for the sale of a type of maize produced by Syngenta, the Swiss company. EU agriculture ministers will decide today whether the maize, called BT-11, should be the first of about 30 GM products waiting for regulatory clearance to reach European supermarket shelves. Although the meeting is expected to result in deadlock, failure to reach a decision would automatically give the European Commission the right to approve BT-11. David Byrne, the commissioner in charge of consumer protection, said: "The public in the EU must be confronted with the reality of the situation, which is that all the scientific evidence shows GM food is as safe as conventional food." (Soil Association UK: Financial Times; The Times)

UK: GM trials all but abandoned

All the major biotechnology companies have abandoned GM trials in the UK this year. Only one crop, a GM pea being tested for drought resistance, will be grown at the John Innes research centre. (Soil Association UK: The Guardian – 15 April)

UK: Supermarkets continue to shun GM ingredients

Supermarkets have promised to shun GM ingredients as laws come into force requiring labelling to identify where they are used. Many stores and manufacturers intend to continue a ban that they had already imposed on themselves. The legal regime, which comes into effect on Sunday, requires food firms to label the use of the derivatives of GM crops – such as the oils, starch and lecithin used in processed foods. The labelling will apply if more than 0.9 per cent of one ingredient comes from GM sources. Those who say they will continue to ban GM include Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Waitrose, Asda, Safeway/ Morrisons, Iceland, Budgens, Somerfield/ Kwik Save, Unilever, Nestle, Associated British Foods and Cadbury Schweppes. (Soil Association UK: Daily Mail)

AUSTRALIA: Monsanto fails to get approval for large GM crop trial

Biotechnology giant Monsanto has failed to win approval for a commercial-scale trial of genetically modified crops in Australia after objections from Australian wheat exporter AWB. The New South Wales government said it had rejected Monsanto's application to cultivate 3,000 hectares of GM canola, reported Agence France Presse. NSW Agriculture Minister Ian Macdonald said AWB had voiced concerns that the country's wheat export market could be negatively affected by the trial. "AWB is the largest exporter by a significant factor, we have to be very careful we don't upset their markets," Macdonald was quoted by AFP as saying. 01 Apr 2004 just-food.com

SPAIN: Fear of genetic contamination

"We have recently had to stand by and watch helplessly as GM cultivation and food with GM ingredients invade our fields and plates. The new genetic technology is sold as technology of the future, without first assessing its risk and hearing our opinion", says General Manager Angeles Parra from the organic and environmental organization Vida Sana in Barcelona. The political institutions in Spain take the view that the coexistence of GM and organic cultivation is possible if suitable measures are implemented. The reality shows the opposite, according to Parra: At the moment, only one farmer in Catalonia is prepared to risk growing organic corn. The fear of losing the crop due to accidental contamination is very widespread among organic farmers. It will soon be very difficult for find organic raw materials for some plants. Vida Sana backs a definite no to the present official arrangement for genetic engineering, as recently published. The organic farmer is being forced to fight a new, practically uncontrollable plague: genetic contamination.

<http://www.vidasana.org> *BioFach Newsletter 23.4.2004*

CANADA: New GM-free labelling rules allow 5% contamination

Food products containing small amounts of genetically modified crop can be labelled GM-free in Canada under new government-approved labelling rules. The standard limits to less than 5% the amount of accidental co-mingling. The voluntary rule applies to the advertising and labelling of pre-packaged, bulk, and prepared food. Environmental groups assailed the

5% solution as lax and have called for mandatory labelling. Jeanne Cruikshank of the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors, the association that sponsored the initiative said: "No solution will please everyone, but this standard represents a broad consensus on the part of consumer groups, farmers, industry and government."
Justfood.com/ Philip Fine 16 Apr 2004

EU: EFSA approves one type of Monsanto GM maize, undecided on another

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has cleared the way for the European Union to legalise the sale of a genetically modified Monsanto maize variety that has been engineered to resist certain pests, especially rootworm. EFSA said that maize MON 863 "is as safe as conventional maize...and is unlikely to have an adverse effect on human or animal health, or on the environment...". However, the agency could not reach a conclusion on the safety of another Monsanto maize product, MON 863xMON 810, and its specialist panel has called for further studies prior to EFSA making a final judgment. This strain is also pest resistant, but can also fight off certain winged corn borers.
justfood.com/ Keith Nuthall 20 Apr 2004

[-back to contents-](#)

5. BSE

UK: BSE in sheep?

