



Organic Matters

Will Food Safety Legislation Trample Small Farms?

by Steve Baril, MOA Board Member

Federal regulation of food safety is about to undergo a big overhaul, fueled largely by outbreaks of food borne illness—Salmonella in peanut butter, E-coli in spinach, and others. Adding fuel to the fire are criticisms of the nation's food supply by movies like *Food, Inc.* Organic agriculture is not immune to food safety concerns and was caught up in the responses to disease outbreaks even though not implicated in the end.

The House of Representatives already passed its version of a food safety act, HR 2749 - The Food Safety Enhancement Act. This bill was passed last summer and sent to the Senate. The Senate has its own bill, S 510 - FDA Food Safety Modernization Act, which has been stalled since being voted out of committee in November. With health care off the agenda, some people speculate that food safety will soon be debated by the Senate. While the Senate and House bills are similar, some major differences exist and Congress will need to resolve these differences.

Both Acts would expand the FDA's authority to regulate food, including the suspension of the registration of a food facility. The Senate's bill requires facilities to evaluate hazards in their systems and implement controls, to undergo inspections to evaluate compliance with food safety regulations, pay fees to cover costs of inspections and food recalls, and maintain records of production that include trace back ability.

Organic operators and advocacy groups remain watchful and concerned about the impacts of food safety legislation on small- to mid-scale farms and processors. Some of the concerns voiced

Organic operators and advocacy groups remain watchful and concerned about the impacts of food safety legislation on small- to mid-scale farms and processors.

by groups like the National Organic Coalition (NOC) and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) are:

- Small- and mid-scale operations are subject to the same regulatory scheme as large scale operations,
- Regulatory burden would increase for farms that even minimally process their crops for sale to restaurants, food coops, grocers, schools, and wholesale,
- Regulations may not target high-risk areas,
- Paperwork, records, and hazard control programs may be excessively burdensome for small and mid-sized operations,
- Regulations may thwart the development of burgeoning local food systems.

Congress added language to the bills attempting to address initial concerns of organic advocates. The House bill directs the FDA to "take into consideration, consistent with ensuring enforceable public health protection, the impact on small-scale and diversified farms, and on wildlife habitat, conservation practices, watershed-protection efforts, and organic production methods." Exemptions were added for food, facilities, and farms that are already regulated by the USDA.

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Montana Organic Association is a 501(c)6 non-profit organization dedicated to advocating and promoting organic agriculture for the highest good of the people, the environment and the State economy.

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Organic Matters occasionally includes guest articles and opinions. While we review these for relevance to our mission, the opinions in these articles may not reflect the opinions or policy of the Montana Organic Association.

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Facilities doing direct farmer to consumer marketing such as at farmers' markets were exempted from trace back and registration requirements. Grain and hay producers were exempted from electronic trace back requirements.

The Senate also improved its bill. A provision now requires "coordination" between the FDA and USDA, and specifically includes the National Organic Program. The FDA is instructed that regulations shall be flexible and appropriate to the scale and diversity of the farm and shall consider conservation and environmental standards.

Regulations must not conflict with or duplicate organic standards. They must prioritize crops that have been associated with food borne illness. Traceability requirements were amended to restrict recordkeeping for produce farms (except farms that also have processing facilities) to information about the initial sale to the first purchaser of the crop.

A related Senate bill, S. 2758

– The Growing Safe Food Act, would create a national food safety training and technical assistance program for small- and mid-scale farms to help reduce the incidence of food borne illness. *NSAC, NOC and others are pushing to have this bill incorporated in to the larger S.510 so that if we are going to have greater regulation of farms and value-added farm-based products, at least training and technical assistance will be available.*

Should small- and mid-sized organic operators still be concerned about food safety legislation? Changes

made so far go a long way in addressing concerns over duplication of organic standards, and they attempt to avoid conflict with conservation and diversity efforts. Consumer advocates generally say that legislation clearly will not be one-size-fits-all, that Congress has heard loud and clear the messages from organic advocates, and that the final law will consider organic farms and local food systems.

