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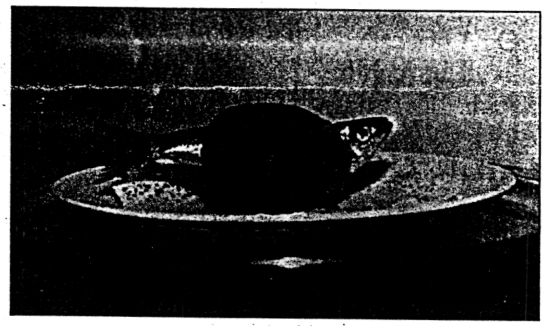
THE Organic REPORT

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE ORGANIC TRADE ASSOCIATION

GMOs:

Moratorium needed in all agricultural production



Citing the adverse impact of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) on organic production, the Organic Trade Association (OTA) has called for a moratorium on the use of GMOs in all agricultural production.

OTA's public statement, issued Jan. 14, included the following points:

Why are GMOs not allowed in organic?

The use of GMOs in agriculture is new technology which works by moving DNA between species in ways that are not possible in nature. This technology has the potential to cause unintended effects on the environment and on human health. Organic certification organizations prohibit the use of GMO seeds or other products of GMOs in organic production.

Doesn't "Certified Organic" mean no-GMOs?

Although the "certified organic" label means GMOs are not used, some organic foods could contain small amounts of GMO material from exposure to pollen from GMO crops in the field or incidental GMO ingredients in processing. Minor ingredients made from corn or soy, in particular, must be carefully sourced to avoid GMO by-products. For this reason, in order to safeguard organic integrity it is necessary that all GMO seed, ingredients, and agricultural products be labeled.

Still Needed

More independent research and regulation are necessary before any more GMOs are allowed in agriculture. As long as GMOs continue to be allowed, organic producers are at risk from background levels of GMOs.

At the very minimum, there should be mandatory labeling of GMO foods, with the real goal of an outright, worldwide moratorium on GMO use in all agriculture.

OTA also supports the consumer's right to know, and to choose foods based on environmental, personal health, religious, dietary or other preferences. Labeling of GMO products or products containing GMOs is necessary to making these choices at this time.

OTA comments to FDA

"Labeling should apply to all genetically engineered products destined for food—not only raw agricultural products but processing enzymes, yeasts, extractions, and other genetically engineered minor ingredients as well," OTA said in written comments submitted to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

OTA pointed out that organic producers take great care to offer customers a quality product with only the limited use of synthetic processing materials or ingredients. "Now, producers are faced with not only the problem of contamination in the field but, more fundamentally, even the inability to be sure they are choosing non-genetically engineered minor ingredients—because they are not labeled."

In testimony at one of FDA's three public hearings held in late 1999, OTA called for mandatory

Continued on Page 4

INSIDE

NEWS AND TRENDS

Continued from Page 7

Crops (SCIMAC) are 200 meters between farm-scale trials of genetically modified (GM) oilseed rape and organic crops, and 50 meters between GM and non-GM rapeseed crops. However, the report showed that bees can carry oilseed rape pollen four kilometers, while wind dispersal of pollen can be three kilometers.

As a result, the Soil Association has recommended that a six-mile notification zone be set as a precondition for licensing all future genetically modified trial plots.

AGRICULTURAL BRIEFS

• West Virginia University has announced that its 36-acre horticulture farm will become a completely organic operation. Research will compare various organic methods, rather than compare organic with conventional methods, according to an article published Sept. 26, 1999, in *The Dominion Post*, Morgantown, West Virginia.

• More than 200 U.S. organic seed farmers are growing 800 breeding lines of traditional crop plants provided by the National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS) maintained by USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS). The objectives of the Oregon-based Farmer Cooperative Genome Project are to increase the diversity of crop seeds available to farmers and gardeners, teach organic farmers how to regenerate seed, and eventually provide NPGS with additional seeds and data.

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFS:

• A Reuters article (Nov. 23, 1999) reported that the 1,000th Dutch farmer has switched to organic techniques, and credited subsidies with encouraging Dutch farmers to choose organic practices. About 20,000 hectares are devoted to organic agriculture, with growth of around 20 percent per year. Dutch Farm Minister Laurens-Jans Brinkhorst has said he wants organic farming to surge tenfold over the next decade, to reach 10 percent of total agricultural output. In 1998, Albert Jeijn, the country's biggest supermarket chain, launched its own line of organic products. By the end of 1999, the chain stocked 150 different organic products, with aims to expand to 400 products by the end of the year 2002.

• On Sept. 9, officials from Cook Islands signed a declaration supporting Cook Islands to be the first nation in the world to go totally organic. "Since it takes three years to become certified, our aim is to reach this goal by three years from this date," signers of the declaration wrote, adding, "We declare that we support this goal and will assist in any way possible for the Cook Islands to become a fully organic growing country which we believe will restore the natural fertility of our soil, improve the quality of our produce and the health and well-being of our people."

RESEARCH BRIEFS

• Results of a five-year study, published in *Toxicology and Industrial Health* (1999, Vol. 15) examined three common farm chemicals (the insecticide aldicarb, the herbicide atrazine, and nitrate from fertilizers). Findings show that the three, when mixed together and consumed at concentrations that mirror those found in groundwater, can significantly disrupt the human immune and endocrine systems, as well as neurological health. Findings from the tests, conducted on mice by environmental toxicologist Warren P. Porter and colleagues at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, suggest that children and developing fetuses are most at risk from such pesticide-fertilizer cocktails. As a result, Dr. Porter warned that the mixtures could possibly result in changes in learning ability and in patterns of aggression.

• Researchers at New York University and the Venezuelan Institute of Scientific Investigations have shown that Bt toxin is exuded into the soil by the roots of Bt corn. Their results, published in the Dec. 2, 1999, issue of *Nature*, found the toxin persisted in various soils for at least 234 days.

REGULATORY AND LEGISLATIVE ISSUES

Continued from Page 5

OTHER ISSUES:

• The Oregon Right-to-Know Bill was signed by Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber on Sept. 1, 1999, making Oregon one of only three states (joining California and New York) to have a system to closely trace pesticide use.

• The California Department of Pesticide Regulation in January released proposed regulations that would impose mandatory, statewide rules on the use of methyl bromide.

• Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman has named 38 members to a newly formed USDA Advisory Committee on Agricultural Biotechnology. The committee, which is authorized for two years, will meet March 29-30 in Washington. Members include Carolyn Brickey, executive director of the National Campaign for Pesticide Policy Reform and member of the National Organic Standards Board; Sharan A. Lanini, member of the California Department of Food and Agriculture Organic Food Act Advisory Committee; Mark Lipson, policy program director of the Organic Farming Research Foundation; Margaret G. Mellon, director of the Agriculture and Biotechnology Program, Union of Concerned Scientists; J. Michael Sligh, director for sustainable agriculture, Rural Advancement Foundation International-U.S.A.; and Margaret M. Wittenberg of Whole Foods Market, Inc. and member of the National Organic Standards Board.