

Making America Organic...One Home At a Time!



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Organic News Bytes—January 2006

U.S. Inspector General Slams USDA On Gene-Altered Crops

The USDA is getting some heat for inadequately enforcing regulations on genetically engineered (GE) crops. But this time the heat's not from environmental groups, it's from the agency's own auditor. According to a two year long safety audit by the United States Office of Inspector General, the USDA "lacks basic information about the field test sites it approves and is responsible for monitoring, including where and how the crops are being grown, and what becomes of them at the end of the field test."



The government report goes on to say "Current (USDA) regulations, policies and procedures do not go far enough to ensure the safe introduction of agricultural biotechnology." After 10 years, GE crops now account for 114 million acres in the U.S., one-seventh of all crop acreage. Despite the USDA's negligence in enforcing GE crops regulations, Congress continues to refuse to require mandatory safety-testing and labeling of these experimental food products.

McMad Cow

When one of the world's biggest purveyors of unhealthy foods complains about how poorly the FDA is monitoring U.S. beef safety, you bet the situation must be pretty dire. The McDonald's fast food chain has submitted comments to the FDA, along with a panel of researchers, saying the government's efforts to protect consumers from Mad Cow disease "fall woefully short." Since the first discovery of the brain-wasting disease in the U.S. in 2003, the government has tested less than one percent of all cattle. "It is our opinion that the

government can take further action to reduce this risk," wrote Dick Crawford, McDonald's vice president. The Organic Consumers Association is urging McDonald's and other beef suppliers to protect their customers from the fatal disease by shifting to free range and organic meats raised without feeding the animals blood, slaughterhouse waste, manure, antibiotics, or hormones.

Study: Junk Food Additives Stop Nerve Cell Growth

Mixing common additives, such as aspartame, Brilliant Blue, Quinoline Yellow or monosodium glutamate (MSG) causes nerve cell damage, say researchers at the University of Liverpool. The results from a two-year study were recently published in the journal *Toxicological Sciences*. The researchers found the additives were much more potent in combination with each other than on their own. Mice were exposed to concentrations of additive combinations relative to what a child would receive in an average snack and drink. Researchers were surprised to see the additives interfered with nerve signaling systems and actually stopped the nerve cells from growing. Aspartame is commonly found in diet drinks, candies and flavored medicines, while MSG is frequently found in chips, processed cheese and many processed foods.

Quick Tidbits



Last month, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a current ban of 36 pesticides in areas where the chemicals may negatively impact salmon. The original ban was initiated by a Seattle District Court in response
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Harvest Blend Regular

- Broccoli
- Carrots
- Hass Avocado
- Green Onions
- Zucchini
- Cucumbers
- Spinach
- Green Leaf Lettuce
- Fuji Apples
- Honeydew
- Bananas
- Navel Oranges
- Anjou Pears

See the web site for details on our other options. Produce bag contents are subject to change based on availability.

You Don't Say

"The quality of food is in inverse proportion to the altitude of the dining room, with airplanes the extreme example." - Bryan Miller

"I appreciate the potato only as a protection against famine, except for that, I know of nothing more eminently tasteless." - Anthelme Brillat-Savarin

"Zen does not confuse spirituality with thinking about God while one is peeling potatoes. Zen spirituality is just to peel the potatoes." - Alan W. Watts

"Contrary to popular notion, truck drivers know nothing about good restaurants. If you want a reliable tip, drive into a town, go to the nearest appliance store and seek out the dishwasher repair man. He spends a lot of time in restaurant kitchens and usually has strong opinions about them." - Bryan Miller (again)

"The age of your children is a key factor in how quickly you are served in a restaurant. We once had a waiter in Canada who said, 'Could I get you your check?' and we answered, 'How about the menu first?'" - Erma Bombeck

to a two-year ongoing failure by the EPA to regulate pesticides that were killing off salmon in the region. "We're very happy," said Patti Goldman, an attorney with the environmental law firm Earth-justice. "There have been many attempts by the chemical industry and the growers to get rid of the buffers; we now know they will remain in place."