However, groups like NOC, NSAC, and Farmers Market Coalition appear to be concerned, and they vow to remain active to lobby for final language that minimizes regulatory and financial burdens on smaller operators and targets this important legislation where it is needed.

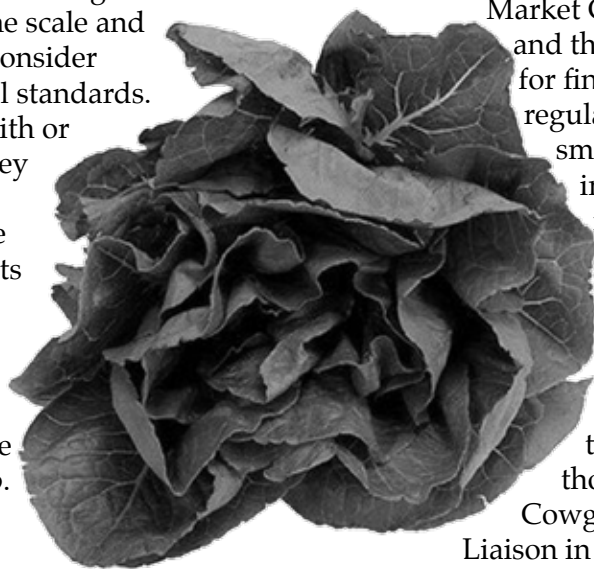
What can you do to influence food safety legislation? The Senate's debate is at hand.

Montana's Senator Jon Tester will be paying attention to this bill and he welcomes your thoughts. According to Jacob

Cowgill, Senator Tester's Agricultural Liaison in Great Falls, the Senator is not

against legislating for safer food, but he does not believe a one-size-fits-all approach is right for many of Montana's farmers, ranchers, and processors. You can contact Senator Tester in Washington DC at 202-224-2644 or you can contact Mr. Cowgill at 406-452-9585 or email him at jacob_cowgill@tester.senate.gov.

Editor's note: Critical action is being taken on this issue as this newsletter goes to print. Please visit MOA's website at www.montanaorganicassociation.org to keep up with the latest developments on food safety legislation and how you can get involved.



Response to EIS on GE Alfalfa

by Kiki Hubbard

A big thanks to MOA members for submitting public comments with the U.S. Department of Agriculture regarding its draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on genetically engineered (GE) alfalfa. Your voices contributed to more than 200,000 comments. Not since the proposed federal organic standards in 1997 has USDA received such a huge outpouring of comments.

MOA's comments described the shortcomings of the draft EIS and the implications for Montana's organic community, stating: "MOA believes the draft EIS dismisses the adverse economic effects that contami-

nation by Roundup Ready alfalfa will have on organic alfalfa seed and hay growers, including those who raise organic livestock."

MOA continues to weigh in on this timely issue. This month we joined one of seven amicus briefs (a "friend of the court" statement) filed in support of defendants who oppose GE alfalfa in the landmark case, *Monsanto v. Geertson Seed Farms*. Monsanto seeks to overturn a federal appeals court's decision to ban GE alfalfa until the court-ordered EIS is completed. The verdict is likely to affect the regulation of other GE crops, including GE sugar beets. The Supreme Court will hear arguments later this month. Log on to www.montanaorganicassociation.org to keep up with the latest news on this important issue.

On the Farm by Jim Lindquist

It's not the sunny, warm, Bluebird kind of a Spring day in Bloomfield today. It's cold and windy, but it's *supposed* to get better tomorrow. For me, the first signs of Spring are the birds coming back. The geese and Sandhill Cranes come over in the thousands. The Meadowlarks singing from the fence posts and the Robins hopping in the yard are sure signs of Spring. But it's tough on them if they come too early since there isn't much to eat yet.

