



KANSAS CITY FOOD CIRCLE

The KCFC Update: Fall 2009

Agribusiness Protests ***Omnivore's Dilemma* Author**

By Emily Akins, KCFC Volunteer

As Michael Pollan, sustainable agriculture advocate and author, continues to lead discussions on sustainable agriculture nationwide, resistance from conventional farms and businesses also builds.

In October, Pollan's scheduled appearance at Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo sparked outrage from Harris Ranch Beef, an industrial meat-processing operation in Selma, Calif.

David E. Wood, chairman of Harris Ranch Beef Co., wrote an angry letter to Warren Baker, the president of Cal Poly in September, threatening to withdraw funding for a new meat processing plant at the university if the school supported a viewpoint in favor of sustainable agriculture. Wood believed this viewpoint would directly and negatively impact his industry.

While many advocates of sustainable food systems have been criticized or dismissed as elitists in the past, the recent backlash against Pollan from agribusiness indicates a broader and more serious impact on the sustainable food movement.

Washington State University, which receives funding from the conventional agriculture industry, was persuaded to pull *The Omnivore's Dilemma* off the reading list for college freshman.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison invited Pollan to speak after selecting his book *In Defense of Food* for a community-wide reading event. Pollan's lecture was protested by people who work in industrial agriculture. They attended the event wearing t-shirts that read "In Defense of Farmers" and "Eat Food. Be Healthy. Thank your farmers."

Evidently, Pollan's words and message have struck a chord with conventional food producers and begun to hit home in a powerful way.

At the heart of the debate is the notion of academic freedom. Pollan and the administration at Cal Poly argue

the university is a place for free and open debate. However, funding sources limit full freedom in many cases by pressuring schools to adopt a viewpoint that supports a particular business.

In the case of Harris Ranch and Cal Poly, the resolution was to invite Pollan to serve on a panel instead of lecturing. The panel included a Colorado State University professor of meat science and a cofounder of Earthbound Farms, an organic produce farm.

Cal Poly's president did defend the university's interest in sustainability by stating that it will be a major issue for agriculture students when they enter the workforce.

Organic Winter Markets

KC Organics & Natural Market holds its annual indoor Holiday Market on Saturday, Dec. 12 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Notre Dame de Sion High School, 106th & Wornall Road.

BADSEED Winter Market runs from 4 to 8 p.m. every Friday night (except holidays) through Feb. 12 at 1909 McGee in the Crossroads Art District.

2010 KCFC Eat Local! Expos

Next year's KCFC farmer exhibitions are set for Saturday, March 27 at the Shawnee Civic Center and Saturday, April 3 at the Roger T. Sermon Community Center in Independence.

The tentative workshop theme is *How to Eat Local All Year Long*. In three sessions, the workshop will cover: how to buy local in season, how to preserve the local bounty and how to prepare it.

2010 Membership Renewals

Please continue your support of local farmers, area farmers markets and healthy, delicious organic and free-range food. Look for your membership renewal notice in the mail soon.

Check kcfoodcircle.org for updates on these events.



How KCFC Is Helping to Solve Climate Crisis

By John Kurman, KCFC Member

On Saturday, Oct. 24, the [350.org campaign](#) organized an International Day of Climate Action with more than 5,200 events in 181 countries around the world - the most widespread political action in history. The Kansas City Food Circle cosponsored one of the events, a rally in Mill Creek Park on the Plaza. You might wonder why, given our focus on food.

First, if we continue with business-as-usual, climate disruption is projected to have [major negative impacts](#) on food production worldwide. Moreover, switching to a locally-based, organic food system is one of the best ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and remove CO₂ from the atmosphere:

- By relying on manure, compost, and nitrogen-fixing crops to build soil fertility, organic farmers avoid the CO₂ emissions caused by the burning of fossil fuels to mine and manufacture synthetic fertilizers
- By adding nitrogen to the soil through biological means, organic farmers avoid emissions of nitrous oxide - a greenhouse gas that is 300 times as potent as CO₂ - which come from land fertilized with synthetic nitrogen
- Growing crops organically and pasturing farm animals increases the amount of carbon stored in soil, removing CO₂ from the atmosphere
- Growing food very close to where it is eaten reduces the use of fuel for transportation
- Pasturing farm animals enables them to eat a healthy diet of green plants, insects, etc., reducing, and perhaps eliminating, energy-intensive corn and soy feed
- Pasturing farm animals allows their waste to return directly to the soil, avoiding emissions of the greenhouse gases methane and nitrous oxide from concentrated waste storage at confined animal feeding operations
- Typically, locally-grown foods are minimally-processed and packaged, reducing energy use and greenhouse gas emissions

For more information about the global warming benefits of locally-grown organic and free-range foods, check out the Center for Food Safety's [Cool Foods Campaign](#), [Sustainable Table](#), [Eat Wild](#) and [the Rodale Institute](#), which has a short video on YouTube titled [Organic Farming Lessens Global Warming](#).

