



News
from

Harmony Valley Farm

An Update for Our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

TWIN CITIES EDITION

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Organic Consumers Association

The Organic Consumers Association has a free bi-weekly emailed newsletter that goes out to thousands of organic supporters across the US. It is an excellent digest of organic issues in the news. To subscribe to 'Organic Bytes' go to:
<http://www.organicconsumers.org/organicbytes.htm>

Wal-Mart Goes Organic?

by Annake Witkop

Last Saturday after we attended the Dane County Farmer's Market in Madison, Richard was a guest on Jean Feraca's 'Here On Earth' radio program on Wisconsin Public Radio. The topic was Wal-Mart's recent announcement that in order to refresh their image and appeal to a wider sector of consumers, they intend to expand their grocery isles to include organic produce, dairy, and packaged goods. They will offer these products at just 10% over the cost of conventional foods, where as most organic products are sold with anywhere from a 25%-100% increase over their conventional counterparts. Is this a good thing, ultimately increasing the number of organic acres farmed worldwide, Jean asked? Or will Wal-Mart's commitment to cheap food hurt small farmers by driving down prices? Will Wal-Mart's involvement in the organic marketplace threaten hard-won standards of production?

The show began with a clip of Bruce Peterson, Vice President of Wal-Mart speaking to an economics class at Cornell University. He commented that there is a huge organic movement. Young mothers wanting to provide the best nutrition for their children are thinking that it has to be better to give them organic baby food. Whether or not that is true, he speculates, is a separate conversation.

Richard's take on the situation is that hopefully, the young parents purchasing organic foods at Wal-Mart begin their journey down a path of learning. Their initial desire may be to feed their children the healthiest food possible, but after more exposure to the issues surrounding the organic production of food they will be prepared to make savvier choices. Richard and other guests including Ronnie Cummins from the Organic Consumers Association, Jorge Rivera, professor of business at George Washington University and Mark Kastel, co-founder of the Cornucopia Institute, a progressive farm policy research group, explored what those other issues are. What follows is an overview of some of the issues that they addressed.

Will Wal-Mart's involvement in the organic marketplace lower organic standards?

The issue of whether beginning in 2002, the USDA's oversight of US organic standards was an improvement, unifying disparate policy from independent certifying agencies, or an erosion of the integrity of those standards did not come up in this hour. What was discussed, and it is fair to say, is that since the USDA's involvement in this policy making process, these standards are now subject to the lobbying, last minute riders, and political posturing that are part of our government process. Hence the creation of such watchdog organizations as the Organic Consumers Association (which began as a result of the backlash against those proposed standards), and the Cornucopia Institute.

Ronnie Cummins is concerned. He feels that Wal-Mart has already had the effect of weakening the organic standards by pressuring their organic milk supplier, Horizon Organics, into increased production at cheap prices when the demand for organic milk is higher than the supply. Horizon Organics purchases milk from large scale feed-lot operations, that although certified organic according to the USDA standards, are a far cry from the vision that the pioneers of this movement had in mind. Ronnie says that Horizon has been purchasing calves from conventional farms, where they are weaned on blood, fed slaughterhouse waste, fed genetically engineered grains and injected with hormones, while the USDA looks the other way.

Since the organic market has become a multi-billion dollar industry, large companies like General Mills, Coca-Cola and Dean Foods are buying up organic start-ups like Cascadian Farm, Odwalla and White Wave. The organic market has been growing at a rate of 20-25% per year since 1991, while conventional food sales simply

This Week's Box

BROWN WEEK

- Asparagus** - We harvest more with warm weather!
- Green Garlic**- Young garlic stalks. A wonderful mild garlic flavor.
- Pea Vine**- A gourmet pea-flavored salad green. Use in soups too!
- Radishes**- Easter Egg. Mild and juicy.
- Ramps** - The last of the ramps for the season!
- Rhubarb**- Try making a rhubarb cake!
- Saute Mix**- Baby kales, chard and other saute greens, this mix is much milder and more tender than full grown leaves.
- Spinach** - New crop spinach. Soft, delicate leaves.
- Salad Mix**- With edible violas for color!
- Choice: Herb Packs**- see chart for details. Enough for the every-other-week brown group. Every week members- we have a few extras for some splitting households, but not enough for everyone!

Herb Packs

FOR PATIO OR KITCHEN GARDEN

We hope that you'll enjoy growing these herbs in your kitchen garden, window or patio. Water them once a week, allowing them to dry out a bit between waterings. Transplant into larger containers as needed. Chef Kyle will be including some of these fragrant morsels in future recipes. Enjoy!

Herb Pack Key

Curly Parsley	Italian Parsley	Italian Parsley
Thyme	Sage	Savory
Rosemary	Oregano	Basil

follow population growth at 2-3% per year. And these large companies carry political clout. Last fall, a last minute rider on the Agricultural Appropriations Bill that weakens the pre-market review process of synthetic substances used in organic processed foods, passed despite 300,000 consumer letters of protest. General Mills and Kraft lobbied heavily for the inclusion of this rider.

How do we meet this demand and make the transition to organic?

