Summer 2004

FOGHORN

News from Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc. (FOG)

Friends of Organic,

In late April we were taken aback by sudden issuance of "directives" by the National Organic Program (NOP). We did not feel at the time that it was in the best interest to solicit a reaction from FOG members. Many of you may have signed petitions or called the NOP offices. While these actions did seem to provide the catalyst for the repeal of the directives, we avoided organization of such a response because it was precisely the kind of action that led the NOP to disregard the opinions of the organic community in the first place.

FOG has a good working relationship with the NOP. Through meetings and conference calls, I have gained insight into the agency's strengths and weaknesses. In the case of the directives, the NOP did not fail to follow what they maintain is the letter of the law. They requested the lawyers at the Office of General Council read the current organic standards and the program clarified how they could be interpreted. The resulting interpretations were never released for comment by the public (consumers), industry (Organic Trade Association), or other stakeholders, including the USDA National Organic Standards Board (NOSB). The NOSB is an advisory board which has spent countless hours taking public input and developing recommendations for the implementation of the National Organic Program.

I work on policy issues related to organic agriculture with many colleagues. Among the duties I have and where I find support are as a board member of the Organic Trade Association (OTA), Steering member of the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture's Organic committee, board member of the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group and of course my relationship with Florida's organic producers, processors and consumers.

What's Inside?

The biggest problem, in my eyes, was the lack of process. There was never a chance for those who know, or those who care, to have input. Did the lawyers know anything about organic farming? Did they care about consumer confidence in the organic label? Clearly not as much as the organic industry, consumer organizations, and members of the organic community who raised their voices to oppose the directives. This public outcry opened the eyes of the NOP: they violated the spirit of the law.

It was a step in the right direction for the NOP to question which sections of the organic standards were unclear. It was a big step in the wrong direction to not bring the sections under question to the table with at the very least the USDA's own National Organic Standards Board (NOSB).

Why the bad manners? The relationship has long been in need of repair. The USDA is "quick to have rocks thrown at it" and they come from different directions. They get defensive and seem to have turned off the willingness to communicate at times. Many organic farmers and consumers are historically not the biggest fans of the federal government. USDA is not accustomed to "seed to table" programs with such a hyperparticipatory community/ industry.

(continued on next page)

Florida Certified Organic Growers & Consumers, Inc. (FOG)

Our mission is to promote organic and sustainable agriculture on local, national and international levels through the education of growers, consumers, policy-makers and the media.

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Neighborhood Nutrition Network

We are a network of community members, agriculture educators, farmers, health professionals, teachers, and business owners. Our mission is to help build healthy local food systems so that everyone may access fresh, nutritious food. Our activities focus on food access, creating community and school gardens, nutrition education, youth-based programs, enhancing local agriculture and food system advocacy.
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Remember that the vast majority (if this isn't an understatement) of USDA resources, attention, and powerful backing go to biotechnology, chemical intensive and confinement production and the continuance of "cheap food" even if it is damaging to the soil, ground and surface water, farm workers, and possibly contributes to health problems. This all the while being dependent on cheap oil and a military expenditures which insure it while devastating rural communities, farmers in other countries, and farmers here at home. And then there is the emotion. Organic farmers and many organic consumers are passionate about why they do what they do, or purchase what they purchase and the idea that organic will go the way of "natural" labeling or be hijacked is a valid concern, given past experience.

The original guidance, then directive documents, may be available on the USDA site, but since the USDA Secretary of Agriculture issued instructions to rescind the documents, they seem to have disappeared. The NOP issued a response "Misinformation Regarding NOP Statements" on their website, but the next day it was gone. Our hope is that the USDA is now ready to work with all the stakeholders prior to issuing "directives" that could decimate the industry by causing a loss of consumer confidence.

