

NONSYNTHETIC NEWS

MONTANA ORGANIC ASSOCIATION

TO ADVOCATE AND PROMOTE ORGANIC AGRICULTURE FOR THE HIGHEST GOOD OF THE PEOPLE, THE ENVIRONMENT AND STATE

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 2 SPRING 2005

MOA FRONTIERS EXPLORED BY MARGARET SCOLES

Over 200 of Montana's organic community gathered on February 4-6 at the Red Lion Colonial Hotel in Helena for the first annual conference organized by the fledgling Montana Organic Association. Attendees included certified organic farmers, ranchers, processors, and retailers; producers interested in transitioning to organic certification; consumers; and legislators.

Helena was selected to maximize potential interaction with the state legislature. Governor Brian Schweitzer, Senate President Jon Tester (organic farmer from Big Sandy), and Director of the MT Dept of Ag, Nancy Peter-

son addressed the conference. A group of attendees visited the Capitol on February 7.

Bob Quinn of Big Sandy (the first certified organic farmer in MT) delivered the opening keynote address. His talk focused on the opportunities for value-added agricultural products.

He detailed the development of Montana organics through the first organic regulation in the state, to the federal Foods Production Act of 1990, to the release of USDA's organic regulations in 2001 with full implementation in 2002, and finally to Montana's development of their own state organic certi-

fication program.

Quinn developed Kamut brand wheat, built Kamut International, and now travels extensively promoting the business. Most of Bob's farm, which is now leased out, is certified organic, and focuses on a smaller acreage of experimental crops.

Fred Kirschenmann, Director of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University and organic/biodynamic farmer from North Dakota, challenged the group to a 'new technology'. After laying out the problems of environmental degradation, reliance on fossil fuels, and global cli-

mate change, he gave simple but elegant illustrations from around the world.

In these operations, appropriate technology and complex agriculture systems replaced dependence on fossil fuels, protected the environment, and provided a better return for the farmers.

Parallel sessions for dryland and irrigated producers provided down-to-earth advice from farmers who grow their own nitrogen. During the dryland session, Herb Sand of Glasgow described his experiences with sweet clover and peas. He believes

(Continued on page 4)

NEW MOA BOARD SEATED

The first "official" board of directors was elected during the MOA annual meeting, held Sunday February 6th, on the last day of the conference.

Judy Owsowitz of Whitefish upgraded her position from interim-chair to the

official Chair. Steve Baril from Helena seconds her as the Vice Chair. Glen Babcock of Missoula is the treasurer, in addition to chairing the finance committee and sitting on the conference committee.

Dee Turner from Oilmont retains. Charles (Chaz)

Holt is a member of the finance committee. Rob Knotts of Lambert is chair of the conference committee. Jon Kvaalen is on the membership and education committees. Sandi Shanks of Whitefish is also on the membership committee.

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STOP AND SMELL THE COW-PIES BY R.R. KNOTTS

Wowser! What a show we had in Helena. If you missed it too bad, so sad. If you didn't then you know exactly what I'm saying.

We had an excellent array of speakers: Fred Kirschenman, Senator Jon Tester and Bob Quinn. Each gave truly compelling presentations, in spite of the fact they were preaching to the choir. I came away with warm fuzzies out the wazoo.

And those warm fuzzies have continued on into the following months. Even now as I sit writing it's 18 degrees outside with snow blowing side-

ways, and a rooster pheasant is crowing in my yard. His testosterone laden cackles remind me that it's only a few more days until spring. And like the rooster marching back and forth across the frozen boundaries of his territory, making sure no upstart newcomers get any funny ideas, I can feel the changing season in the wind.

It's a new season for the Montana organic community as well. We now have the impetus behind us to roll into another growing



R.R. Knotts & Co.

season with the full recognition of our state and local communities. Let's use that momentum to keep things moving in a positive direction.

We have a friendly ear in the Senate. Every grocery store from Sidney to Missoula carries at least one organic item, and we have a great bunch of people from across the state who are willing to herald our cause.

