

The Kansas City Food Circle

UPDATE

Spring, 1997

Attack on Organic Produce Looms

A recent article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (Jan 8) suggested that increased consumption of organically grown produce may be contributing to the increase in food-borne infections.

Their reasoning? *"Organic' means a food is grown in animal manure. Studies have found that E coli can survive in cow manure for 70 days...."*

Apparently these people are not familiar with techniques of organic farming. In the first place, raw manure is not applied to growing crops by organic farmers for the simple reason that the breakdown process removes available nitrogen. Secondly, the usual practice is to compost manure before its use. Even if raw manure was used, it would be worked into the soil before the crop is planted. Organic farmers are careful to create a soil that is loose, highly aerobic, and full of natural organisms that would likely deactivate pathogenic organisms. These physicians must be too young to remember that, prior to World War II, all vegetables were grown using animal manure, apparently without any epidemics.

Their proposed solution? Wash produce in chemical solutions or use irradiation. No thanks. This is the tip off, though. The agri-industrial complex has been talking to these people. Irradiation has been pushed by the nuclear establishment for decades as a way of reusing their wastes. Ionizing radiation works by disassociating the molecules of pathogenic organisms. Unfortunately it does the same to food molecules whose ions are then free to form new, possibly toxic, chemicals. Industry studies purporting to show the safety of irradiation are controversial.

The article also blames the movement of the American diet away from "meat and potatoes" toward more heart-friendly fruit and vegetables, and the globalization of the food supply. The former claim is absurd since most of the really serious problems in recent years have related to contaminated meat. The latter claim is substantially true, though. In the winter, much of our fruits and vegetables are brought in from countries with lower sanitation standards. Such food products are shipped around the world in such large quantities that little attention can be focused on quality and safety.

In the Food Circle, we believe that our best bet is to get to know and trust our local farmer. The irradiation people are always looking for an opening to promote their technology. That's what the pending attack on organic agriculture is all about.

Per Capita Consumption of Pork Declining

The *Kansas City Star* (Jan 16) reports that per capita consumption of pork declined about 8% since 1994, while beef and chicken have remained about the same. This suggests that people are reacting to all the bad publicity generated by the takeover of the industry by corporate hog farms. A grocery store chain in Minnesota and Wisconsin recently announced it would no longer handle a brand of pork products produced by one large corporate hog producer. This decline comes after several years of consumption increases following the industry's "other white meat" promotional campaign. In December, the *60 Minutes* news show produced a devastating profile on the hog industry in North Carolina.

The boycott of veal led by the Humane Farming Association reduced the market by 70% and showed that, when made aware, the American people do not want to be part of cruelty to farm animals. The corporate hog industry should be running scared. The factory production of chickens and eggs isn't any better. More information needs to be disseminated on that industry.

Nitrates May Contribute to Rare Cancer, Study Suggests

A study published in the September issue of *Epidemiology* and conducted by the National Cancer Institute, the University of Nebraska, and Johns Hopkins University suggests a link between nitrates in drinking water and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. More study is needed. If this link is proven, however, industrial agriculture in the plains states will be shaken. High levels of nitrates have been found in well water in many areas and can be linked to excessive usage of inorganic fertilizers, packing plant wastewater and seepage from confined animal facilities and sewage lagoons. Source: *Clean Water Report*, October 22, 1996.

Scientist Links Long Term Use of Fertilizers and Pesticides to Increased Groundwater Contamination

In the January 1997 issue of Acres USA, soil scientist Dr. Elaine Ingham of Oregon State University explained how prolonged use of inorganic fertilizers can upset the natural balance of organisms in the soil and lead to increased nitrates contamination of the water table. Plants actually exude part of their photosynthetic carbon production to encourage the growth of bacteria and fungi around their roots. This sets up a soil food web that protects the roots and provides a buffer and storage capacity for the uptake of nutrients. The excessive application of commercial fertilizers and pesticides can substantially sterilize the soil or throw off the balance among the various types of organisms in the soil food web. Organisms are then not available to hold nitrogen applied to the field and much of it escapes to the groundwater.

Organic Turkeys Best

The New York Times (Nov. 20, 1996) reports that free-range, organic turkeys taste better than the mass produced kind. The test was conducted by New York University's Department of Nutrition and Food Studies. Mass produced birds were reported to be relatively tasteless compared to free-range organic. In another indication of industrialism out of control, the Associated Press reports that turkeys have been genetically bred with such large breasts that they are literally falling over and must be destroyed. Now animal geneticists are trying to breed leg strength back into the bird stock used by almost all of the factory turkey farms.

Linda Heffern and Food Circle Featured in Star Column

Food circle member, Linda Heffern, got a chance to expound on our work that connects small farmers with consumers in the KC metro area. Linda was interviewed for Barbara Shelley's column in the food section of the Star. Linda, who runs the food pantry of the Metropolitan Lutheran Ministry, described her vision of small, inner-city businesses that would process locally grown food, thus boosting family farms and providing well-paying jobs for city residents. Linda notes that, with growing demand for food assistance in the inner city and cutbacks in welfare assistance, something's got to give, soon.

Growing Market for Small Farms Near Cities

Over the past year, the alternative/progressive farm newspaper, Acres USA, has featured a number of small farmers throughout the country who are making a living selling meat and produce directly to consumers. The key is proximity to an urbanized area where the farmer can bypass the middlemen who take such a large chunk out of the retail price. Many of these farmers are using intensive,

organic growing methods with low capital inputs on as little as 2 acres of land. Of course, farmers in other parts of the world have been doing this for generations.

This fits with the Food Circle's experience. Our own John Kaiahua is even leasing the backyards of some of his neighbors in Raytown to expand his output. Some, like Mark Marino, sell produce directly to gourmet restaurants that have an overriding interest in quality and freshness. These farmer-pioneers are proving the exception to the growing concentration of agriculture and the huge farms out in the hinterlands. It's hard work, though. It's hard to find help for the fields when competing with the casinos.

The biggest challenge will be building the capability to produce food during the off-season in Kansas City. Craig Volland reports he's found locally grown, organic tomatoes this winter at the Hen House supermarket on Parallel Parkway in Kansas City, Kansas. They are also selling "cage-free" eggs from Missouri. The Food Circle exists to see that these positive trends continue. Please buy these items whenever you can.

Osborne County Votes Out Corporate Hog Farms

In a closely watched referendum on November 5, the citizens of Osborne County, Kansas, opted out of corporate farming in a 1388 to 1007 vote. This was a really a referendum of mega hog factories, proposed in the county by Murphy Farms, the nation's largest hog producer. This result is all the more remarkable because the local newspaper didn't give opponents much space and Murphy Farms ran full-page ads supporting their position. Murphy Farms had also sponsored visits of local officials to their facilities in Missouri. This vote means that the reputation of the mega hog factories has diminished everywhere in the country. Activists from southwest Kansas, who have been fighting corporate hog producer, Seaboard Farms, Inc., went to Osborne County to tell folks the real scoop on what happens after the mega hog factories move in. Murphy Farms is not presently a corporation. However, they had promised to abide by the vote on corporate farming anyway.

Food Circle Publishes Spring Growers' Directory

The KC Food Circle has just published its third annual Spring Growers' Directory, listing local organic producers of vegetables, herbs, flowers, and meats. Our growers' list grows every year. This year we're also proud to include Sarah's Cafe at 59th and Holmes, a family-owned and operated cafe serving entrees, soups, salads, and breads obtained from local and organic suppliers. See the ad in the Spring Growers' Directory for more info.

This is a re-mastered copy – you can find the whole KCFC archive at www.KCFoodCircle.org