Our cows have been calving for a couple of weeks now. For me, it's best to start calving about the first of April—the weather is usually more cooperative than in March and there's more dry ground for the calves to lie on. The grass is slow in coming this year and I'm about out of hay, so I might have to turn the cows out a little early so they can graze on the old grass along the creek. That's not what I want to do while I'm still calving. I like to keep them close to home for that. So far, our cows are faring really well. We bought a light-birth-weight bull from a neighbor and he throws good light-weight-calves that wean heavy. That's a good deal for everybody.

Before I get too excited about planting any crops, I want to wait until some weeds start emerging and till them under (or eat them—see *The Organic Kitchen* on page 10). That way I'll have fewer weeds to compete with my crops. We have all the seed we will plant this year that we've saved from last year's crops. We'll be planting Fortuna Spring wheat, some hay barley and a few Delta Yellow peas. I want to plant the peas first and the hay barley last. I like to seed my wheat at one hundred pounds per acre and mix in about six to eight pounds of yellow sweet clover with it that



The ubiquitous dandelion

will be my green manure crop for next year. I'll do the same with the hay barley. With the peas, I'll plant three bushels to the acre. I have such a small place that I only have a fifty-fifty crop rotation. Some years I can't afford the seed for green manure, so I just plow down the weeds.

I've been getting the farm equipment serviced and fixing all the stuff I broke last year. I'm trying to make some improvements on a few things, such as my grain cleaner. I just got a new/used grain drill from a friend that will allow me to get my seed in the ground a lot faster. With dry land farming, that's pretty important. We had better than normal snowfall last Winter, so the sub-moisture is looking good. We hope to get some of

those good Spring rains too. As always, we're looking forward to the best crop ever.

Sharon's kitchen garden is getting underway. We've hauled in some old cow manure and tilled it under. Nothing's sprouted yet, but we anticipate the first radishes and spinach plants soon. She's going to plant a few fruit trees this year—apples and pie cherries, along with some currant bushes. We'll see how this works out. In the past, some of our tree planting hasn't gone too well.

This is just a brief snapshot at how Spring is progressing in beautiful Eastern Montana. I hope all goes well for you and that you have your best crops ever. Now we should all get outside and enjoy the day.



1/2 hour-old calf and her Angus-cross mother

Legislative Session 2011

The Board Development Committee is looking for action-oriented volunteers. Looking ahead to the 2011 Montana legislative session, we would like your help and your input. There will be bills in the upcoming session that the Montana Organic Association is interested in paying close attention to. If you would like to help by monitoring their progress for our membership, please let us know. It is a simple process, and we would be happy to get you started. Then we would be able to pass along alerts to the rest of the membership, when appropriate. Also, if you have any thoughts about legislation that we need to present and/or endorse, we welcome your ideas and suggestions for contemplation and possible action. Please contact Judy at (406) 862-6362.

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"Be the change you want to see in the world." ~Mahatma Gandhi

Inoculant Clarification

by Doug Crabtree, Montana Department of Agriculture

The situation involving approval of certain inoculants for use in organic growing was, and still is, very complex. Here is a brief synopsis:

1. In June 2009, the department received notice that NitraStik C and Nitragin Gold were “dropped” from the OMRI list.
2. Upon further investigation, we learned that EMD had voluntarily withdrawn from the OMRI.
3. After even further, off-the-record investigation, we learned that OMRI had determined the products would no longer qualify for listing as “approved,” due to the use of an unidentified synthetic ingredient in the substrate used to grow the inoculant bacteria.
4. Based on 2) and 3), the department informed growers that the inoculants were no longer approved for use after June 1, 2009; that the department was reviewing the products; and that each grower must provide information on any inoculant proposed for use BEFORE its use in 2010.
5. The department received detailed product information from the manufacturer, EMD Biosciences, Inc.
6. We reached a **preliminary** determination that the products should continue to be allowed (in contrast to OMRI’s un-official determination).

7. After extensive consultation with other certifiers, we determined that the consensus among certifiers (OCIA, CCOF, MOSA, OTCO, among others) was that the inoculants are allowed; that OMRI was “digging too deep” in considering the substrate on which bacteria were grown; and that no synthetic substances, GMOs or irradiated materials are present in the actual products.

