



**The Organic Specialists**

## **FEBRUARY 2015**

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*"Hope is being able to see that there is light  
despite all of the darkness."*

**Desmond Tutu**

## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

### **Think Globally, Act Locally**

This winter, I had the opportunity to listen to the earthworms in a series of organic farm visits. The pre-conference tours before the EcoFarm Conference were truly heartening, with visits to four interesting growers in Watsonville's Pajaro Valley.

Despite California's ongoing drought, we saw numerous new and ingenious improvements in holistic and organic production. At Zea Sonnabend's and Terence Welch's Fruitilicious Farm, they are restoring older apple trees and showcasing best organic management techniques to encourage beneficial insects, nutrient density, and an increase in earthworms. Nearby, Hidden Springs Vineyard highlighted wildlife and waterway management. After our visit to Viridis, the world's largest aquaponics operation, I am still pondering its controversial organic certification. The operation raises fish to use their effluent for 10 acres of greenhouse vegetables. The three busloads of organic farm tourists feasted on their salads for lunch.

But the most energizing stop for me was the last of the day – where Manuel Mercado showed off his organic raspberry production and told the story of his journey from immigrant berry picker in 1986 to owner of River Valley Farms at Farmhill Ranch. His hard work and the incredible vision and support provided by Tom and Nancy Driscoll led to Manuel becoming a successful Driscoll's grower. For me it was an unexpected homecoming. You see, I consulted with Tom in the 1980s to help develop Driscoll's organic growing methods and had the pleasure of working with Manuel back then. It's great to see that work is still bearing fruit.

During the tour, we saw thousands of acres of organic production, much of which uses polyethylene mulch for weed control and water conservation. I shared the good news with growers that this can now be replaced with biodegradable mulch that was just added to the organic list and farmer tool chest. However, [new NOP guidance](#) now puts that improvement in question.

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A few miles north, I had another extraordinary homecoming at the amazing Molino Creek Ranch, home of the tastiest organic tomato in the world. In addition to visiting with Mark Lipson and thanking him for his great work in DC for the last five years as the Organic Policy Advisor in the Secretary of Agriculture's office, we checked on the well-being of the official NOSB earthworms being cared for by Mark and friends ... I'll report in the next newsletter on their feelings about the organic standards and their desire to testify at the April NOSB meeting after almost 20 years...

Meanwhile, feel free to visit with members of the Wolf, DiMatteo + Associates team at Natural Products Expo West, or call us any time to discuss how we might be able to help you take care of the planet as you do business.

**Bill Wolf**

**President**

**Wolf, DiMatteo + Associates**

*\*Wolf, DiMatteo + Associates delivers the strategic expertise to help organic, socially, and environmentally responsible products and projects reach their full potential—and flourish.*

P.S. - Unfortunately, I won't be at First Western Regional Grazing Conference or Natural Products Expo West as I had planned, because local events to protect my farm's watershed are heating up. A few days ago, plans for a massive high-pressure gas pipeline were announced, and several key meetings are this week and next. If you want to sign a petition in defense of this great Eastern aquifer, you can check it out at <http://www.petitionbuzz.com/petitions/preservecraigcounty>.

## **ORGANIC REGULATORY AND MARKET UPDATES**

### **National Organic Program Updates**

#### **Guidance document on natural resources and biodiversity - Comment by February 27**

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service seeks comment on Draft Guidance: Natural Resources and Biodiversity Conservation for Certified Organic Operations, which is designed to help certified organic operations understand the kinds of production practices that support conservation and comply with National Organic Program regulations. This guidance also clarifies: 1) the certified organic operator's responsibility to select, carry out, and record production practices that "maintain or improve the natural resources of the operation;" 2) the accredited certifying agent's (certifier) responsibility to verify operator compliance with this requirement; and 3) how domestic organic operations that participate in a USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) program and the National Organic Program (NOP) can reduce their paperwork burdens. An appendix lists examples of practices to address soil composition, soil stability, water quality and quantity, wildlife benefits and more, and if NRCS programs may be available to assist. [Comment by Feb. 27](#).

#### **NOP issues technical corrections to organic regulations**

An updated version of the organic regulations corrects typographical and other similar errors in the text. None of the updates change any interpretations of the regulations, and changes can be seen in the [Federal Register](#).

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## **Penalty matrix gets an update**

Updates to the NOP's enforcement policies penalty matrix clarify NOP expectations concerning what actions certifiers need to take. The new chart offers four categories of action based on the severity of the problem, and guides certifiers in the correct response. [More](#).

## **NOP updates reinstatement procedures**

If you've found yourself in the unfortunate situation of losing your organic certification, updated instructions provide details on the steps operations and certifiers need to take for reinstatement. In a nutshell: NOP makes the decision about reinstatement, and the operation must demonstrate that all non-compliances have been corrected. [Details](#).

*Working with Wolf, DiMatteo + Associates to develop effective organic system plans tailored to your operation can help you avoid costly non-compliances. [Contact us](#) to discuss your needs.*

## **What is 'biodegradable biobased' mulch film? NOP issues opinion**

In a new policy memo, NOP describes the components of 'biodegradable biobased mulch films,' which have been allowed in organic production since Oct. 30, 2014. These mulch films are made from organic material in which carbon is derived from a renewable resource via biological processes. Mulch films made from petrochemical resins, even if they are biodegradable, are not allowed. [Details](#).

