



KANSAS CITY FOOD CIRCLE

The KCFC Update: Winter 2007-8

New Farmers Pledge Proposed

Please come to our annual membership meeting on Sunday, January 6th

Our annual membership meeting will be held from 1-4 p.m. on Sunday, January 6th at the Waldo Branch of the Kansas City Public Library, 201 E. 75th St. in KCMO. The focus of this year's meeting will be a conversation about our new Farmers Pledge proposal, the possibility of further strengthening our production standards in the future, and the genetically engineered feed issue explored in the "Another Helping of Frankenfoods?" article included in this *Update*.—*John Kurmann*

"Eat Local!" Expo: A Double-Header in 2008

For the Tenth Annual Farmers Exhibition, our Coordinating Committee has decided to take the plunge and host a second event in the KC metro area. We will hold a westside Expo in Shawnee for the 4th year in a row on **Saturday, March 29th**, and we'll hold an eastside Expo for the 1st time on **Saturday, April 5th** at the Roger T. Sermon Community Center in Independence, MO, just west of Independence Square.

Our popular westside Expos have not drawn many eaters from Independence, Lee's Summit, Raytown and Blue Springs, Missouri. The Sermon Center site could help open up a large new potential market to our farmer members, including folks from Liberty.

The second Expo **will** strain our financial and volunteer resources, so we hope that you, our eater members, will pitch in a little extra donation when you return your membership renewals.—*Craig Volland*

Local Food Buying Club Info on KCFC Website

At www.KCFoodCircle.org/buyingclubs/, the KCFC has posted a model that will help eaters organize Local Food Buying Clubs (LFBCs). Food Buying Clubs, where people get together to buy processed natural foods in bulk, are not a new idea. What's new is a type of group focused on **local organic foods**. For the sake of slowing climate change and keeping the planet livable for future generations, we need to stop shipping in so many heavily-processed & packaged products and so much water in the form of juices from Florida and California.

Our LFBC model helps people buy locally- and regionally-processed (value-added) food products, especially off-season. The model mentions two types of approaches, one more-organized type with a strong social element, and another informally organized around

existing email lists and affinity groups. LFBC members will be responsible for doing the actual organizing. The KCFC's role is to help interested foodies find each other. We are also adding links on our website to non-member, value-added product suppliers that are located outside our foodshed but within the four-state region. We anticipate that existing CSAs may want to morph into LFBCs and vice versa. One deals primarily with the growing season and the other the off-season.—*CV*

Opinion: Another helping of Frankenfoods?

I recently decided it was time to check up on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's figures regarding the prevalence of genetically engineered (GE) food crops. According to their Economic Research Service, 91% of this year's soybean crop was genetically engineered to be herbicide-tolerant. Also, if I'm interpreting the USDA's numbers correctly, 24% of this year's corn crop was genetically engineered to be herbicide-tolerant, another 21% was genetically engineered to contain the *Bacillus thuringiensis* soil bacterium toxin (which is deadly to insects that feed on corn), and 28% was genetically engineered to have both traits—making a total of 73% of this year's corn crop genetically engineered.

Worse, according to a row crop farmer I know, one can safely say that almost all conventional corn and soybeans contain some level of contamination from GE crops due to cross-pollination (in the case of corn) plus both intentional and accidental commingling during storage, transportation and processing.

Consequently, if you're eating anything that contains corn or soybeans in any form, you're almost certainly eating GE foods—unless the corn or soybeans are organic. This includes not only easily-identifiable foods like taco shells or tofu or corn tortilla chips or soymilk or corn oil, but also a huge number of processed foods containing corn or soybean oil (or both) and/or high-fructose corn syrup (which is ubiquitous in processed foods because it's a cheaper sweetener than sugar).

If you're eating at a restaurant, there's a good chance that any oil used to prepare the food—and lots of oil is used to prepare the food in most American restaurants—was GE soybean oil, and it was probably hydrogenated to boot.

Cottonseed and canola oils from GE crops are also found in some foods, and a Nov. 27th *New York Times* article titled "Round 2 for Biotech Beets" revealed that U.S. sugar beet growers are expected to greatly expand their use of seeds next spring that have been genetically engineered to be tolerant of Monsanto's Roundup

herbicide. Sugar beets are used to make about half the sugar used in the U.S., the rest coming from sugarcane.

In addition, Monsanto claims that approximately 1/3 of the 9 million dairy cows in the U.S. are in herds that are being drugged with their brand of recombinant Bovine Somatotropin (rBST), a GE growth hormone that increases milk production. Given that milk from more than one herd typically gets mixed together during processing, it's impossible to say what percentage of the milk and other milk foods sold in the U.S. contains milk from cows treated with rBST.