It is a difficult task to document the timeless practices of organic production in a constantly changing world. It takes time to differentiate medicines from poisons. We understand that it is hard to make program requirements instill consumer confidence all over the country, while having a regulation be applicable from Florida to Alaska, Hawaii to Maine and all over the world where products are destined for the US marketplace. If the regulation needs to be changed to stay inline with the wishes of those producing and purchasing organic products, the USDA needs to supply staff willing to work with the NOSB, industry, and consumers. Our certification department, Quality Certification Services, (QCS) has been working with shrimp producers for a number of years. We have certified shrimp which meets the NOP livestock regulation. Consumers have expressed interest in buying certified organic shrimp and the marketplace would encourage increased production if they could remain confident of the USDA Organic label. The NOP is aware of this, and has asked us to send them our guidance statement on setting organic aquaculture standards. We look forward to working with the NOP to improve organic standards.

We are glad to represent such a strong organic community. We've made decisions in the past year to improve our communication with you. So far that means more informative newsletters and a website where you can post bulletin board messages. We hope all of you will visit our website as it grows in the coming months. Register on the members page at www.foginfo.org/members so we can easily email you with special events, or breaking news on policy. The take home message: You need to get involved, stay involved, and weigh in, when things you care about are decided for you in Washington DC.

Sincerely,
Marty Mesh
FOG Executive Director

Endangered Seed Bank in St. Petersburg

St. Petersburg, Russia - More than 360,000 varieties of the planet's food crops are harbored in 18th century buildings that occupy the west block of St. Isaac's Square, prime real estate in the heart of St. Petersburg, Russia. Home of the N.I. Vavilov Institute of Plant Industry (VIR) for more than 80 years, these buildings are now at the center of a conflict between one of the world's most prestigious gene banks and a government who covets the property for presidential suites.

Founded by legendary phytogeographer and seed saver Nikolai Vavilov, the N.I. Vavilov world seed collection is a staggering representation of plant genetic diversity. Collected by Vavilov and his staff in more than 150 expeditions to five continents, the VIR world seed collection maintains many varieties of crops now extinct in their original centers of origin: biologically rich areas of crop genetic diversity where agriculture first originated. Encompassing 320,000 accessions of 155 botanical families, the collection harbors some 95,000 accessions of grain crops, 43,000 of legume crops, 52,000 of groat crops, 26,000 of industrial crops, 28,000 of fodder crops, and 50,000 of vegetable crops. Of special interest to many plant breeders are the 10,000 varieties of potatoes - from wild landraces to hybrid varieties - that agronomists hope hold resistance to troublesome potato pathogens such as wart and blackleg.

The 2002 eviction order was another chapter in the long and often tragic history of VIR. Through the Stalinist purges of the 1930's, to the siege of Leningrad, the unfortunate reign of quack-geneticist Troyfim Lysenko, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1989 (which has left all of Russian sciences seriously under-funded), VIR has endured. Without fanfare, and often under mortal danger, VIR has worked tirelessly to preserve the biodiversity of the planet's food supply for future generations.

Why would human beings risk life and limb to save a seed collection? During Stalin's purges, at least 80 of Vavilov's colleagues were arrested and/or executed for opposing the spurious science of Troyfim Lysenko, which would seriously endanger the world seed collection in coming years. During the siege of Leningrad, Vavilov and 14 of his fellow scientists preferred to starve to death in a Saratov prison, than to eat the collections that represented their life's work. "Every day 250,000 babies are born on this planet," VIR executive director Viktor Dragavtsev explains. "By 2015 the population of Earth will be 8.5 billion people. Gene banks are the main guarantee of food security in the world."

Perhaps nowhere was this more dramatically played out on the world stage than in Ethiopia during the 1990's. Emerging from years of famine and drought, the stricken nation soon discovered it had lost many of its endemic varieties of wheat, barley, and other crops to the ravages of hunger and climatic disaster. Ethiopian officials appealed to VIR who immediately sent emissaries bearing 3000 varieties of crops originally collected by Vavilov in his travels through the country in 1926.
With a mission and a history such as this - and admist the context of a world agricultural situation that is becomingly increasingly concentrated to fewer and fewer varieties - it is no surprise that VIR did not take the eviction order laying down. Director Dragavtsev appealed. In October 2003, amid much public outcry from within Russia and from the international community, the order was rescinded.