Ronnie would like to see political pressure come to bear on Wal-Mart and Horizon in order to stop these organic feed lots from importing conventional calves. This degradation of standards is happening he says, because Wal-Mart is demanding its producer keep up with the increased demand for organic milk, despite the shortage of organic dairy farms. With no process to help small producers make the transition to organic, Horizon is choosing to try to get away with questionable practices. Ronnie's organization, the OCA, lobbied for a "transition to organic" label, for farms beginning the process of adding pasture and using holistic medicine, back when the organic standards were being written, but this was shot down. While European countries give subsidies to farmers in this transitional period, the USDA elected to make it illegal for farms transitioning to organic to label their products as such. He also suggests that if companies like Wal-Mart would like to make a positive contribution to the increase in domestic organic farms, they could sign long term contracts with producers who are in this transitional phase, thus ensuring the supply will be there for them when they need it down the road.

What about issues like labor?

Wal-Mart purchases 71% of its products from China, where workers are paid and treated miserably. In order to offer organic produce in their store at a significantly cheaper price than your local food co-op, they will buy from China where organic standards are questionable and labor practices abhorrent. There are no country of origin labels required with the current organic standards, so it will be difficult for consumers to obtain this information if not shopping at a food co-op or health food store that volunteers this information. However, without a 'fair-trade' component in the organic standard, there is no way to guarantee that even organic producers in the US are complying with the ideology of the pioneers of the organic movement and providing fair pay and good working conditions for their workers, or for that matter, that the farmers themselves are receiving a fair price for their product so that they are able to do so!

Does transporting produce from China follow organic principals?

While there is very little monetary cost in transporting products from across the globe, the food is certainly not as fresh as locally grown vegetables, and there is certainly an increase of energy expended in that transportation. A large part of the impetus for people to shop at farmers markets and join CSAs is that the food is fresh and has a higher nutritive

value. Mark Kastel points out that although we pay less for food in the US than any other country in the world, we spend more on health care, and in health comparisons, we are sicker than residents of less affluent countries. People who make the choice to purchase organic food are not just looking for USDA certification, he suggests, they are looking for an environmental ethic, an animal husbandry ethic and a social justice ethic.

Beyond Organic?

Richard suggests that in addition to the need for a label indicating a farmer's transition to organic, there is a need to distinguish producers who are choosing to go beyond those USDA guidelines. Offering a health care plan to workers and creating habitat for songbirds are some of the things we do at Harmony Valley that aren't specified in those standards, but choosing to support local producers that are going beyond organic takes a real commitment on the part of the consumer. Eating locally means eating seasonally and that requires that members make a shift in cooking habits, and HVF is committed to helping members make that transition by offering cooking tips and recipes. But we are also committed to helping members make a change in how they think about what they eat. We have lots of educational newsletters planned for this season. Planned topics include: production information, food history, immigration, ag policy, and the fair trade movement, as well as employee profiles and stories about life on our farm. The industrial organic system can be just as opaque as the conventional. It is our goal to help you decipher the difference.

To hear a podcast of the 'Here On Earth' episode, go to:
www.wpr.org/hereonearth/archive_060520k.cfm

Pea Shoots, Pea Scores!

by Chef Kyle Cross

Whether you refer to them as pea greens, shoots, or tendrils, probably the most fitting nomenclature is vine. Starchy sweet, tender, and almost identical in flavor to the pod which it produces, pea vines have been a Chefs favorite for years. At Harmony Valley Farm pea vines serve a few purposes. First as a cover crop planted early along with oats for weed suppression, next as a marketable spring salad green, and finally a great source of organic fertilizer. Mixed among the cover crop fields the market vines are harvested by hand in early spring. Pea vines are in the legume family along with beans, clover, and alfalfa all of which horticulturists call "green manure". Legumes are able to fix nitrogen gas from the air and convert it into a usable form, thus fortifying the soil below for future crops. Tilling under the pea root systems and what green is left after the vine harvest, adds organic material back into the ground, which is important for the soil's biological activity.

Enjoy your Harmony Valley Farm pea vines, and remember their other uses, besides a twelve dollar salad at your local fine dining restaurant.

Honey Mustard Vinaigrette

This very simple dressing is great on Harmony Valley Farm's salad mix, as well as our tender pea vines. You can also use it as a marinade for grilled chicken.

1 C Dijon mustard
1 C whole grain Mustard
1/3 red wine vinegar
1/2 C honey
3/4 C vegetable oil (substitute any neutral oil)
salt & fresh ground black pepper

Method: In a small mixing bowl combine the two mustards, red wine vinegar, honey and whisk to combine. In a steady stream slowly whisk in oil to emulsify. Season with salt and fresh cracked black pepper to taste. Use vinaigrette as needed, refrigerate up to one week.

Yields (approx 3C)

Garlicky Pea Vines

Increasingly a food purist, I take a bunch of Harmony Valley Farm's pea vine and cook them very simply.

1 bunch Harmony Valley Farm pea vines
2 medium shallots (minced)
3 green garlic stalks (minced, white to light green parts only)
2 Tbls vegetable oil for sautéing
salt and fresh ground black pepper

Method: In a colander using cold water, gently rinse the pea vines and pat dry on a paper or tea towel. In a medium sized pan on medium heat, sauté the green garlic and shallots with the oil until soft for 1 -2 minutes. Add the pea vines, salt & pepper, and continue to cook for an additional minute. (Chefs note you may have to adjust the seasoning after cooking to your taste)
Serves 2-3 as a vegetable side