Does it matter that GE foods have become so common? After all, there are no news stories of people dropping dead or even becoming terribly sick after eating GE food, right?

True, but that doesn't mean there are no destructive health effects. First of all, the government doesn't require companies to label GE foods and has no comprehensive program to detect and report harm caused by these foods. If anyone is dying or getting acutely sick from eating them, how could we know GE foods were the cause as long as few people know when they're eating GE foods and the government isn't monitoring for harmful health effects?

Sudden death and acute illness aren't the only issues, either. Many harmful substances only cause detectable damage over time, due to repeated exposures. If GE foods are causing or contributing to hormonal problems, allergies, cancers, diabetes, infertility, organ damage, or any other health condition, we won't know for years, if ever, because, again, the government isn't carefully watching for problems.

Moreover, people are commonly exposed to many other industrial substances that can cause or contribute to all these conditions, so most of the time it's impossible to tease out "the cause" of a particular individual's health problem. Does it make sense to add another source of risk to your life for little, if any, benefit, though? Benefit other than to the profits of the GE seed and food processing companies, that is.

Even if you manage to avoid directly eating conventional corn and soybeans and all the ingredients derived from them, you may be only once removed from eating GE food if you're eating animal foods—meat, poultry, eggs, dairy foods, and some farmed fish—that come from animals that weren't given organic feed. Corn and soybeans are the primary ingredients in the feed that makes the industrial animal factories possible, and, while I'm unaware of any studies that show a "pass-through" effect from GE feed, if the animals eating GE feed are less healthy as a result, it seems to me that any animal foods coming from them will be less healthy for us to eat to some degree.

And, at the same time GE corn and soybeans have come to dominate the market, ongoing research into how genes actually work has been in the process of undercutting the assumptions that underlie genetic engineering. A July 1st *New York Times* article titled "A

Challenge to Gene Theory, a Tougher Look at Biotech" gave more details, but the short version is this: While the biotech industry treats genes as independent entities that can be neatly plucked from one organism and inserted into another to produce some desirable—that is, profitable—trait, in actuality genes appear to operate in complex networks whose interactions are far from fully understood. Given this, there are inevitably going to be unpredictable consequences from plucking a gene out of one complex network and forcing it into another it did not evolve as part of. Are the "benefits" of plants that have been engineered to be herbicide-tolerant and to produce *Bacillus thuringiensis* toxin in their cells really worth that risk?

I think it's important to remember that, whenever you buy something, the implicit message you send, whether you want to or not, is *Yes, please, make more just like this*. I'm not suggesting anyone be a complete purist—I don't completely avoid eating foods that may well come from GE crops, particularly when I eat at restaurants—but the great majority of the foods I buy to eat at home are either locally-grown organic or non-local certified organic.

The KC Food Circle does **not** require our farmers to use organically-grown feed, though we certainly encourage them to do so and some do (ask the farmers you buy from if you don't already know). This decision to allow conventionally-grown feed was made years ago because the Coordinating Committee at that time decided it was too difficult for area farmers to source organically-grown feed. Also, genetically engineered crops were still new and, consequently, a much smaller percentage of the U.S. corn and soybean crops were genetically engineered then. We have begun exploring ways we can help all our farmers use organically-grown feed in the future.

For more info about GE foods, visit the Genetically Engineered Food page of The Center for Food Safety www.CenterforFoodSafety.org/genetically7.cfm

To tell your Congressional representatives that you want the FDA to require clear labels on GE foods, go to the Campaign to Label Genetically Engineered Foods at www.TheCampaign.org/main_label.php.—JK

Shocking news: Organically-grown and free-range foods really are more nutritious!

On October 29th, the BBC News published an article titled "Organic produce 'better for you'" (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7067100.stm>), which explored the results of the 4-year QualityLowInputFood project funded by the European Union. Quoting:

"Researchers grew fruit, vegetables and reared cattle on adjacent organic and non-organic sites across Europe, including a 725-acre farm attached to Newcastle University.

"They found levels of antioxidants in milk from organic cattle were between 50% and 80% higher than normal milk.

"Organic wheat, tomatoes, potatoes, cabbage, onions and lettuce had between 20% and 40% more nutrients."