Allowed to hold title to their buildings for the time being, the Russian government has mandated that VIR provide for upkeep and maintenance of the historic buildings from their already extremely low budget. This could pave the way for another attempt to evict the world seed collection in the near future.

VIR is now taking measures to establish a public support fund for renovation of the buildings. Details on how to contribute to the fund will be forthcoming on VIR's website @ www.vir.nw.ru.

Contributed by Sue Morris, FOG Board Member

BREAKING NEW GROUND:
Innovations in Agriculture

Researchers at the University of Florida are studying the effects of using soil-sensing systems to automate crop irrigation.

Over the past few years, drought years for Florida, Professor Rafael Munoz-Carpena and his research team at the TREC center in Homestead have been fielding different experiments to determine the most efficient methods of crop irrigation.

The project has tested reduction in water usage without noticeable change in yields. The team tested irrigation scheduling methods to compare efficiency in water usage, or how much water is applied with different methods of allocation. They used the following scheduling methods:

a) soil moisture-based
b) weather-based (evapotranspiration, or evaporation from crop and soil, as well as water loss from photosynthesis)
c) typical farmer-scheduled practices

Tomatoes were used as the test crop. They were irrigated using the three different methods. Different levels were used for rate soil moisture, as well as different percentages of evaporative demand. This resulted in more than one setting for each method.

Results showed the greatest water savings (over 70% less water than the typical farmer uses) occurred when soil moisture sensors were used to automatically schedule the irrigation. Weather-based method followed, with the typical farmer schedule using the most water. Reductions in water use were not accompanied by a loss in crop yield. By using less water, and giving plants only what they needed, there was no surplus of water passing through the soil, and out off the root zone. This reduced the amount of potential nutrient leaching into the groundwater, and reduced the environmental impact. This translates to reduced pumping costs for farmers, since less water is used. Conventional farmers can reduce amounts of fertilizers applied, as less nutrients in the solution are lost through excessive irrigation water percolation through the soil profile.

Research continues with a closer look at nutrient leaching. Graduate student Jonathan Schroder has just begun measuring and quantifying the reduction in agrochemical leaching as a result of using the soil-sensing scheduling system. He will record chemical loads captured in lysimeters, placed in the experimental field. His study looks at the nutrients leached out of the root zone - where they are useful to the plant, to the groundwater - where they can be harmful to the environment.

Can you try this at home?

If you want to install your own soil moisture-based irrigation system, there are two options: tensiometers, or a capacitance probe.

Tensiometers measure the suction that roots need to use to extract water from soil particals. Capacitance probes correlate the electrical conductivity of the soil with the amount of water present. They must be calibrated for specific soil types.

Each system has its advantages and disadvantages. The tensiometers give pratical results and do not need calibration. They do need careful installation and constant monitoring - to ensure that the instrument has contact with the soil and is not losing water. If a break in soil contact occurs, the tensiometer must be refilled with water.