Scientists have detected the first signs that bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) may have crossed into sheep in a study that is likely to rekindle anxieties over the safety of lamb and mutton. (Soil Association UK 8 Apr: The Independent; The Guardian)

USA: USDA requests info on BSE safety methods

The US Department of Agriculture is requesting more information about how the beef industry plans to remove cattle brains and spinal cords from slaughtered cattle in order to prevent BSE, or mad cow disease, from entering the food chain. The USDA said it wants "public comment on methods used to prevent cross-contamination of carcasses" with cattle brains and spinal cord, reported Reuters. Certain parts of cattle aged 30 months or older, including the brain, skull, eyes and spinal cord, have been banned from entering the human food supply because BSE is believed to be carried in the brain and central nervous tissue of infected cattle. It is believed that humans can contract vCJD, the human form of BSE, from eating infected parts of a BSE-infected animal. This latest move by the USDA is one of a number of steps it is taking in response to the discovery of a single case of BSE in Washington state in December. "We want to see if there is any additional scientific information out there," Steve Cohen, spokesman for the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service, was quoted by Reuters as saying. "We want to make our methods the strongest they can be." *just-food.com 02 Apr 2004*

USA: USDA stands by decision on independent tests for BSE

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has stood by its decision to stop a small Kansas meat processor from carrying out independent tests for BSE, or mad cow disease.

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Earlier this month the USDA rejected an application by Creekstone Farms Premium Beef to voluntarily test 100% of its beef for processing in order to resume exports to Japan. Following its decision, the USDA has come under fire from some consumer advocates, lawmakers and several newspaper editorials, but has now said it will not reconsider its decision, reported Reuters. Ed Loyd, a spokesman for the USDA, said the department is now concentrating on other areas of the issue, such as persuading Japan to resume imports of US beef. The USDA said BSE testing should be for animal health reasons not for marketing purposes. "We have been very clear on our reasoning for that decision and we have a lot of issues on our plate and have been working on those," Loyd was quoted by Reuters as saying. Creekstone, among with many other beef processors, is struggling to survive while some of its normal export markets are closed. Japan was one of several major US beef buyers to ban imports of US beef after the discovery of a case of BSE in Washington state last December. *justfood.com 22/4*

UK: No BSE risk from older cattle, say scientists

Scientists have reiterated that it is now safe for UK consumers to eat meat from cattle over 30 months old, but a ban on such meat entering the food chain is unlikely to be lifted just yet. The comments came as the government ordered previous assessments to be rechecked, reported BBC News Online. Government advisers concluded last year that the risks of older cattle being infected with BSE were negligible. However, since that assessment the ban on meat from animals over 30 months (OTM) old entering the food chain has remained in place. Since 1996, cattle older than 30 months have been bought by the government to prevent their meat entering the food chain, at a cost of £300m (US\$554.6m) per year to UK taxpayers. There are apparently concerns among some Department of Health officials that some scientific questions still need to be answered before the ban can be lifted. *just-food.com 02 Apr 2004*

[-back to contents-](#)

6. NUTRIENT CONTENT

[-back to contents-](#)

7. HEALTH & DIET

[-back to contents-](#)

8. RESEARCH

EU: Archive of organic studies

The Organic Eprints archive is a tool to further develop research in organic agriculture. The main objectives are to facilitate the communication of research papers and proposals, to improve the dissemination and impact of research findings, and to document the research effort. In accordance with these objectives the archive is designed to facilitate international use and co-operation. The Organic Eprints archive has been developed by

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the Danish Research Centre for Organic Farming, DARCOF, since 2002. The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture, FiBL, (Germany) joined the project in 2003 as its first international partner with editorial responsibilities for the German language region and responsibility for the German language version of Organic Eprints.

<http://www.orgprints.org> *BioFach Newsletter* 23.4.2004

UK: Social science of organics studied

The following paper was published this month on Organic-Research.com

"More than just fashionable foods - the importance of the Social Sciences in organic research", by Matt Reed, Centre for Rural Research, University of Exeter, UK.