Go. Fight. Win team.

Okay, enough of the rah-rah stuff. I hope everyone has a great spring and gets everything planted before the FSA target dates. rek@midrivers.com

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MONTANA ORGANIC LIST-SERVE ONLINE

The Montana Organics list-serve has actually been around for a couple of years. Their web address is Montana_Organic@yahoogroups.com

This forum is just what its name suggests, a place to discuss all things organic in the state of Montana. It is a typical Yahoo web-group and to join you must go to the Yahoo homepage and start following links. This will take a few minutes but when you're finished access to the forum is granted immediately.

Jon Kvaalen is the list moderator. (jak@midrivers.com)

The discussions range from general gripes about the idiosyncrasies of the NOP rules and regulations, to production methods, and everything in between. Some very knowl-

edgeable individuals frequent the list and if you have any questions it is an excellent place to post them. Likewise the list is a great place to buy or sell seed, source different varieties, or just find out which varieties of crops do the best in your region.

The Montana Organics list-serve is also an excellent resource for those who are just beginning to explore the organic world. There's a lot to be said for lurking on a list for several months just to see which way the wind blows. You can learn a lot by keeping your mouth shut and listening to what other people have to say (a lesson I've yet to learn).

So fire up your computer and surf on over to the forum, we're all waiting for you.

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Contact us with all your questions and needs

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NAME THIS PUBLICATION CONTEST BY R.R. KNOTTS

We had an excellent response to the "suggest a name contest" and quite a few people submitted their choices. We still haven't come up with a good way of determining the winner, nor what their prize might be. But those are minor details. Here are a few of the submissions.

The Real Deal

Organic Scoop
 Organic Frontier
 Organically Speaking
 Organic Love
 Free Speech
 Organic Matters
 Growing Concerns
 Montanaganic News
 Naturally News

The Yeoman

And last but not least, my personal favorite:

Nonsynthetic News.

To the best of my knowledge the process is still open so keep those suggestions coming. In the mean time I imagine the most democratic approach is to put'er to a vote! Get on line or drop a letter in the mail. And may the best name win.

NEW ORGANIC COMPLIANCE HANDBOOK AVAILABLE ONLINE

University of California Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SAREP) has developed an Organic Farming Compliance Handbook to help farmers and advisors find accurate information about requirements for organic production and marketing.

Geared towards agricultural professionals in the West, the online guide is organized into seven sections covering introductory material, the principles of organic agriculture, national organic standards, organic production plans, materials compliance, marketing and

economics, and resources and organizations.

This appears to be a valuable tool for producers and certifiers in MT. More information can be obtained at the website listed below.

<http://news.ucanr.org/>

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MOA FRONTIERS EXPLORED

(Continued from page 1)

they help him maintain protein in his wheat. Peas are planted in the spring in the fallow year and terminated in June when they begin to bloom. Clover is planted with the grain and provides green manure the following year.

Darrell Lasilla of Great Falls talked of his experience with black lentils, also spring planted in the fallow year, and said he found them particularly useful during the transition years. Jess Alger of Stanford said that black medic 'was a good weed to establish' and especially attractive to livestock.

Bob Quinn shared his years of experience with alfalfa, peas, and other legumes. He developed a rotation using alfalfa as a short-lived perennial, planted like the clover with spring grain, then harvested for hay the following year, then green manured early

on the 3rd year before planting a crop. He found this rotation best for eliminating Canada thistle and building organic matter, but not as effective during drought years because alfalfa takes more water than other green manure crops. Chickling vetch shows promise, especially in the eastern part of the state.

Organic meat marketers see Montana as a strong production area and are interested in calves, yearlings, and cull cows. To be certified for meat production, animals must be managed organically, including all organic feed, for their entire lifetime and the last 1/3 of gestation period before their birth.

Sessions included Buyers Panels, which gave the vendors and sponsors of the conference trade show a chance to speak about their companies and what crops or products they are looking for.