8. The department formalized its determination, as indicated in the memo distributed to seed dealers and soon to be included in each producer’s application packet.

It is important to note that only the current versions of NitraStik C and Nitragin Gold have been reviewed and that we have no control over any potential changes in the products. As such, it is still the responsibility of each organic producer to inform their certifier of ALL substances/materials used or intended to be used as crop inputs in organic production AND to provide the certifier with sufficient product information to allow a determination of the substances’/materials’ acceptability. Producers will have to provide much more information now that the products are no longer OMRI listed.

For more information, contact Doug Crabtree at (406) 444-9421.

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"Access to Pasture" Rules

by Sean Mulla, Montana Department of Agriculture

On February 12, 2010 the USDA announced final rules on access to pasture for organic livestock. The new rules are designed to reassure consumers that milk and meat products carrying the organic label come from ruminants that actively graze on pasture.

This final rule is the result of a long process of comments, discussions, reviews and consensus. The new standards are designed to address and resolve complaints that large scale dairies and beef finishing operations, claiming to be organic, were bending the rules for competitive edge and profit and damaging natural resources. The new rules are being hailed as a victory for small family farms, environmental protection, animal welfare and consumers alike.

Essentially, the new rules expand the scope of NOP administrative oversight and enforcement capacity pertaining to animal living conditions, animal feed and natural resource protection. Standards now specifically require producers to:

- Provide year-round access for all animals to the outdoors.
- Establish a functioning management plan for pasture, as part of the organic system plan (OSP).
- Provide ruminants with pasture throughout the grazing season for their geographic location.
- Ensure ruminants derive not less than an average of 30 percent of their Dry Matter Intake (DMI) requirement from pasture grazed over the course of the grazing season, which is 120 days minimum.

The minimum 120-day and 30% DMI standards were arrived at through public comments, a national dialogue with stakeholders and consultation with university researchers who have expertise in ruminant nutritional requirements. The rules are aimed at ensuring organic ruminant livestock operations are able to provide pasture for their herds across a wide range of climatic zones in the U.S.

The rules are good for consumers and for the well being of the animals. Continuous total confinement of any animal indoors is prohibited and continuous total

confinement of ruminants in yards, feeding pads and feedlots is prohibited. But, there are additional record keeping requirements for ruminant livestock producers.

The rules are more specific, requiring producers to document more details pertaining to feed sources, percentage of each feed type in the feed rations in relation to the class of animal (and life stage), including pasture. Producers must also document seasonal feed changes, and provide the method for calculating dry matter demand and dry matter intake.



The new rules are being hailed as a victory for small family farms, environmental protection, animal welfare and consumers alike.

If you are a ruminant producer, help is available. Dry matter demand (DMD) and dry matter intake (DMI) variables for classes of ruminant animals are available from the National Research Council, and are available online through the NOP website. Also, DMI and DMD calculation work sheets are also available online through the NOP website. Also, the NOP is conducting workshops throughout the country to help people understand the new rules and how to comply.

The final rule will become effective on June 17, 2010.

The implementation period for the rule is one year, ending on June 17, 2011. Operations which apply for organic certification after June 17, 2010 must comply with this final rule prior to certification. Existing operations certified as of February 17, 2010 must fully implement the provisions of this final rule by June 17, 2011.

Although the final rules for access to pasture have been published, the National Organic Program is still taking comments for rules pertaining to finishing slaughter stock. Currently, the standards allow for limited confinement for finish feeding, and exempt the 30% DMI from pasture for finishing slaughter stock. But the animals must still have pasture access, if it corresponds with the grazing season. Also, confinement areas for finishing organic slaughter stock must be large enough to prevent crowding or competition for food. The standards also state that the finishing period cannot exceed one-fifth (1/5) of the animal's total life or 120 days, whichever is shorter.