Abstract: This paper is concerned with the role of the social sciences in furthering the understanding of organic agriculture and food. It argues that the contemporary understanding of the social impacts of organic farming has been systematically underdeveloped in preference to establishing a grounding in the physical sciences. Whilst acknowledging the importance of this project, this paper traces the development of the social scientific knowledge about the organic sector and argues for its extension. Beginning with the early projects in the sociology of science the paper follows the development of research about the social consequences of organic farming through economics and marketing towards contemporary rural sociology. The paper concludes by arguing that the future support for organic farming will rest on the social benefits that it may bring to rural people and rural communities, and that without understanding what the social impacts are a compelling case is unlikely to be made. It suggests that until the economic and social consequences of organic farming are more fully understood, then the discussion of moving organic agriculture to a 'fair trade' or 'no sweat' status are premature. These developments whilst laudable in themselves would be strengthened by an in-depth understanding of the social impact of organic farming as it is at the present time. Referring to a wide range of contemporary literature, this paper seeks to engage those interested in organic agriculture in considering the social importance of it. *Organic-research.com* 31/3

US: Top 5 organic university research programs listed

The report, "State of the States 2nd Edition: Organic Farming Systems Research at Land Grant Institutions 2001-2003," by the Organic Farming Research Foundation, has ranked West Virginia University's Organic Research Project in the top five efforts in the field, along with Iowa, Ohio,

Minnesota and North Carolina. *Organic-research.com* 31/3

<http://www.organic-research.com/news/database/newsarticle.asp?id=2787>

[-back to contents-](#)

9. PROMOTION

EU: Birth of international federation for organic food associations

The aim of the federation currently being set up under the name of the Organic Retailers Association is to obtain an organic retail trade association as member from every country. The founders of the new association provided information about their project at BioFach and emphasized that they regard co-operation with IFOAM as very important, particularly when it comes to representation at international level. IFOAM Director Thomas Czierpa was therefore invited as co-speaker. The aim of the new association is to achieve the

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largest possible share of organic products in Europe's specialized stores. Co-organizer Tom Vaclavik from the Czech Republic quoted as an example that the 52 member stores of Pro Bio in the Czech Republic have reached an average organic share of only 50 % until now. European-wide certification of the stores would also be useful to attain a high quality standard. Vaclavik reported that organic retailer associations are being set up in Slovakia, Poland and Hungary.

<http://www.o-r-a.org> BioFach Newsletter 23.4.2004

UK: Organic demand strong

Shoppers are spending three times as much on organic food as they did in the late 1990s, research by Mintel shows. Last year more than £1.12 billion was spent on organic food, the equivalent of £19 per person. However, a third of shoppers say they are put off by price, the study found.

FRANCE: Organic food market growing

According to a study by Ecozept, the French organic food sector is growing by approx. 18%. The various types of stores differ appreciably in terms of turnover growth: Organic food stores and health food stores are registering growth of 10 to 12 %, whereas organic supermarkets are averaging more than 30 % growth. The results also show that the turnover of stores with less than 50 m² of sales space has grown relatively little (approximately 9 %). The stores opened in the last five years expect the biggest rise in turnover with an average of 28 %. The stores opened five to 15 years ago estimate growth of 11 % and those older than 15 years only 5 %. The 46-page study "Organic Food Stores in France, Situation and Prospects 2003" is obtainable from Ecozept for 99 EUR.

(info@ecozept.de) BioFach Newsletter 23.4.2004

SWITZERLAND: Organic market grew by 7% in 2003

Bio Suisse reports that the organic market in Switzerland grew by 7% in 2003 to reach SF1.13 billion. The number of certified farms is now 6445, with 206 converting so far in 2004. That means 11.1% of all farms in Switzerland are organic. *Organic-research.com* 31/3 <http://www.organic-research.com/news/database/newsarticle.asp?id=2804>