These results probably won't come as any surprise to folks who understand that **healthy soil = healthy plants = healthy animals**, including people, but it's still helpful to have additional scientific evidence. One thing that's really important about this particular study is that it compared organically and conventionally grown fruits, vegetables, and milk to each other **that had been produced together on the same farm**. By doing so, the researchers eliminated variations between farms such as differing climates and preexisting soil conditions as well as nutritional differences between foods due to the genetic characteristics of particular varieties of plants and breeds of animals. This approach also controlled for nutrient losses caused by the passage of time since harvest and differences in storage and handling practices. All of those variables could have skewed the results of other studies in which foods from different farms were purchased in grocery stores and then compared.

More details on the results of this study are to be published over the next year, and we'll bring them to you when they are.

Also, *Mother Earth News* magazine published an article in the October/November 2007 issue titled "Meet Real Free Range Eggs." Quoting:

"Most of the eggs currently sold in supermarkets are nutritionally inferior to eggs produced by hens raised on pasture. That's the conclusion we have reached following completion of the 2007 Mother Earth News egg testing project. Our testing has found that, compared to official U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) nutrient data for commercial eggs, eggs from hens raised on pasture may contain:

- **1/3 less cholesterol**
- **1/4 less saturated fat**
- **2/3 more vitamin A**
- **2 times more omega-3 fatty acids**
- **3 times more vitamin E**
- **7 times more beta carotene**

"These amazing results come from 14 flocks around the country that range freely on pasture or are housed in moveable pens that are rotated frequently to maximize access to fresh pasture and protect the birds from predators. We had six eggs from each of the 14 pastured flocks tested by an accredited laboratory in Portland, Ore."

These results show that using organic methods to produce meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy foods isn't enough to maximize their nutritional quality. It may be even more important to keep the animals outdoors on healthy green pasture as much as possible, eating a diverse diet and getting plenty of exercise, though we think it's best to do both, of course.

The original article also provided a summary of 6 other studies which have produced similar results. To read it,

go to www.MotherEarthNews.com and search for "Meet Real Free Range Eggs."

We in the local organic and free-range food movement have long suspected that foods produced using such methods were more nutritious, but there were few studies to substantiate our suspicion. The folks with the money to conduct the studies—the federal government and the conventional food industry—didn't have any incentive to do them, and our movement didn't have the money. That's in the process of changing, though, and the results are showing our suspicions were correct—it really does matter how you produce food. Not only are we reducing our exposure to insecticides, herbicides, antibiotics, synthetic hormones, and other drug residues by eating local organic and free-range foods, we're also nourishing ourselves better.—JK

Pharmaceutical FrankenRice growing in Kansas

A group of farmers and food activists concerned about pharmaceutical crops in Kansas came together Nov. 14 at the Washburn University Law School in Topeka. The conference was organized by the Kansas Rural Center (www.KansasRuralCenter.org), the Center for Food Safety (www.CenterforFoodSafety.org) and the Farmer to Farmer Campaign on Genetic Engineering, a network of 34 farm organizations that's a part of the National Family Farm Coalition (www.NFFC.net).

Pharmaceutical, or "pharma," crops are plants genetically engineered (GE) to produce drugs. Earlier this year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture permitted California-based Ventria Bioscience to plant up to 3,200 acres of rice that contains human proteins in Geary County, KS. The company planted and harvested about 200 acres. Ventria has promoted the proteins as a treatment for diarrhea in less-industrialized countries, but much cheaper solutions already exist. In the company's draft application to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Ventria said the plant-produced protein would be used in sports bars, nutrition drinks and yogurt products. As Oxfam noted, the rice-produced proteins are clearly designed for a wealthy Western market, not impoverished children.

Speakers included Jane Rissler, Senior Scientist and Deputy Director of the Food and Environment Program, Union of Concerned Scientists (www.UCSUSA.org); Bill Freese, Science Policy Analyst, Center for Food Safety; William Wenzel, national director of the Farmer to Farmer Campaign on Genetic Engineering; Ron Lee, California rice grower and organizer for the Rice Producers of California; Harvey Howington, Arkansas rice grower and vice president of the Arkansas Rice Growers Association; Dan McGuire, CEO American Corn Growers Foundation; and Ed Reznicek, manager, Kansas Organic Producers.

The great danger from pharma crops is the possibility of cross-contamination of conventional food crops. Pharma crop drugs mimic, but differ from, the natural substances they are modeled on, said Freese. There is

a risk of dangerous immune system responses, including allergies and possibly anaphylactic shock—a life-threatening, whole-body allergic reaction that can cause death—should a GE crop commingle with food crops. The food industry, the grocery industry and one of the nation's leading bioscience journals, *Nature Biotechnology*, oppose efforts to use food crops to create drugs. In spite of this opposition, USDA has permitted 400 field trials in 36 states since 1991.