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The Other End of Good Times

by Sam Schmidt, Montana Milling/MOA Board Member

I'm not telling you anything you haven't already heard, but organic grain sales are *slow*. Not the condition we like to see, but one we're all facing—everyone from producers to retailers. Why? The economy is in a recession and people are choosing to cut back. Some consumers are still very passionate, but others just view organics as an alternative and will either pay for the organic practice of a product or they won't. Everything is analyzed for its "value" and the organic industry has always strived to provide a better food source for both consumers and the environment. I wish I could tell you the rebound is just around the corner, but what I do believe, is that the quality of organic products must never be affected by economic times, good or bad, or their "value" will be lost forever.

NOSB Update

by Barry Flamm

As you read this, the Spring NOSB Board Meeting in Woodland, California, will be wrapping up. It will have been another busy session and as soon as I return home I will post a report on MOA's website at www.montanaorganicassociation.org/nosb.htm.

One topic that will be discussed at the Spring meeting will be the Sunset Review, and I'm not talking about the beautiful Big Sky variety of sunset. It's the process that is mandated in the Organic Food Production Act for materials that have been placed on the National List. The handling of this process by the Board has been controversial. The Policy Committee decided to review the process and examine alternatives for discussion at the Spring meeting and make recommendations (also based on public comment) at the Fall meeting. Please read the excerpted article, *NOSB Sunset Review* on pages 8-9 in this newsletter. The public comment period will likely be in late Summer or early Fall, so look for the announcement in MOA's newsletters and on the MOA website and send in your comments.

"If one person is unkind to an animal it is considered to be cruelty, but when a lot of people are unkind to animals, especially in the name of commerce, the cruelty is condoned and, once large sums of money are at stake, will be defended to the last by otherwise intelligent people."

~Ruth Harrison - Author of *Animal Machines*

Here's Looking at You

Member Profile

Nate Powell-Palm is a young, ambitious MOA member who raises certified organic beef west of Belgrade.

Like many ranchers before him, he's found that having a cattle herd required him to be self-supporting with multiple occupations. Since May 2008, Nate has been giving horseback riding lessons to beginning riders who have rarely ever touched a horse before starting. To pay off the loan he used to purchase the original cows, he operated a firewood processing business. Additionally, he began playing the violin in first grade, and the money from his performances has covered the cost of straw. While high school has rarely been as interesting as organic farming for him, Nate hopes to advance his knowledge of sustainable agriculture and practices as he embarks on his college adventures.

Nate's interest in organic agriculture began with one simple question: What is in my 4-H steer's feed? His family has always maintained their land in an organic manner, so when Nate took on a 4-H steer and was told by the program to feed this "magic" pellet, he questioned whether or not animal byproducts were really what he wanted to use to produce food that other people would be eating. The 4-H program provided him with a foundation for understanding the conventional cattle industry. But it also, unintentionally, pushed him toward organic cattle production. In 2004, Nate secured a loan from the Montana Department of Agriculture, which allowed him to purchase three bred cows, the foundation of his herd. With the help of artificial insemination and several cleanup bulls, Nate's herd has since grown to ten brood cows, four yearlings and Bubba the bull, who is trained to pull a cart.

Nate began the organic certification process in the Fall of 2007. The process was daunting, but with the help of many mentors from the organic community, he received his first organic certification in October of 2008.

Last year, Nate sold his first crop of calves. This year, in addition to the calf crop, he added the direct sale of finished, packaged beef to his operation. This has brought him face-to-face with the folks who will actually be eating his beef.

"Relationships with my customers, my vendors, and my mentors, are what have made this venture truly rewarding," says Nate. "I'm incredibly fortunate to have formed these friendships that will continue for years to come."



Nate Powell-Palm

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NOSB Sunset Review

NOSB Policy Development Committee

The National Organic Standards Board Policy Development Committee is soliciting comments from the NOP and public on the process that the NOSB will use in the future for sunset review. The input will be used to revise the directions in the NOSB Policy and Procedures Manual. This revision is intended to be presented as a recommendation for the Fall 2010 Board meeting.