EU: Organic market doubles in five years, but price still an issue

Germans munch their way through more organic foods than the French and British put together, so finds a new report from Mintel, that reveals in Germany alone the organic market tipped €3.2 billion. Price remains a key barrier to growth as the research shows consumers are unwilling to spend more. Opportunities in Germany are ripe for manufacturers looking to drive organic food product sales with the country buying some 40 per cent of the total European market in 2003. *"Today an ever increasing number of Germans are looking to avoid additives and are taking an interest in 'natural' products with traceable ingredients,"* said Michelle Strutton, senior consumer analyst at the market analysts Mintel. Together with environmental issues, these health concerns have helped the organic market to grow over the past few years, she added. The past five years have seen a boom in the organic food market with sales across Europe doubling since 1998. Consumers in Italy, Spain, Germany, Britain and France spent a total of €8 billion on organic food. Spending in Italy - €1.4 billion - accounted for around half of German expenditure, while Spain accounted for just €220 million. In track with the sales, the highest organic 'spenders' are the Germans, spending around €38 on organic food in 2003, the Brits fall into second place with €28, while the French and Italians spent €25 Euros. The Spanish consumer falls far behind, averaging just €5. But, according to Mintel over the past five years the Spanish market has seen the most impressive growth, albeit

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from a very small base. The market has grown by a massive 564 per cent, which means that it is now worth almost six times as much as it was in 1998. Britons are also voting with their feet, with the organic food market trebling from €581 million in 1998, and in Italy and France the market almost doubled. In Germany, too, the market has almost doubled, 'particularly impressive considering that in 1998 it was already by far and away the largest organic food market,' says the report.

Even more surprising, Mintel predicts that the German organic food market will grow the fastest, despite already being the largest market. It is expected to more than double to be worth a massive €6.7 billion, continuing to extend its lead over the other European markets. Which also means that the German organic food market will account for half of the European total. *"In addition to selling organic on the health and safety platform, a further boost to sales is expected to come from the expanding network of new generation health food shops, which are likely to attract new consumers to the market. Growing state support is also expected to help increase the use of organic products, along with efforts by manufacturers to improve branding,"* commented the Mintel analyst. Pitching products at the right price has been a key issue in organic sales over the past few years, and according to Mintel, remains a driving factor in consumer spending. Higher prices may well continue to be a barrier to full market growth.

Organic food often costs more than other food due to lower yields, more labour-intensive production and expensive materials. In some countries, insufficient supply and additional distribution costs also push up the price. But today it is still only the minority that feels it is worth paying more for organic food, writes Mintel. Just less than one in three – 32 per cent – of Germans feel that it is worth paying more for organic food, showing the potential to be had in market gains. In France – 30 per cent and Spain – 29 per cent, while in Britain it is just one in four – 25 per cent. Indeed, 35 per cent of the UK bargain-driven consumers feel that organic foods are far too expensive. *"Across Europe, but particularly in Britain, the real value of organic food needs to be addressed,"* said Strutton. She proposed that either the price of organic foods needs to come down or people need to understand why it is worth paying more for organic foods. Against the backdrop of a burgeoning consumer demand for 'natural' products, strong growth is assured in the organic food market if the food industry works collectively on the price issue as well as educating the consumer. *FoodNavigator.com 09/04/2004*

EU : Organic logo to become compulsory

The use of the European Union's currently hardly known organic label is to become compulsory. This is provided for in the European Action Plan, which is to be passed shortly. Many well-known figures in the organic industry have already spoken out against this logo. The well-known Freiburg solicitor Hanspeter Schmidt sees a very large risk of confusion with other EU logos of similar appearance. Like the German Minister of Agriculture Künast, he also rejects compulsory use. Agriculture Commissioner Fischler on the other hand thinks that compulsory use of the organic label would promote the sale of organic products. An information campaign is to publicize the blue label with the circle of stars and an ear of corn in the middle. Fischler assumes that the market for organic products will remain a niche market, but could achieve a share of up to 15 % - current share in the EU is around 3 %. *BioFach Newsletter 8.4.2004*

[-back to contents-](#)

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10. POLITICS

Is organics the future of farming?

The current edition of Nature carries a seven-page article looking at whether organic is the future of farming. The article is balanced and provides a good overview of the current issues with inputs from people with differing views. Francis Blake, the Soil Association's standards and technical director and Peter Melchett, Policy Director, are quoted. The lead article acknowledges that elements of organic philosophy are starting to be deployed in mainstream agriculture particularly and concludes, "if the organic movement wants to change the world, it is making a reasonable start". "Agronomists are becoming concerned about the sustainability of high yielding farming methods. They are also now aware that intensive farming reduces biodiversity, encourages irreversible soil erosion, and generates run-off that is awash with harmful chemicals, including nitrates from fertilisers that can devastate aquatic eco-systems". (Read the full report at <http://www.nature.com> - free till the end of May)

[-back to contents-](#)

-end-