Montana has nearly 200 certified operations producing a wide variety of products from Kamut, vegetables, herbs, cherries, apples, wine grapes, beef, pork, lamb, and poultry.

Montana leads the nation in acres of certified wheat.

Conference meals reflected the diversity of Montana's products. The February conference date challenged the Food Committee, which strove to plan menus largely of Montana products. Attendees commented frequently on the diverse products available since the first certified operation in 1987.

Tasting sessions included organic porter and ale, brewed at Blackfoot River Brewing Co. in Helena, and fine wines from Rattlesnake Valley Farm & Vineyard in Missoula, made from their own wine grapes or organic Flathead cherries.

THE CHAIR SPEAKS BY JUDY OWSOWITZ

March in the northwest corner of our diverse state is living up to its reputation; in like a lamb and out like a lion. But our greenhouse is toasty warm with just a wee bit of sunshine, so I am busy with the bedding plants indoors. Meanwhile, I hear it is 70 degrees in northeastern Montana, Bozeman is getting dumped on, and planting is going strong in the southeast!

Wow! Isn't Montana grand?? Such variety in one state. I just think about all the different things being drilled, planted, and born each spring here, and I can't help but smile. We may work awful hard, but I do believe that us Montana organic farmers live a privileged life! If you couldn't make it to the MOA



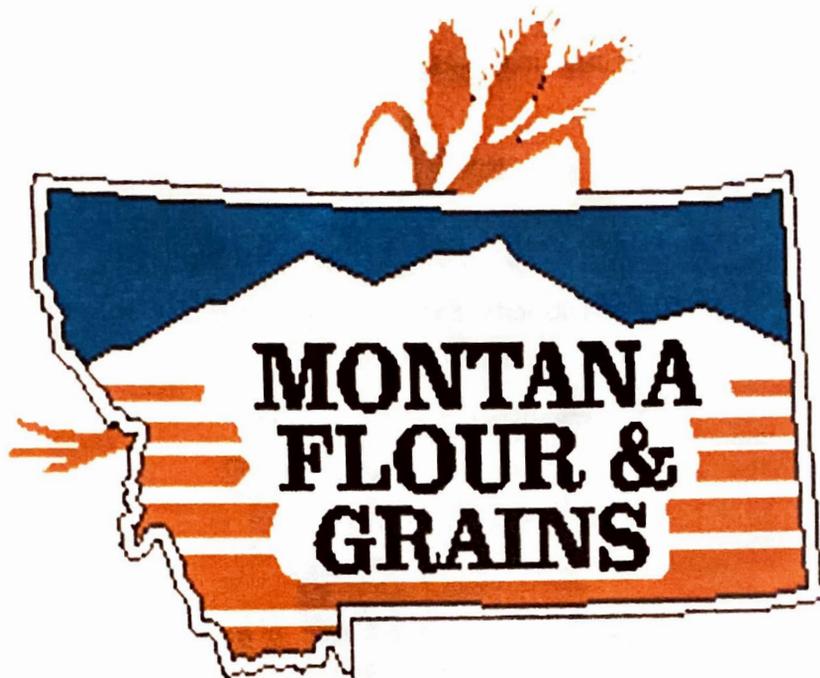
"The Chair"

conference in February, you sure missed an experience. All the hard work and planning paid off, and I do believe that a good time was had by all. Keep your eyes peeled on upcoming MOA newsletters for the vital statistics of the next conference, tentatively planned for late autumn.

One thing that we did at the annual meeting was to elect a very fine slate of Board members. We will be holding our first board retreat in Helena in April. I'm really looking forward to some face to face time with these quality folks. If the truth be told, some of us on the interim board only met for the first time at the February conference! Telephone conferences are sure handy, but a bit cumbersome for theoretical and ideo-

logical work. We'll be looking at nitty-gritty stuff like the budget, but we'll also be talking about MOA's goals and objectives.