## **Europe**

### **Organic aquaculture regulations changed**

Updates to organic regulations for seaweed and aquatic animal production include allowing collection of wild fry in certain traditional fisheries practices, changes to how much meal can be used to feed shrimp, requirements that whole fish used to feed carnivorous animals be certified as sustainable, allowing conventional phytoplankton and zooplankton for feed for certain, organic juveniles and more. The changes became effective January 1, 2015. [More](#).

### **European Commission puts proposed revision of organic regulations on a 'kill list'**

Among the proposed work for the European Commission under President Juncker, the European Commission came up with a "kill list" in which it proposes withdrawing or amending 80 proposals including the proposed revision of the organic framework legislation. Meanwhile, the Presidency of the Council of the European Union (held by Latvia) has made the revision of the EU's organic farming proposal one of its key priorities. Unless the European Parliament and Council of the European Union come to an agreement within six months, the Commission will withdraw the organic revision proposal and replace it with a new legislative initiative. June 11, 2015 will be the 9th European Organic Congress where policy makers will discuss the EU's vision for organic farming after 2030.

## **GMO NEWS**

### **GMO labeling regulation bill reintroduced**

On Feb. 13, 2015, Senators Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and Representative Peter DeFazio (D-OR) reintroduced legislation that would require labeling of genetically modified food.

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The Genetically Engineered Food Right-to-Know Act was previously introduced on April 24, 2013, and not enacted. Over 1.4 million people have signed the Just Label It petition in support of mandatory labeling of genetically engineered foods. See the [proposed regulation](#).

### **New approvals for genetically modified soy, cotton and apples**

The US Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has deregulated new genetically engineered soy and cotton plants and two genetically engineered apple varieties. The soy and cotton plants will be resistant to both dicamba and glyphosate herbicides. As a result, use of dicamba, a drift-prone herbicide linked to high rates of cancer and birth defects in the families of food growers, is expected to increase 500 times over current levels of use in soy, and 14 times over current use in cotton. Meanwhile, apple grower groups including the US Apple Association and the British Columbia Fruit Growers Associations have spoken out against introducing the genetically engineered apple varieties, which are engineered to be non-browning.

## **NEWS AND NOTICES**

### **Global organic market hits \$72 billion**

"The World of Organic Agriculture," the annual compilation of global organic sales and production statistics and compiled by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) in collaboration with IFOAM – Organics International and others, shows that the United States remains the largest market for organic products with market growth of 11.5 percent and reaching 24.3 billion euros of the total 55 billion euro (\$72 billion) global market in 2013. Germany is the next largest market (7.6 billion euros), followed by France (4.4 billion euros), and China (2.4 billion euros). Overall, 170 countries report organic farming activity with over 43.1 million hectares of organic farmland worldwide. Australia has the most land in organic farming (17.2 million hectares), followed by Argentina (3.2 million hectares) and the United States (2.2 million hectares). In eleven countries, more than 10 percent of the agricultural land is organic. [More](#).

### **Organic cotton acreage is up in the United States**

U.S. organic cotton growers are estimated to have planted the most acreage to organic cotton in 2014 since 1995, according to the 2013 and Preliminary 2014 U.S. Organic Cotton Production & Marketing Trends report from the Organic Trade Association (OTA). Respondents to OTA's survey reported a 14 percent increase in organic cotton plantings in 2014, to 18,234 acres, the most in almost 20 years. [Report](#).

### **New report details growth in local and regional food systems**

A new report from the USDA Economic Research Service, Trends in U.S. Local and Regional Food Systems: A Report to Congress, details the latest economic information on local food producers, consumers, and policy, such as the Food Safety Modernization Act. The report states that producer participation in local food systems is growing, and the value of local food sales (based on sales direct to the consumer and to intermediated marketing channels such as restaurants or regional distributors) appear to be increasing. Among the other findings: In 2012, local food sales totaled an estimated \$6.1 billion. Furthermore, farms with gross cash farm income below \$75,000 accounted for 85 percent of local food farms in 2012, but account for only 13 percent of local food sales. Local food farms with

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gross cash farm income above \$350,000 accounted for 5 percent of local food farms and 67 percent of sales. Farms selling direct to consumers were more likely to remain in business over 2007-12, compared to farms that did not sell direct to consumers. [Full report](#).

### **USDA organic research covers key issues**

Early results of an analysis of research projects funded by the United States Department of Agriculture, more than \$142 million into 188 organic farming studies, covered issues of concern to organic farmers. The analysis is part of a collaboration between Organic Farming Research Foundation and partners including Oregon Tilth, the National Center for Appropriate Technology, Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides, the Virginia Association for Biological Farming, and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. The analysis found USDA-funded organic research emphasized soil nutrient management, soil quality, and management of weeds, insect pests and diseases. The agency has also made significant research investments in crop breeding for organic systems. Meanwhile, research funding for livestock issues has lagged, and a number of important organic crops including rice, cotton, tree nuts, medicinal herbs, cut flowers and peanuts were either under-represented or entirely overlooked, reported OFRF.

### **WHERE TO FIND WOLF, DIMATTEO + ASSOCIATES**

**March 4-8, 2015: Natural Products Expo West, Anaheim, CA.** Katherine DiMatteo and Sandy Mays to attend. Katherine will be speaking as well.

**April 14-16, 2015: Organic Trade Association Policy Conference and Hill Visit Days, Washington, DC.** Katherine DiMatteo to attend.

**April 27-May 1, 2015: National Organic Standards Board Meeting, La Jolla, CA.** Bill Wolf to attend.