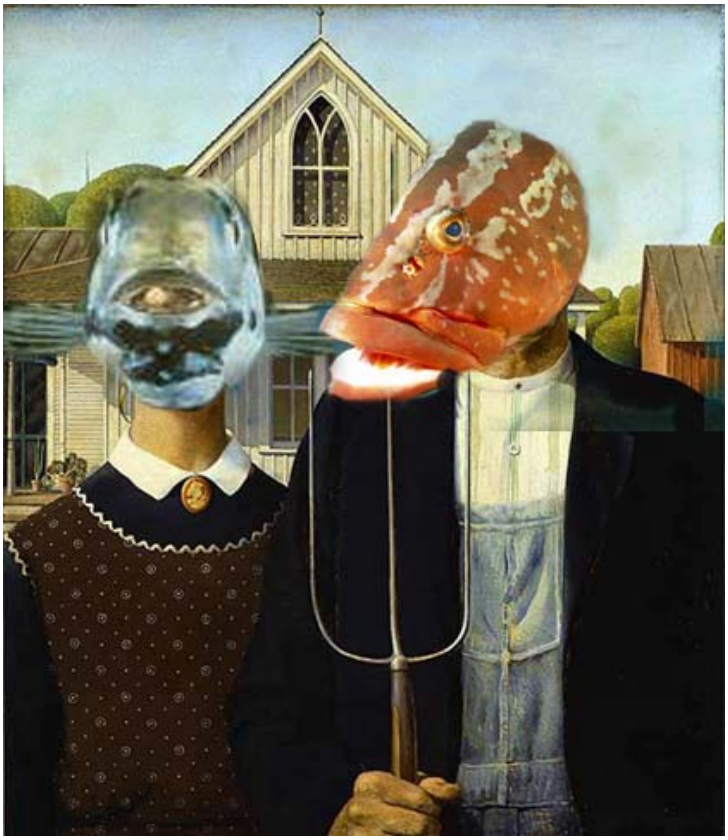
The capacitance probes do not need much maintanence, but must be calibrated for your particular soil. This involves taking measurments of a sample at different moisture levels, as it is dried out from saturation, and recording the masses of the sample for each electrical output reading. This establishes a relationship between soil moisture and electrical conductivity. This is necesary because a capacitance probe's output display is in an electrical format.

These soil moisture devices can be connected to the irrigation system for automatic irrigation, or manual readings can be taken, and appropriate watering applied. The automation of the tensiometer system uses switching tensiometers and solenoid valves to start and stop the system. You should consult your manufacturer to for detailed instrutions and recommendations. Irrometer (www.irrometer.com) has the switching tensiometers, and Decagon Devices (www.decagon.com) carries the ECH20 probe. Most irrigation supply stores should be able to assist you with automated systems. The Rainbird company (www.rainbird.com) manufactures controllers for automated irrigation systems, both for private homes and small growers.

For more information on research done using different moisture measuring devises, read "Alternatives of Low Cost Soil Moisture Monitoring Devices for Vegetable Production in South Miami-Dade County" available for download at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/AE230 and "Field Devices for Monitoring Soil Water Content" at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/AE266

QCS Helps NOP Develop Aquaculture Guidance

The recent (retracted) NOP Scope Directive brought into question the eligibility of aquaculture for organic certification by the USDA. Aquaculture does indeed fall under the regulatory authority of the NOP, but a current lack of species specific standards presents a challenging certification process.



Prior to the issuance of the NOP Scope Directive, QCS had worked with several shrimp producers to verify compliance with general NOP livestock standards. We certified one operation as organic under the NOP Rule. We also know several producers who have made significant investments in their move toward organic production. They are currently selling their products under market labels such as "produced without the use of horomones, antibiotics, GMOs and [specific chemicals]." There is a favorable demand for these products.

Without the support of the NOP, aquaculture certification could become meaningless in the marketplace. The organic aquaculture producers who invested substantial amounts of money to become compliant could lose their product differentiation advantage. That wouldn't be fair. It's important that guidance for organic aquaculture under the NOP be developed in a timely manner, so as not to cause consumer confusion.

Due to the work we have done in organic aquaculture, the NOP has requested that QCS submit guidance information for certifying aquaculture products under the current NOP Rule. In this effort we are seeking comment from the industry, environmental, consumer and scientific communities in order to strengthen the standards as needed. We hope to provide the NOP with straightforward guidance that will ease more organic aquaculture products into the marketplace with the same organic integrity as all other agricultural products currently certified under the NOP. The next year should be an exciting one.