For those of you who haven't read the by-laws and articles of incorporation, our objectives are quite ambitious. Which means two things to me; prioritize, and volunteerism!! There is plenty of room in MOA for everybody with drive and desire! Copies of the by-laws, including mission statement and objectives, are available through a board member either hard copy or via email. So, if you would like to hop on the hay wagon, please call one of your board members, listed elsewhere in this newsletter. We look forward to hearing from you!!!



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MOA FRONTIERS EXPLORED CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Organic regulations require a minimum of 3 years of no synthetic inputs prior to certification, and annual inspections to maintain certification. Certification agencies must be accredited by USDA.

The Montana Organic Association was born in December 2003 in Great Falls; the forerunner of this year's conference. The first gathering was a modest one-day conference with a single organic lunch. In just over one year the group established an interim board of directors, organized a conference planning committee, tripled membership several times, and enthusiastically grew the conference to a full 2½ day event with multiple sessions. Lise

Rousseau of Polson served as Event Coordinator.

MOA plans an annual conference as its primary educational activity. Next year's event is tentatively set for late fall at some location east of Great Falls.

MOA's mission is to advocate and promote organic agriculture for the highest good of the people, the environment, and the state. MOA membership includes a newsletter. A 12-member Board of Directors was elected in Helena. For more information, contact (406) 443-7272.

Comments? ioia@ioia.net

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ARE YOU, OR AREN'T YOU AN ORGANIC BEEF PRODUCER?

by Karalee Bancroft & Clay McAlpine

In "Grasp the Nettle" (a book about Biodynamic farming) Peter Proctor describes the effects of Ivermectin. "Avoid buying stock that have had Ivermectin," he says. "Ivermectin is such an efficient internal worm drench that it kills earthworms as well. Its effects last in the dung a number of years, so dung from animals treated with this material will not break down."

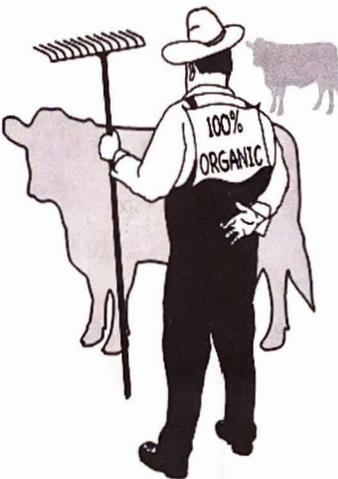
Ivermectin not only kills parasites in livestock, but also the incredibly valuable earthworms and songbirds we rely on so heavily in organic production. And a growing body of evidence links the cause of Mad Cow with the use of organophosphate backpours (www.markpurdey.com).

Do we really believe backpours used on mother cows before the third trimester don't pass onto their calves, or affect their milk? Do we really think a product that lasts years in the soil, killing earthworm populations, doesn't somehow contaminate the meat of those calves which we're trying to sell to consumers demanding "clean" meat? And whether we believe the chemical companies' propaganda or not, we have to remember it's not what our customers want.

I contacted ATTRA, the MDA and ranchers who have successfully eliminated backpours from their herd management practices. They all agree that parasites can be managed without chemicals by integrating a combination of techniques into our livestock management programs:

- 1) reducing stocking density (crowded animals without adequate space tend to be sick animals that spread disease and parasites).
- 2) rotating pastures (which breaks the reproductive cycle of parasites).
- 3) multi species grazing (which further reduces parasite populations for each species).

- 4) keeping animals off of wet, swampy ground (especially if you have a liver fluke problem).
- 5) and most important, an aggressive culling program (selecting animals that are naturally resistant to parasites).



There's always a top end and a bottom end to every herd. Keeping the bottom end is very expensive in the long run. We have to remember, parasites are a symptom of a problem, not the problem itself. If animals are susceptible to parasites, they need replaced just as much as one that doesn't calve easily, don't produce enough milk, or won't mother up. Why damage our land by using backpours, which poison our soil, just to save an animal that should be culled?

Culling is a long-term investment in the health and natural resistance of our herd. In a few years of diligent culling, the top end of our current herd could well be the bottom end of our future herd! Read "The Lasater Philosophy of Cattle Raising" by Laurence Lasater, (order a copy at lasater@rmi.com). Laurence's dad, Tom Lasater is the founder of the

Beefmaster breed, but his techniques work on any breed.