If you're not yet convinced of the urgent need to address the climate crisis, please read *New Scientist Magazine's* 2007 article [Climate Change: a Guide for the Perplexed](#).

Organic Food Study Debunked

By Craig Volland, KCFC Coordinator

Perhaps you heard the media reports in July about a study from England reporting that organic foods were not more nutritious than their conventional counterparts. As is often the case, the truth of the matter is quite different from what one gets from TV news.

The English study was issued by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and was funded by the United Kingdom's Food Standards Agency (FSA). Sounds legit, but The Organic Center in the U.S. has issued a detailed [analysis](#) that soundly refutes the FSA study. The Organic Center (TOC) assembled their own team of scientists that came to an entirely different conclusion in a study issued last year.

The FAS study downplayed their own results, which showed organic was superior to conventional food in three categories. No other category favored conventional food. The FSA study also failed to note that the higher nitrogen levels found in conventional crops represent a health hazard because of the potential for cancer-causing nitrosamine compounds to form in the human GI tract.

TOC's study, which used more recent, higher quality studies showed organic foods higher in total polyphenols and total anti-oxidant content, the latter of which was not even analyzed by the FSA study.

The FSA analysis also misclassified certain data as related to organic foods when it actually related to conventional.

TOC limited its analysis to "matched pairs" where the comparison was limited to those cases where the same crop varieties were grown on nearby farms on the same type of soil using the same irrigation systems and harvested at about the same time.



Organic Food Study – continued

FSA used studies going back to the 1950s, whereas TOC used only studies published since 1980. This is important because crop breeding since the 1950s has been almost entirely focused on increasing yields, which has the unfortunate side effect of diluting nutrients. That means including old studies has the effect of overestimating the current level of nutrients in conventional foods.

The Organic Center obviously has an interest in showing organic food as better. So who to believe? In July, a [French study](#) came down solidly on the side of the TOC.

A review article published in the *Journal of Agronomy for Sustainable Development* (July 8, 2009) from the French Agency for Food Safety (AFSSA) concluded that organic food is more nutritious than conventional.

This study also included organic animal products and considered anti-oxidants and the higher nitrate and pesticide residues in conventional food. In any event there are many environmental reasons for buying organic food, especially when it is locally produced.

Factory Farms Breed Deadly, Antibiotic-Resistant Bacteria

By Craig Volland, KCFC Coordinator

In *KCFC Update*'s last issue, we noted how hog CAFOs (confined animal feeding operations) had contributed most of the genetic material found in the H1N1 swine flu virus now haunting America. Actually the connection between human illness and the intensive confinement of food animals in huge industrial facilities goes far beyond H1N1.

Laura Sayre wrote in the [February/March 2009 issue](#) of *Mother Earth News* that there are five other “nasty microbes” linked to CAFOs: campylobacter, salmonella, e. coli, enterococcus and MRSA.

Campylobacter is the most common cause of food-borne illness in the U.S., generating some two million cases per year, which include diarrhea and death. As much as 80 percent of supermarket chickens in the U.S. have been found to be contaminated with this bacterium. When dioxin-contaminated chicken feed led to the removal of all chicken and eggs from the market in Belgium in 1999, doctors noticed a 40 percent decline in the number of campylobacter infections in humans.

Salmonella causes some 1.4 million medical cases each year including 18,000 hospitalizations and 600 deaths. Salmonella may be found on beef, poultry, eggs and vegetables. Antibiotic-resistant forms are on the rise.

E. coli O157:H7 is blamed for 67,000 illnesses each year including 2000 hospitalizations and 60 deaths. It is most often found on ground beef and is linked to conditions in beef feedlots. It was also the cause of the spinach scare in 2006.

Antibiotic-resistant enterococcus faecium has been linked to agricultural uses of certain important antibiotics. The new kid on the block is methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus, or MRSA, which causes serious hospital-acquired infections but recently has been linked to hog CAFOs.

Many scientists link the microbes' increasing antibiotic resistance to the rise of CAFOs after World War II and the use of low levels of antibiotics in animal feed.

“Factory farms represent the most significant change in the lives of animals in 10,000 years,” says Dr. Michael McGregor of the U.S. Humane Society.

