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# ORGANIC BYTES

Food and Consumer News Tidbits with an Edge... From the Organic Consumers Association

[www.organicconsumers.org](http://www.organicconsumers.org)

## There May Be Dolphin in Your "Dolphin Safe" Tuna

The *San Francisco Chronicle* has discovered documents that reveal US government inspectors have been taking massive bribes from Mexican fishing boats to create fake reports that overlook the capture and killing of dolphins during the tuna-netting process. "The whole basis for protecting dolphins in countries that set nets on them is that there are reliable observers on board," said Mark Palmer of Earth Island Institute. "If the observers are being bribed, obviously, the entire program falls apart." [www.organicconsumers.org/corp/tuna042904.cfm](http://www.organicconsumers.org/corp/tuna042904.cfm)

## People Dig Small Family Farmers

A new Roper poll shows that 85% of those surveyed trust small family farms over large scale factory farms in producing safe and nutritious food in a more environmentally-friendly manner. 70% of those surveyed said they are concerned about the pesticides, hormones and antibiotics used in food production. The challenge is to get that same constituency to vote for small-scale sustainable food production with their consumer dollar. [www.organicconsumers.org/organic/roperpoll050704.cfm](http://www.organicconsumers.org/organic/roperpoll050704.cfm)

## Frankengrass—Coming to a Golf Course Near You...

Scotts Company and Monsanto are looking to release a new genetically modified grass that can withstand applications of Monsanto's toxic Roundup pesticides. The announcement has provoked the first occurrence of US government agencies actually condemning a GE plant. The Bureau of Land Management and the US Forest Service are concerned that GE grass could lead to the spread of pesticide-resistant weeds.

[www.organicconsumers.org/ge/golf051004.cfm](http://www.organicconsumers.org/ge/golf051004.cfm)

## Monsanto Backs Down on GE Wheat!

The OCA launched its anti-GE wheat campaign two years ago to educate consumers and farmers about the hazards of GE wheat. This campaign has evolved into OCA's "Millions Against Monsanto." After years of intense pressure from the OCA and the global grassroots, Monsanto has decided to shelve plans to introduce its controversial genetically engineered Roundup Ready wheat. "This is the beginning of the end of genetically engineered crops," said Ronnie Cummins, National

Director of the OCA. "This is a bitter defeat for Monsanto and a

well-deserved victory for family farmers and consumers." Farmers across North America have been resisting the introduction of the biotech wheat crop, based on concerns over its negative impacts on the economy and the environment. Farmer resistance has been strengthened by consumer opposition, which has been especially strong in Japan, South Korea, and Europe. Even in the US consumer pressure has forced major food companies like General Mills to speak out against Monsanto's GE wheat.

Learn more: [www.organicconsumers.org/monlink.html](http://www.organicconsumers.org/monlink.html)



## How Magic GE Beans Make Lots of Money for Monsanto

Once upon a time (okay, to be specific, it was 1999), a Mississippi soybean farmer named Holan McFarling purchased genetically engineered soybean seeds from the Monsanto Corporation to grow his crops. When making the purchase, the farmer signed a complex agreement with the corporation (as all GE farmers are forced to do), stating that he would not save seed from that year's harvest, but instead would pay the corporation again the next year for more seed. Due to the lack of foreign interest in GE soybeans, prices fell dramatically that year, and farmers lost money. Financially broke, McFarling secretly saved seed from his harvest so that he could afford growing crops again. The corporation discovered what the farmer had done and brought him to court.

Here comes the shocker: The small print in the agreement between the farmer and the corporation stated that if the farmer breaches the contract, he owes 120 times the actual cost of the seeds to the Monsanto Corporation. As a result, in 2002 the multi billion dollar Monsanto Corporation successfully sued small family farmer McFarling for \$780,000.

**Happy Ending:** Last week, a Federal appeals court ruled that Monsanto's demands for financial reparations from McFarling are far too excessive. A revised fine has not yet been set.

**Not So Happy Ending:** In a similar case in Tennessee, Monsanto put cotton farmer Kem Ralph in prison for eight months for saving seeds (farmers have done this for thousands of years all over the world). In addition to the prison sentence, the small family farmer is being forced to pay \$1.7 million in damages to Monsanto, despite the fact that the seeds in question actually cost a tiny fraction of that.