The current process for Sunset Review is guided by statutory language in the Organic Foods Production Act, Sec. 2118(e), the NOSB Policy and Procedures Manual (PPM), and several Federal Register notices that describe the process.

While the statute does not define the process for validating an exemption or prohibition, it requires the NOSB to review "as provided in" Section 2118 of the act. In the strict sense of the law, this language would seem to require that the National List to be reevaluated to ensure that the list is in conformance with the standards as spelled out in Section 2118; "that the use of such substances – (i) would not be harmful to human health or the environment; (ii) is necessary to the production or handling of the agricultural product because of the unavailability of wholly natural substitute products; and, (iii) is consistent with organic farming and handling." This reasoning would extend to the other provisions of this section as it applies to prohibitions and exemptions reviewed in the sunset process.

The Federal Register notices reinforce the notion that the sunset process is a complete review that assesses those materials on the list in accordance with the standards of Section 2118. As a result, the notices seek public input in three categories: "Category 1. Adverse impacts on humans or the environment?; Category 2. Is the substance essential for organic production?, and; Category 3. Is the substance compatible with organic production practices?"

The document entitled "Sunset and the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances," (NOSB Materials Committee Draft) finds in its section on background, "We consider the Congressionally-mandated sunset of exemptions and prohibitions contained in the National List to be a similar review and renewal process – that of the conditions that justified the exemption or prohibition in the first instance." The NOP has previously taken the position that the Board has narrow authority under the sunset process. More recently, NOP in a document entitled "Sunset Review Under the National Organic Program (NOP)" (February 16, 2010), the program has provided an interpretation of OFPA that enables broader Board authority to modify and amend annotations, and a shifting of the burden of proof to the public to retain exempted materials. It should be stated that all the documents reviewing the sunset process state that public comments should inform the NOSB process of review at the front end.

The PDC is inclined to move as quickly as possible to establish through the sunset process procedures that (i) shift the burden of proof to those defending the renewal or removal of materials on the National List, and (ii) enable the Board to make recommendations to modify or amend annotations associated with listed materials. The committee is seeking public comments to inform its formulation of a revised PPM sunset policy for recommendation at the Fall 2010 NOSB meeting.

Sunset Implementation Options

1. Burden of proof on the industry to show that the material should remain on the National List of Allowed Substances. This approach requires re-petitioning or some form of formal request from the industry (manufacturer, user). This approach conforms more closely to the traditional meaning of "sunset." Items on the National List automatically go off the list in five years, unless they are petitioned to remain. Nonsynthetic substances prohibited for use in organic crop or livestock production remain prohibited unless petitioned to be allowed. The burden of proof that a material should remain on the National List should not lie with the NOSB.

2. Burden of proof on the NOSB to show that the material should be delisted.

A. Policy and Procedures Manual Update: Sunset Procedures November 2008. This alternative should be considered by what it actually says and not necessarily by the Board's present or past sunset actions. This approach does not mandate "evergreen." The designated committee and finally the full Board have the ability and duty to recommend the removal or continued listing of a material.

B. "Evergreen Approach." This approach has a material staying on the National List, using the petition process to initiate removal of a substance.

3. Sunset phase-out (hybrid) approach (combining the best of 1&2). The sunset phase-out or hybrid approach enforces the notion that materials on the National List will phase-out unless they are defended by those who believe it is essential to organic production "because of the unavailability of wholly natural substitute products."

The Policy Development Committee intends to make a recommendation on changes to the sunset review policy after the receipt of public comments on the issues outlined in this document.

Visit www.montanaorganicassociation.org/NOSB.htm for the full review document and more detailed information about the regulatory and legal background, relevant areas in NOSB Policy and Procedures Manual and OFPA, discussion points, and the pros and cons of the implementation options. The public comment period will likely be in late Summer or early Fall, so look for the announcement in MOA's newsletters and on the MOA website and send your comments in. Your input is valuable and will help determine future policy.