Meet our newest certified entities:

Grove Squeezed LLC in Florida.
Partners Coffee Company in Atlanta, GA
Ayrshire Farm in Upperville, VA
Pastime Farms LLC in Roseland, LA
EXPALSA S.A. in Guayas, Ecuador
Spooner's Organics Inc in Vero Beach, FL
H & H Farms in Castalia, NC
Pavel's Yogurt Co. in Oakland, CA
KMC Citrus Enterprises Inc. in Weirsdale, FL
Butterfly Cattle Company in San Antonio, TX
Kirkland Harvesting Inc. in St. Lucie County, FL
Five Penny Farm in Floyd, VA
Allison Farms in Palatka, FL
Stonecrop Farm in Newport, VA
Spring Song Organics in Alachua, FL
Sunshine Farms in Zephyrhills, FL
Briscoe Farms in Darby, FL
Larry's Beans Inc. in Raleigh, NC
Dhamma Farm in Signal Mountain, TN
Robert L. Knight in Vero Beach, FL
Miami Citrus Inc. in Fellsmere, FL
Cason Farm in Lake Butler, FLKerry Speciality Ingredients in Owen, WI
Abaco Neem in the Bahamas

News from the Neighborhood Nutrition Network

Rooted in Community

For the past six years, youth and adults involved in sustainable agricultural have been coming together to share resources, experiences, and tools at the Rooted in Communitiy Conference. RIC has evolved into a vital, youth-lled movement of emerging leaders - the rising voices in Sustainable Agriculture. Two years ago, FOG and NNN had the honor of hosting this conference in Gainesville, Florida. We had a great time, learning and sharing with so many energetic and responsible teenagers. This year RIC will be held July 15-18th in Olympia, Washington. NNN will play a vital role in shaping this conference as members of the RIC Advisory Council. Two youth members of the Farm and Food Preservation Project, both recently promoted to be community and marketing liasons for the program, will attend the conference with staff members. Look for their feedback on the event in the Fall issue of the Foghorn.

Pricsilla Monroe enjoys a day at the farm with her grandkids.

Dreamer's Garden Party a Successful Partnered Effort

The Dreamer's Garden, a community garden in Gainesville's Grove Street neighborhood, celebrated it's first Fete d'Artistes on Saturday and Sunday, June 12-13. Students from the Gainesville School of Music and Arts, Eastside High School, the Tall Pines Home School, and the Cedar Ridge 4-H club displayed artwork in the garden, while local music group Bast contributed entertainment. There were demonstrations on how to make ice cream using an old-fashioned ice cream maker, and opportunities to paint wood carvings later hung on the fences to decorate the garden. Plenty of fresh garden treats were available to snack on - including ice cold watermelon!

The event was dreamt up by Maria Huff Edwards, community organizer for the Dreamer's Garden and member of the NNN advisory board. Maria arranged a partnership with Keep Alachua County Beautiful, which helped to fund the event. With help from Maria and the community, the Dreamer's Garden won eight awards at the annual KACB ceremony last February. NNN also won an award for our partnership with UF Office of Community Service.

Organic Farm Holds U-Pick Festival

The Gainesville Organic Blueberry Farm, who host community garden plots and NNN's Farm and Food Preservation Project (keep an eye on NNNinfo.org for details on next year's program) held a terrifically successful 1st Annual U-Pick Blueberry Festival.

After an unexpected amount of publicity - newspaper, TV and radio spots the farm never asked for - about 300 people from the community came out to the farm. They enjoyed an afternoon of live music, an organic feast provided by local caterers and restaurants, a watermelon eating contest, and the chance to make fresh homemade blueberry ice cream. An estimated 600 pounds of berries were picked, leaving most of the fields bare! The produce stand nearly sold out and many newcomers to the farm are excited to come back and support future CSA shares. What a great way for the farm to end their busiest season.

Astra and Tim McCarthy in the fields at the 1st Annual U-Pick Blueberry Festival. An estimated 600 pounds of berries were picked in one afternoon.

Mustikkapiiras: Blueberry Yogurt Pie
A Finnish recipe by Susan Harville taken from *Sundays at Moosewood Restaurant*.