A good, healthy, resistant herd free of synthetic materials reduces cost, keeps with the spirit of organic standards, and is what organic consumers want. The organic market is probably the greatest consumer-driven movement of all time. Think about it ... most successful products, even big success stories like the car or airplane, are a result of a product looking for a market, and finding one.

But the growth in organic production over the past decade has been the result of a market looking for a product; and many farmers have responded. Organic farmers need to remember that, and be true to the product consumers want.

I was at the Montana Organic Association meeting in February. It was a well attended event receiving much positive feedback. However, one of the sessions I saw distressed me. I walked in the beef production workshop, right in the middle of a long conversation about backpours (paraciticides). Several ranchers in the meeting queried the panel and others, seeking ways around the organic stipulation that backpours (Ivermectin) can only be used in emergency situations prior to the third trimester of gestation.

In talking with other farmers later, I found that many organic beef producers have an "emergency" situation every year, just before the third trimester! It seems to me that the conversation at the MOA meeting should have discussed ways to avoid the use of backpours altogether, rather than attempt to find a "legal" way to use them.

We have to remember that consumers drive this business, and what they want is what we should provide. I've not met a consumer yet who wants their meat animals (or their mothers) backpoured.

(Continued on page 6)

ARE YOU AN ORGANIC BEEF PRODUCER?

(Continued from page 5)

Backpours may be "legal" in organic production, but we really should find alternatives that are more in keeping with the spirit of organic standards.

Ivermectin is not an emergency-use product...it's designed for routine-use. The organic rule that allows its use in emergency situations is in conflict with the nature of the product allowed.

The National Organic Program (NOP) standards say: "Ivermectin—prohibited in slaughter stock, allowed in emergency treatment for dairy and breeder stock when organic system plan-approved preventative management does not prevent infestation." It also states: "The producer of an organic livestock operation must not administer synthetic paracitocides on a routine basis."

But the standards say: "The producer must establish and maintain preventive livestock health care practices...selecting species and types of livestock suitable for site-specific conditions and resistance to prevent diseases and parasites, and establishment of appropriate housing, pasture conditions and sanitation practices to minimize the occurrence and spread of diseases and parasites."

So, it would appear that if a producer is following an approved system plan for preventive management, he shouldn't have need for the Ivermectin loophole in the standards. Let's start solving the problem at the root cause rather than merely treating the symptom. Remember, backpouring is the one significant thing that truly separates Organic from Natural production.

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NEW MOA BOARD MEMBERS (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Karalee Bancroft from Boulder, Barry Flamm from Polson, Ole Norgaard from Great Falls and Linda McKinney from Helena make up the remaining members.

The new board faces a number of challenges in the upcoming year, not the least of which is the next annual con-

ference and where it will be held. Other very important venues are the education and membership committees. One of the biggest challenges we faced at the last conference was getting the word out to everyone in the state. The more people we have enlisting members the better our

next conference will be.

Education is also a very important aspect of organic agriculture, and this not only includes consumers and new farmers, but the younger generations as well; FFA and 4H participation could reap unimaginable rewards.

At a recent FFA event I judged

students were asked "What do you think is the future of agriculture?" Not a single one mentioned "organics."

Please note that committee positions are not restricted to board members and anyone with a yearn to help should contact any board member for more information.

BUSH CUTS AG BUDGET \$18 BILLION

SENIOR EDITOR, THE CONSERVATIVE VOICE

President Bush's agriculture budget cuts are more than twice as deep as he had originally said, according to a non-partisan review of the budget, Senator Kent Conrad, ranking member of the Senate Budget Committee, said today.

When the President released his budget last month, he said he was seeking \$7.6 billion in farm program cuts over the next ten years. However, a just-released analysis of the White House budget by the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) shows a far deeper cut of nearly \$18 billion. The cuts are outlined in the President's budget for Fiscal Year 2006, starting on October 1.