School districts across the U.S. are responding to government funding cutbacks by beginning the sale of ad space on school buses. For participating districts, banners on the outsides and insides of buses carry ads for everything from soda to pizza to banks. The debate over the issue has become quite contentious among parents and school administrators. "I'm sending my child to school to learn, not to be sold junk food," says Denver parent Melissa Hart.



Although only a handful of school districts have begun the practice, they're each reporting an average of half a million dollars per year in ad revenues.

The United Nations World Food Program has developed a video game that has, surprisingly, become the second most frequently downloaded game on the Internet (the U.S. Army's recruiting tool holds the #1 position). The game, entitled "Food Force," is designed to teach kids how to use food to rebuild community. Players of the video game air drop emergency food to people ravaged by drought and civil war; coordinate shipping and prices for rice, beans and oil on the world market; and design a nutritionally balanced food package for the hungry.



Recipes

Zucchini Fritters

- 1 lb of zucchini, coarsely grated
- kosher salt
- ground black pepper
- 1 large egg
- 2 scallions, finely chopped
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- sour cream or plain yogurt



Salt the zucchini with about 1 teaspoon of salt. Try to remove the excess moisture from the zucchini by either squeezing the liquid out with a potato ricer, or by squeezing with paper towels. Whisk egg in a large bowl; add the zucchini, flour, scallions, and 1/4 teaspoon of pepper. Mix to combine well.

Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Cook fritters in two batches. Drop six mounds of batter (2 Tbsp each) into the skillet. Flatten slightly. Cook, turning once, until browned, 4-6 minutes on each side. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate. Sprinkle with salt. Repeat with remaining batter. Serve immediately, with sour cream or plain yogurt on the side.

Spinach Casserole

- 1 bunch fresh spinach, chopped
- 8 oz crumbled feta cheese
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1 cup cubed processed cheese food
- 1 cup melted butter, divided
- 2 tbsp distilled white vinegar
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 (16 ounce) package phyllo dough

Preheat oven to 425 degrees F (220 degrees C). In a large bowl, combine the spinach, feta cheese, mozzarella cheese, processed cheese food, 1/2 the butter, vinegar, garlic powder, salt and pepper. Mix well and set aside.

Place a layer of phyllo dough into the bottom of a lightly greased 2-quart casserole dish. Spread the spinach and cheese mixture into the dish and top with 4 layers of phyllo dough, spraying each layer with butter-flavored cooking spray. Drizzle the remaining butter over the top. Bake at 425 degrees F for 20 minutes.

Minted Honeydew Soup

- 1 ripe melon, peeled, seeded, and cut into chunks
- 1/4 cup fresh mint leaves
- 3 tbsp lime juice
- 1 tbsp honey
- salt

Process the ingredients in batches in a blender or food processor until smooth. Cover and chill at least 1 hour. Taste, adding additional lime juice, if necessary, and salt. Serve in individual chilled bowls, garnished with lime slices and mint sprigs, if desired.

Avocado Steak

- 1 cups water
- 1/2 cup uncooked long-grain white rice
- 1/2 can refried beans
- salt and garlic powder to taste
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 small onions, chopped
- 2 beef steaks
- 1 avocado, peeled, pitted and sliced

Preheat an outdoor grill for high heat, and lightly oil. In a medium saucepan, bring water to a boil. Stir in rice, reduce heat, cover, and simmer for 20 minutes. Place refried beans in a medium saucepan over medium heat, and season with salt and garlic powder. Cook, stirring occasionally, until heated through.

Heat oil in a medium skillet over medium heat. Sauté onions until browned and tender. On the prepared grill, cook steaks 7 to 10 minutes, to an internal temperature of 145 degrees F. Spread steaks with refried beans, and top with onions and avocado slices. Serve over rice.