Crust:
1/3 cup butter
1/4 cup sugar
1 egg
1 cup unbleached white flour
1/2 tsp baking powder

Using an electric mixer, or by hand, cream the butter and sugar. Add the egg and blend well. Combine the flower and baking powder and mix them into the wet ingredients to form a soft dough. With flour-dusted fingers, pat the sticky dough into the bottom of a buttered and floured pie pan. Push the dough up to cover the sides of the pan. Refrigerate for at least as long as it takes to make the filling. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Filling:
2 eggs
3 tbsp sugar
1 cup plain yogurt
3 tbsp fresh lemon juice
1 tsp pure vanilla extract
...
2 cups blueberries

Mix all the filling ingredients, except for the blueberries, until smooth. Put the berries into the pie shell and gently pour in the fillilng so the berries are coated and evenly distributed.

Bake for 50-60 minutes, until the crust is browned and the custard has set. Chill well.

Gazpacho

1½ kg red tomatoes, peeled and roughly chopped
1 small onion, chopped
1 green pepper, chopped
2 - 3 cloves garlic
1 small cucumber (or half a long cucumber), chopped
olive oil
white wine vinegar
salt
water

Blend all the vegetables and place in a large bowl. Add two tablespoons of olive oil and a tablespoon of vinegar. Season with salt and blend well. Check the taste and add as much water as necessary depending on whether you will be drinking or eating it with a spoon. Chill thoroughly before serving. If you are using bowls, finely chop some cucumber, green pepper, tomato, and hard-boiled egg to use for the garnish.

Summer Garden Favorite - Cassava

Contributed by Robert Hewitt

Cassava is fun to grow and is a low maintenance crop. It's in the Euphorbiaceae family. Its lobed, palmate leaves and lanceolate-obovate leaflets are attractive as the plant grows rapid and tall during the summer rains. Allelopathic, it weeds itself, with the entire plant discouraging competing pests and predators with hydrocyanic (HCN) compounds.

Looking at agriculture systems that rely entirely on human labor, the cassava has a remarkably high rating of efficiency. In Zaire and Tonga, returns in kcal per kcal invested are 37.5 and 26.9 respectively. Using draft animals, returns were .3 for rice in the Philippines and 3.4 for maize in Mexico. With high mechanization, figures for the USA are approximately 2.5 for maize, 1.4 for rice, 1.8 for wheat, and 2.3 for potato (Crops and Man, 1992). This is relevant in Africa where 85% of the farming/gardening is done entirely by human labor, primarily women.

Cassava is propaged asexually from stem cuttings, although occasionally seeds are produced. When planted in the drier months, the stem cuttings can be planted horizontally, but from June to September when rainfall is higher, planting vertically may prevent rotting. As with the sweet potato in our highly weathered sandy Florida soil, the element of potassium is crucial to the plant. Native to the Amazon, cassava evolved in an acidic soil and is tolerant low soil fertility and drought. Being a C-3 (three, rather than four-carbon molecule) plant, it makes acceptable yield in shadier garden spots. Each plant produces 5-20 tubers, and depending on variety and other factors, and takes six to 18 months to reach maximum food value. The leaves are high in protein and in some places, the plant is grown only secondarily for its tubers.

Among third world peasants and hand-tool laborers, cassava is common in intercrop and relay crop practices. Where intercropped there is less bare soil and less soil erosion, and the cassava takes longer to reach high LAI (leaf area index) than, for example, intercropped beans. Mulching is good. (see Norman, Person and Searle in Ecology of Tropical Food Crops, 1995).

The starty tuber is eaten as potates would be, or in desserts. Imagine coconut cassava cake with mango ice cream and mamey fruit!

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- ☐ Grower: 500+ acres $100

(The back is beautiful, too!)

- ☐ Yes, I would like to help support the Neighborhood Nutrition Network. And I'd like a chance to win this beautiful quilt that was made with Love and donated by the Hearts and Hands Cottage Quilters.
  Send me ___ tickets. I'm including a $1 donation for each ticket.
- ☐ I'd like to support FOG's efforts by making a tax-exempt donation. I'm sending $____.