"It is absolutely clear the proposed cuts for farm country are far more severe than we were first

led to believe," Senator Conrad said. "Farm cuts of this magnitude would hurt not only farm families, but the Main Street businesses throughout North Dakota. All North Dakotans should be asking, 'What on earth

PRESIDENT BUSH'S AGRICULTURE BUDGET CUTS ARE MORE THAN TWICE AS DEEP AS HE HAD ORIGINALLY SAID.

did we do to deserve this?"

The President's budget calls for sweeping and painful cuts in loan deficiency, counter-cyclical and direct payments. It also includes a new tax on sugar producers and a requirement that farmers pay more for crop insurance.

The President's plan would cost North Dakota farmers and ranchers at least \$20 million a year.

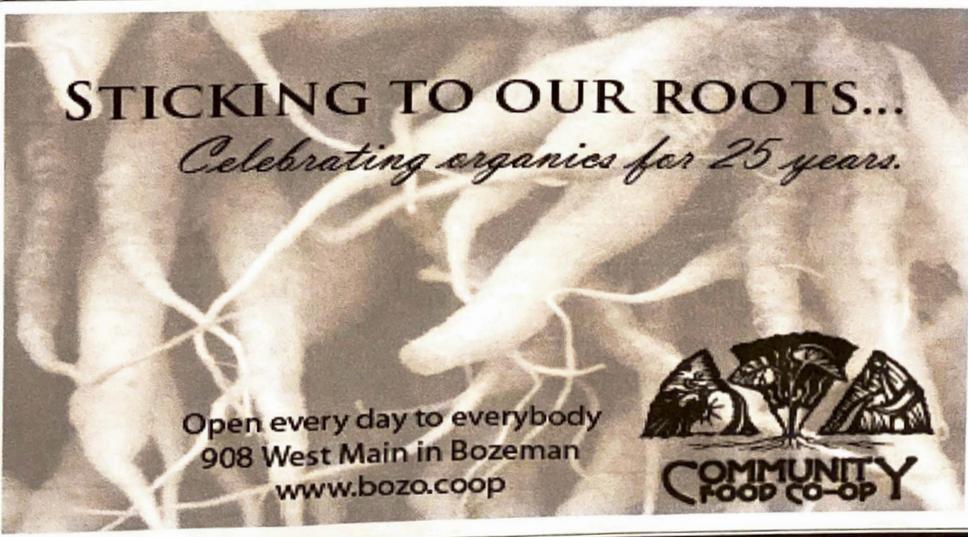
"I don't know how someone can pull \$18 billion out of U.S. farms and still claim to be pro-farmer," Senator Conrad said.

The proposed cuts would go beyond the immediate pain felt by farm families. The cuts would undercut America's negotiating position at the World Trade Organization. Senator Conrad says the cuts would constitute unilateral disarmament in trade talks with our European competitors.

"They support their farmers at a level five times ours. The President's budget cuts undermine our attempts to level the playing field for our producers," Senator Conrad said.

IMPORTANT DATES:

- April 6-9 **MON-TANA'S 75th ANNUAL STATE FFA CONVENTION** Bozeman MT. For more information call (406) 582-4118
- April 11, 10 AM **MT Agriculture Innovation Center board meeting** 300 River Dr. Great Falls, MT
- May 1-3 **ALL THINGS ORGANIC OTA Trade Show**, McCormick Place, Chicago IL. For more information: www.organicexpo.com or expo@divcom.com
- June 24 **MOA 4% Sale** at the Bozeman Co-op. Call Linda McKinney (406) 461-2775.



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Nonsynthetic News is a quarterly publication of the Montana Organic Association. Submit all queries, suggestions, letters and requests for information to the editor: Rob Knotts PO Box 252 Lambert, MT 59243 email:rek@midrivers.com

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The purpose of the Montana Organic Association is to provide education, information, support, assistance promotion and representation for organic producers, processors, handlers, retailers, consumers, researchers, agricultural service providers and other interested parties.