In the June 2009 issue of *Johns Hopkins Magazine*, Kellogg Schwab, director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Water and Health said that, if he tried, he could not build a better incubator of resistant pathogens than a factory farm.

In a study conducted by Ellen Silbergeld, a leading Johns Hopkins researcher in this field, 41 percent of workers who catch CAFO chickens for the slaughterhouse were colonized by pathogenic campylobacter microbes. The same was true for 63 percent of workers at a poultry processing plant and nine people who lived near the plant but did not work there.

Later she found that 50 percent of poultry workers were colonized by antibiotic-resistant *E. coli* compared to only 3 percent of community members who did not work with poultry. Silbergeld even showed that one could encounter antibiotic-resistant enterococci by following in a car behind poultry trucks.

Schwab sampled the air from a hog CAFO and found that 98 percent of the enterococci, staph and streptococci in the samples were resistant to two or more common antibiotics.

Beginning in 2006, Dutch scientists discovered a new MRSA strain, called ST398, which was showing up in their communities. It did not match the usual hospital acquired



Factory Farms – continued

types but did match MRSA isolated from pig farms. They found that the rate of MRSA colonization among pig farmers was 760 times that of the general public.

According to the UK Soil Association, an organic advocacy group, 25 percent of all MRSA cases in Dutch hospitals are now caused by the farm-animal strain, and farmers are no longer allowed in general wards without prior screening.

Last year researchers in Ontario, Canada found MRSA-ST398 in 25 percent of tested pigs and 20 percent of workers on farms with infected pigs. In January 2009, University of Iowa researchers reported that they found ST398 in 49 percent of pigs and 45 percent of workers in a hog CAFO in that state. Interestingly, the CAFO contained breeding sows imported from Canada while another CAFO, where pigs and workers tested negative for MRSA, did not contain imported sows. More research is underway to assess this threat in the U.S.

Industrial agriculture interests currently are getting away with the pollution of our rural environment, but when the CAFO menace creeps into our towns and cities I think the handwriting will be on the wall for animal factories in America.

Most Conventional, Processed Foods Contain Genetically-Engineered Ingredients

By John Kurman, KCFC Member

Last Spring, the American Academy of Environmental Medicine released a [position paper](#), which concluded that "GM [genetically-modified] foods have not been properly tested for human consumption, and because there is ample evidence of probable harm" the AAEM called "[f]or a moratorium on GM food, implementation of immediate long term independent safety testing, and labeling of GM foods, which is necessary for the health and safety of consumers."

Unfortunately, we are way overdue to implement such measures.

According to [USDA data](#) for the 2009 crop year, 91 percent of the soybeans grown in the U.S. have been genetically engineered for herbicide tolerance and 85 percent of the corn grown in the U.S. has been engineered to contain the Bacillus thuringiensis toxin

and/or to be herbicide-tolerant. (Varieties that have been engineered for more than one trait are referred to as "stacked.")

Given the prevalence of genetically-engineered (GE) varieties and the fact that corn and soy from different farms typically get mixed during processing, one can safely assume that any food that contains conventional corn and/or soy contains GE corn and/or soy. The exception would be if the manufacturer has an effective policy to ensure it only purchases non-GE ingredients, which is rare.

Of course, animal foods produced by the conventional food system come from cattle, hogs and chickens that are fed large quantities of conventional corn and soy. Most of these animals are eating GE food, too.

What are the consequences for the animals and people who eat these foods? As far as I know, the government hasn't required any independent studies to figure that out.

While GE corn and soy have been on the market for years, we now have a new ingredient to watch out for: GE granulated sugar. While there is currently no GE cane sugar on the market, about half of the granulated sugar used in the U.S. is made from sugar beets, and in 2005, the USDA approved the use of sugar beet seeds genetically-engineered to be resistant to Monsanto's Roundup Ready herbicide.

The sugar beet industry has moved quickly to adopt this new technology. They have moved so quickly that 90 percent of the U.S. sugar beet crop is already being grown from this GE seed.

Given that corn syrup, corn oil, ground corn, soy oil, and granulated sugar are ubiquitous in processed foods, it is now safe to say that the great majority of processed foods contain GE ingredients.

If you're interested in knowing whether or not a food you buy is likely to contain GE ingredients, the Center for Food Safety's [Shoppers Guide to Avoiding GE Foods](#) is a valuable resource.

This *KCFC Update* is a Kansas City Food Circle original publication. Past issues are archived at kcfoodcircle.org. For more information, write to: KC Food Circle, P.O. Box 45195, KCMO, 64171.