**Moral of the Story:** Join OCA's "Millions Against Monsanto" campaign—  
[www.organicconsumers.org/monlink.html](http://www.organicconsumers.org/monlink.html)

## The Mad Cow Cover-Up

Pressure is mounting for a federal investigation into a possible second case of Mad Cow Disease in San Angelo, Texas. Two weeks ago, a cow staggered and collapsed at a Lone Star Beef slaughterhouse, and under federal law should have been tested for the deadly disease. According to government and industry sources, a federal inspector was in the process of taking a brain sample to test for the disease but was ordered to stop by the regional headquarters of the Texas Department of Agriculture. Instead, the cow was sent to a rendering plant to be made into animal food. According to Felicia Nestor, director of food safety at the Government Accountability Project, there have been several recent instances where government offices have attempted to keep inspectors from testing cows showing symptoms of Mad Cow Disease. [www.organicconsumers.org/madcow/fedinquiry050704.cfm](http://www.organicconsumers.org/madcow/fedinquiry050704.cfm)

## Eat Chicken, Get Cancer

A new study published in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* has found that the poultry industry's excessive use of drugs in raising chickens has increased arsenic levels in chicken meat and farm runoff to dangerous levels. [www.organicconsumers.org/foodsafety/arsenic050704.cfm](http://www.organicconsumers.org/foodsafety/arsenic050704.cfm)

## Happy News Tidbit of the Week - Banning Irradiated Foods

The San Francisco Board of Education has voted unanimously to ban irradiated foods in all city school lunch programs. Los Angeles passed a similar ban last year. Irradiation exposes food to a high levels of radiation to control bacteria. Research has shown that it produces possible carcinogens and depletes nutrients and vitamins from the food. [www.organicconsumers.org/school/ban042904.cfm](http://www.organicconsumers.org/school/ban042904.cfm)

### YOU ARE THE OCA!

The Organic Consumers Association represents a half million people, like you, working together to support family farms, sustainable agriculture, safe food, and a healthy environment. Without you, there is no OCA. Together we are bringing about positive change!

## Bush Administration Threatens Organic Standards

Over the past few weeks America's organic standards have once again come under heavy attack. First the USDA's National Organic Program (NOP) announced on April 14 that they would no longer monitor or police "organic" labels on non-agricultural products, opening the door for unscrupulous companies to put bogus organic labels on products such as fish, body care products, pet foods, fertilizer, and clothing. Then on April 28 the Feds shocked everyone by announcing that pesticides, animal drugs, growth hormones, antibiotics, and tainted fishmeal would be allowed on organic farms. The OCA is working hard to stop the degradation of organic standards by the USDA and head off the takeover of the organic market by corporate agribusiness and biotech interests. We are now launching a national campaign called SOS—Safeguard Organic Standards, to make sure that strict organic standards are maintained and that organic monitoring, certification, and policing extends to the full range of consumer products, including body care, clothing, pet food, fertilizer, and other items. But to Safeguard Organic Standards we need your donations and we need your grassroots volunteer energy. Join us, and ask your friends, family, and neighbors to do the same. **Donate:** [www.organicconsumers.org/donations.htm](http://www.organicconsumers.org/donations.htm) **Take Action:** [www.organicconsumers.org/sos.cfm](http://www.organicconsumers.org/sos.cfm)



## US Gets a WTO Spanking over Cotton Subsidies

In late April, the World Trade Organization (WTO) surprised the world by supporting a Brazilian complaint against the US regarding the massive funding wealthy nations put into subsidizing cotton. The US subsidizes its 25,000 cotton farmers with \$3 billion of taxpayer money each year. Eighty percent of these subsidies go to the 2,000 largest cotton plantations in the US. This has allowed US Cotton exporters to dump massive quantities of subsidized cotton on the world market-driving 15 million cotton farmers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America into desperate poverty. The WTO has ruled that these subsidies are illegal impediments to free trade. The WTO decision will likely lead to similar lawsuits from other developing countries in the global South. President Bush has vowed to appeal. Meanwhile, cotton farmers in Brazil and Africa are hoping that an end to US Subsidies could mean they might actually be able to afford to send their kids to school some day.

[www.organicconsumers.org/clothes/takethat050704.cfm](http://www.organicconsumers.org/clothes/takethat050704.cfm)

## OCA Helps Register Youth to Vote

Given the recent USDA attack on organic standards, not to mention other, even more serious, crises in the US and the world, the OCA is exploring ways our members can increase voter participation in the 2004 elections, both by organic consumers and youth. In 2000 only 51% of potential voters showed up at the polls. A strategic segment of non-registered voters are high school students and recent graduates. Sadly, according to statistics, recent high school graduates are the least likely to vote. See the "Open Letter from OCA on Registering Youth to Vote in 2004" at [www.organicconsumers.org/ocu/register.cfm](http://www.organicconsumers.org/ocu/register.cfm) **See also:** *Carry It Forward!*—a multi-media project honoring the legacy of Paul and Sheila Wellstone—a 5 minute voter mobilization video targeting first time voters. Go to [www.carryitforward.org/votefilm.html](http://www.carryitforward.org/votefilm.html) to view and order a \$10.00 copy of *VOTE!* and to download the companion materials prepared to support teachers and others interested in carrying out lessons on voter registration and voting. Thanks for your support!!