

News bites, June 2018

EU: hydroponics aren't organic

The European Parliament has drawn a hard line against hydroponics being labeled organic, saying organic is “about the soil” and must be “based in the soil.” New EU organic regulations reject the notion that soil-free systems, such as hydroponics, can produce organic yields and that means U.S. hydroponics may not be sold as organic in the EU. The EU also is taking steps to increase organic production by making it more efficient and less costly for small and medium farms to convert to organic methods. (Foodnavigator.com)

Soil health vs. pipelines

A growing number of farmers are raising concerns about acreage destroyed by oil and gas companies laying pipelines in rights of way. They say bulldozers scrape the topsoil off the land and push it aside, but once pipes are laid, the companies don't restore the land as promised. Uneven land with compacted clay has rendered many acres unfit for growing crops. (Agweb.com/Farm Journal)

Fracking harms health

The process of hydraulic fracturing to release natural gas — known as fracking — has been linked to severe health effects, such as respiratory illnesses and cancer, for people living near fracking sites. Research from the University of Chicago has found that infants born to women living near fracking sites are especially vulnerable to adverse health outcomes. Infants born to mothers living less than two miles from a fracking site have lower birth weights, higher rates of mortality and asthma, lower test scores in school, and lower earnings as adults. (Grist)

Tax cuts for big beer

The new tax bill reportedly contains significant tax cuts for the beer industry, but critics say it disproportionately favors the largest brewers. Craft breweries are likely to see less than 10 percent of the savings, leaving them at a further disadvantage to multinational beer giants. (Food & Power)

Fish welfare

Mercy for Animals, a U.S. animal welfare group, is preparing a campaign targeting the aquaculture industry to expose the conditions where salmon, tilapia, catfish and trout are raised. A spokesperson says, “More and more fish are being farmed in intense factory farms. At the same time, there's an increasing amount of research discovering just how intelligent and social fish are as individuals.” (NPR.org)

More GE animals

About 20 species of GE animals reportedly are in the process of being approved by the FDA — despite evidence the techniques used can be so imprecise and inefficient that fewer than 4 percent of the animals survive the process. Critics say engineering animals ignores unhealthy, inhumane conditions on factory farms and that scientists are redesigning animals to fit an industrial mold with few safeguards to protect animals or consumers. Recent research includes silencing the “mothering gene” in laying hens and creating hornless cattle and tailless pigs. (Center for Food Safety)

GE yeast “hops” for beer

New technologies for brewing beer are creating new questions about transparency. A team of beer-brewing chemists and geneticists in California has created a GE yeast that produces hoppy aromas and flavors — without using any real hops at all. The engineered yeast reportedly creates the flavors typical of the Cascade hop, a highly valued variety widely grown in Washington, Oregon and Idaho. (NPR)

GE salmon will be labeled

The federal omnibus budget will require labeling any GE salmon sold in U.S. markets. SEC. 770, page 122, says, “During fiscal year 2018, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) shall not allow the introduction or delivery for introduction into interstate commerce of any food that contains genetically engineered salmon until the FDA publishes final labeling guidelines for informing consumers of such content.” (pccmarkets.com/r/4910)

Sugar tax results

Philadelphia’s tax on sweetened beverages reportedly has succeeded in reducing sugar consumption. Drexel University researchers surveyed 900 residents immediately before and after the tax was implemented and found that compared to residents of nearby cities, Trenton, Camden and Wilmington, Philadelphia residents were 40 percent less likely to drink soda and 60 percent less likely to consume an energy drink each day. At the same time, Philadelphians became 58 percent more likely to drink water. (American Journal of Preventive Medicine /EurekAlert.org)

Exceptional drought and wildfires

Extreme drought conditions have contributed to wildfires in at least five Southwestern states, including Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico, delaying or destroying growth of grass and wheat needed to feed cattle in spring. Finding hay is next to impossible for many and some are selling off some of their herds. Exceptional drought also is reported in Utah and Arizona. (Associated Press)

National GE labeling

As a conscientious consumer, please take time to comment on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) proposal for labeling genetically engineered (GE) foods. USDA is proposing to replace the standard term "genetic engineering" with "bioengineering" and proposes a sunburst happy face, or a leaf over a hillside symbol, as the logo. USDA has exempted meat, dairy and eggs produced with GE feed, and has not yet declared a threshold to trigger labeling — it could be 0.9 percent or as much as 5-10 percent.

It's critical that consumers send comments to USDA by July 3 for the best outcome. For details and to engage easily, sign up for PCC Advocates [here](#).