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Spring is a hopeful time of endless possibilities!

Try these recipes and enjoy some of Spring's early offerings. Be it spring greens or weeds, both are incredibly nutritious and surprisingly delicious.

Remember - if you can't beat 'em, eat 'em! -- weeds, that is.

Potato Soup with Kale and Chorizo (bonappetit.com)

5 tablespoons olive oil, divided	1 1/2 pounds potatoes, peeled, cut into 1/4-inch-thick slices
1 large onion, chopped (about 2 cups)	8 cups low-salt chicken or vegetable broth
8 ounces fully cooked smoked Spanish chorizo or other spicy, sausage-type meat, casing removed if necessary, chopped	1 1/2 pounds kale or other spring greens, stemmed, torn into small pieces (about 16 cups lightly packed)
2 teaspoons smoked paprika	3 cups 1/2-inch cubes bread

Preparation

Heat 3 tablespoons oil in large pot over medium heat. Add onion; cook until translucent, about 8 minutes. Add chorizo and paprika; stir 1 minute. Add potatoes and broth. Increase heat and bring to boil. Add kale; stir until wilted and soup returns to boil. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer 1 hour, stirring occasionally. **DO AHEAD:** Can be made 1 day ahead. Refrigerate uncovered until cool, then cover and chill. Rewarm before serving.

Meanwhile, heat 2 tablespoons oil in large skillet over medium heat. Add bread cubes and sauté until golden, about 10 minutes. Sprinkle croutons with salt and pepper. **DO AHEAD:** Can be made 4 hours ahead. Let stand at room temperature.

Divide soup among bowls. Top with croutons and serve.

Fried Dandelion Blossoms (mountain-breeze.com)

New dandelion blossoms on short stems	hot cooking oil
1 c. milk	1 egg
1/2 tsp. salt	1 c. flour
	pinch of pepper

Preparation

Pick new dandelion blossoms, those on short stems, and rinse well in cool, lightly salted water.

Cut off the stem ends close to the flower heads, leaving only enough to hold the petals together, because the stems and greenery are bitter.

Roll the dandelion flowers in paper towels to blot up the excess moisture, then dip each one in a batter made of 1 egg, beaten, with 1 cup milk, 1 cup flour, 1/2 teaspoon salt and a pinch of pepper.

Drop the batter-coated blossoms into deep hot fat (375 degrees) and fry until lightly browned.

Drain on absorbent paper;

Sprinkle with more salt, if needed, and serve at once.

To Your Health by Susan Waters

It's probably still too early to harvest much from the newly thawed earth, but what you're likely to find in the coming weeks are spring greens and of course, weeds. "A plant out of place" is a kind way of describing weeds. But while futile and persistent efforts to eradicate them can frustrate the most patient of growers, these pesky plants can be culinary treats.

Spring greens are a cultivar of Brassica oleracea, similar to kale, in which the central leaves do not form a head or form only a very loose one. It is considered to be closer to wild cabbage than most other domesticated forms, and is grown primarily in northern climates where its tolerance of cold winters is valued for an early spring supply of edible leaves. The leaves, being loose, are fully exposed to light, and so are dark green and are strongly flavored but are also particularly rich in vitamin C, folic acid and dietary fiber, making them a very healthy food.

Edible weeds are loosely defined as organisms of the vegetable kingdom suitable by nature for use as a food by human beings. The most common edible weeds are dandelion, chicory, cattails, amaranth, milkweed, blackberry, burdock, Japanese knotweed, red clover, stinging nettle, plantain, purslane and wild violet. Not all parts of any given weed are edible, and some are poisonous, so accurate identification is essential. There are many great weed identification books in your local bookstore as well as many online resources. Be sure your weed source is away from roadways and contamination by chemicals or animal feces. Only eat the parts of plants that you know to be edible.