While the USDA says it has rigorous regulations for monitoring field trials, including the Kansas field trial, Rissler said, "I've been watching for 20 years and USDA has been incredibly lax—and that's a nice word for it." The UCS routinely requests USDA field inspection records, and those records are often redacted to withhold relevant information from public scrutiny. USDA did send one legible report of a field trial by Ventria in North Carolina to the UCS, and it showed that USDA conducted a planting inspection two months before any seeds were in the field and performed a harvest inspection two months after the rice was harvested.

USDA has offered assurances that there is no potential for contamination from the field trials in Geary County, but Rissler said "there is nothing at the site that persuades me rice couldn't move off that site." Severe weather, equipment contamination, human error, flooding, animals and kernels dropping during the harvest all offer opportunities for the rice to move off the site and possibly into our food supply, Rissler said.

Scientists dominated the morning session of the conference, and farmers took the lectern in the afternoon. William Wenzel said his group, the Farmer to Farmer Campaign on Genetic Engineering, is neutral on technology overall, but adamant on pharma crops. There should be no outdoor pharma crops, he said.

McGuire, of the American Corn Growers Foundation, noted that the export market for corn and other grains has nearly evaporated due to crops genetically engineered to be herbicide-tolerant and/or to produce the *Bt* soil bacterium toxin. Most other nations don't want GE food imports, and many countries test imports for GE contamination. Few shippers are willing to take the risk that a boatload of grain might be turned away due to contamination. Wheat is currently our largest commodity grain, he said, but "if they ever introduce Roundup-ready wheat, you can kiss exports goodbye."

Economics may prove the only way to end the vast open-air experiment of using food crops to produce drugs. While USDA has continued to permit field trials, the Food and Drug Administration has never approved any drugs produced by plants for human consumption. Four of the five companies that have experimented with pharma crops have gone bankrupt or shut down their pharma crop operations. Ventria, the last company standing, was forced out of California, Arkansas and Missouri by food activists and farmers before coming to Kansas. Kansas was chosen largely because the state

has no rice production, reducing—but by no means eliminating—the possibility of cross-contamination.

In spite of the dwindling corporate interest in pharma crops, Gov. Kathleen Sebelius and Secretary of Agriculture Adrian Polansky have voiced their support for Ventria on a number of occasions. Polansky even received an award from the bioscience industry for promoting their interests. Kansas legislators seem largely uninterested in the topic, and even if they were opposed to pharma crops in Kansas, the current rewrite of the farm bill includes a clause that prevents states from passing laws more stringent than the federal statutes. Still, the farmers and scientists who spoke at Washburn are doing all they can to protect us from pharma farming.—*Ralph Tomlinson*

Travails of Industrial Organic Milk

Perhaps you have seen organic milk in cardboard cartons with a "nature...ish" sounding brand name for sale in big box stores like Walmart, Costco and Target as well as supermarkets like Hy-Vee and Price Chopper. You may have also noticed store-brand organic milk at places like Wild Oats. Most likely, this milk is produced by very large, factory-like dairies that push the envelope on organic certification. A couple of these have finally been sanctioned for practices that violate organic rules.

Last spring, the USDA revoked organic certification from the Vander Eyk dairy in California which housed **10,000 cows**. In contrast, the typical family dairy farm has 40 to 80 cows. Then, in August, they forced Aurora Organic Dairy to decertify one of its large farms and put its processing plant on probation.

The most common violation has been that the cows are not given adequate access to pasture. Other violations are sourcing of new cows from farms that are not organic, not keeping records that verify their practices, and using questionable feed.

In any event, this type of mass-produced milk is mostly shipped in at great energy cost over long distances. We recommend you save the extra miles and get your milk from stores that carry milk from local KCFC member suppliers, Green Hills Harvest and Good Natured Family Farms. In a pinch, we'd also recommend Organic Valley, a nationally-distributed brand created by a cooperative of small family farmers, although it is not locally-produced. For more info, contact the Cornucopia Institute at www.Cornucopia.org. They have been leading the struggle to expose questionable practices and maintain the integrity of the organic label and have published a Dairy Report & Scorecard on their website that "rates 68 different organic dairy brands and private-label products."—CV

This is a KC Food Circle original publication. Past issues are archived at www.KCFoodCircle.org. For more information, you are welcome to write to KC Food Circle, P.O. Box 45195, KCMO, 64171, or call our hotline at 816-374-5899.