Nutrition and Medicinal Qualities

Leafy greens (especially the darker varieties) are particularly important in today's diet because of the known benefits for disease prevention, weight management and achieving optimal health. The vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, fiber and phytonutrients in these foods are not the same when they are obtained from supplements, so it is critical to get at least five servings of leafy greens, various vegetables and fruits each day for the biggest health benefit. Many so-called "weeds" have similar nutritional benefits and have been used for centuries for their various medicinal value.

Choosing Your Greens

Since most greens have a short life, prepare and eat as soon as possible. If purchasing, choose bunches that still have attached roots. Avoid yellowed, wilted or slimy leaves and remove any from the rest.

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Cleaning

Trim stems and remove any leaves past their prime. Dunk greens in a large bowl or clean sink filled with cold water and agitate them around to remove dirt and grit. Lift leaves out of the cleaning water and place them in a salad spinner. Spin for a few seconds and if you see grit at the bottom of the spinner, drain it and repeat the process until the water comes out clean. (Use a pasta sieve to wash and drain the greens if you don't have a spinner. You can also use a clean pillow case to shake the greens partially dry.)

Drying

You can leave the leaves damp if you plan to cook them immediately, but you should dry them for use in salads (dressing will cling better) or if you are going to store them in the fridge (will spoil if left wet). Spread leaves on a clean kitchen towel and turn occasionally to dry thoroughly.

Storing

When the cleaned greens are dry, roll them up loosely in the slightly damp kitchen towel and insert into a plastic bag. Refrigerate with the bag slightly open to allow air to circulate. Fresh, clean and dry greens should last several days in the fridge.

Take advantage of all that Spring has to offer this year. Cheers...and to your health!

Save the Dates

MOA Eastside Event

Saturday, October 9, 2010 in Glasgow, MT

MOA Missoula Conference and Member Meeting

Saturday, November 6, 2010

Visit www.montanaorganicassociation.org for details and updates.

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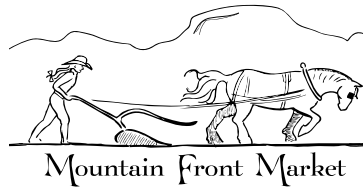
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A View from the Chair

by Ole Norgaard

Spring has arrived to this part of the world with birds singing their tunes, new calves stretching their young legs, crops sprouting green shoots and all the flora and fauna springing to life for a new season. The arrival of Spring always means a busy time for all of us farmers, ranchers, gardeners and food producers. It's also a time where the weather can really play with a farmer's mindset. Montana weather changes happen so fast, and with a moderate el-Niño going on, some volcanic activity in Iceland and a few changes in the jet stream, who knows what weather changes will affect us next.

As well as the seasons' changes over the course of a year, there are also seasonal changes in organics—an ebb and flow in the market place that for many farmers right now, seems to be more ebb than flow. For some farmers, there is still a lot of grain in the bins from last year's harvest and the organic cattle market is down too. Fortunately, fruit and vegetable farmers are enjoying a little more flow.

In light of these ups and downs, a look at organic trends over the last 20 years, both here and abroad, show a general upward trend with some flat spots in between. Organic food producers are in it for the long haul and the ebb and flow of our commodities is part of the reality we

live in. The world's population is still growing, but information is flowing freely across the globe and the younger generation is seeing the world through a different lens. The principles of "green," "clean," "healthy," "sustainable," and "integrity" are being embraced by many young people and these new generations are the decision makers of tomorrow.

Over the last several months, MOA has been closely monitoring and acting on the food safety issues that are currently being decided upon in Washington, D.C. We have written letters to our Senators and have supported the efforts of other groups to minimize the impacts these laws could have on the world and the health of its population. We have also attended meetings about farmer protection issues and have supported MSU in their efforts to minimize cuts to their funds and their work. These important developments and decisions are happening very quickly, so frequently visit the MOA website at www.montanaorganicassociation.org to stay informed and active. MOA is steadily working on making our voices heard and making a difference in the world we're living in. We hope you are too. Let us know how we can help.

Enjoy the emerging Spring and all the hope it brings.