

AGRARIAN ADVOCATE



COMMUNITY ALLIANCE WITH FAMILY FARMERS

Leafy Greens and Food Safety

After a history of recent disease outbreaks related to California-grown fresh-cut processed spinach, lettuce, and salad mixes, feverish attention is being given to new requirements aimed at preventing future problems. As public health officials, regulators and industry organizations geared up, CAFF also became involved. CAFF was concerned that the new rules under discussion were encouraging farms to take out their conservation plantings; were setting up expensive and uncoordinated testing efforts; and were not focused on the most important risks.

On February 27, 2007, the Joint California State Assembly and Senate Committees on Agriculture held an *Informational Hearing on Farming and the Environment: An Overview of the 2006 E. coli Outbreak*. CAFF was invited to attend, representing our members. The following is a summary of the main points made by Judith Redmond, CAFF's president at the joint meeting (see the complete testimony at www.caff.org/policy/leafygreen.shtml).

Limit the Scope of the New Rules to Processed, Fresh-Cut Greens

The sense of urgency around *E. coli* in leafy greens has resulted in an approach that does not target the most significant risks and mistakenly encompasses issues that are not risks at all. Since bagged salads and spinach were the most common vehicle for produce-linked outbreaks of 0157 during 1990 to 2004, our effort should focus on them as known risks.

Foods that are grown to be bagged and sold in their raw form as



“ready to eat” need to be produced using good agricultural practices. Centralization of washing and packaging is a major risk factor, since greens from many locations are chopped and mixed together. The product is then enclosed in a packaged environment that can reach high humidity and provide favorable conditions for microbial growth. Then it is distributed nationwide, which vastly increases the risk of contamination.

Because bagged mixes and salads are highly perishable, there is consensus that they must be distributed, stored and displayed under

See **Leafy Greens** continued on page 6

Introducing the Sacramento Valley Growers Collaborative

BY DAVID LEVIN

The groans and grumbles that often accompany a meal in a hospital cafeteria, college dining hall, or a public school may soon fade. A shift in produce sourcing options for institutional kitchens is taking place in our region.

The Sacramento Valley Growers Collaborative, after many months of planning and discussion is up and running in Yolo County! Giving small-scale growers an accessible way to bring their produce into a new market, the Growers Collaborative (GC) helps to overcome many of the obstacles that have long prevented institutional food directors from making local purchases. Barriers such as the need for a refrigerated delivery truck, a high level of liability insurance, and perhaps most daunting, the inefficiency of trying to juggle the deliv-

ery and invoicing of many small purchases, have made local sourcing unrealistic for many kitchens.

The GC takes over this juggling act, finding an institutional kitchen for local produce, and supplying food directors with a single point of purchase for an abundance of local foods. With a market in California that includes some 21,000 daily meals at health care and education facilities, the Growers Collaborative opens up many new possibilities for small and mid-size growers.

GC acts as a central communication, consolidation, and distribution hub. By connecting food directors through a one-invoice

See **Growers Collaborative** continued on page 4



Cultivating healthy farms,
food & communities

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Mission: CAFF is building a movement of rural and urban people to foster family-scale agriculture that cares for the land, sustains local economies and promotes social justice.

The Agrarian Advocate/Farmer to Farmer is the quarterly publication of the Community Alliance with Family Farmers.

Agrarian: 1. Relating to land or to the ownership or division of land. 2. Of agriculture or farmers generally. [From the Latin *ager*: a field or country]

CAFF is a nonprofit membership organization. Members are part of an active, effective voice for CAFF's mission. Benefits of membership: subscription to this newsletter, voting privileges and timely updates on CAFF activities. Membership levels are: \$20 Student, \$50 Basic, \$250 Gardener, \$500 Tiller, \$1,000 Steward.

CAFF encourages contributions of any size to support our work. Contributions to CAFF are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by the law.

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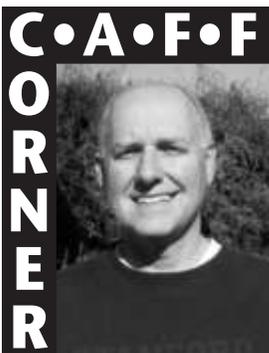
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Dilemmas of Genetic Engineering

BY DAVE RUNSTEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CAFF has long been concerned about the consequences of genetic engineering (GE) in agriculture. We adopted a resolution in 2000 calling for a moratorium on the use of GE crops until further research established their safety. This is in line with the "precautionary principle," which

guides European environmental policy and states that if an action or policy might cause severe or irreversible harm to the public, in the absence of a scientific consensus that harm would not ensue, the burden of proof falls on those who would advocate taking the action. The US government often seems to take the opposite approach: allow the use of GE crops, bovine growth hormone, cloned animals, food additives, new drugs, and see if they cause problems, then ban or recall them after the fact.

We have obviously not stopped the use of GE crops, but we continue to support efforts to impose reasonable controls. We have supported the right of California counties to ban or limit GE crops in their jurisdictions. We have insisted that farmers be protected from potential contamination of their crops by GE drift, which is especially a problem for organic farming, where no GE crops are allowed. CAFF has also supported the efforts of rice farmers to prohibit the growing of "pharmaceutical rice," which would be used to produce drugs. The risks of contamination of conventional rice are very great and it is clear that many export markets would be lost if such rice were grown in California. The California Rice Commission recently called for a moratorium on all experimental plantings of genetically modified rice in the state, after GE contamination of rice in the U.S. South demonstrated that existing controls are inadequate.

On February 21, 2007, Assemblymember Jared Huffman (D-San Rafael) introduced AB 541, The Food and Farm Protection Act. The bill would establish California's only state laws related to GE in agriculture and protect California farmers, consumers, and the food supply. The bill is being sponsored by a 14-member coalition of agriculture, environmental, food safety and natural food industry businesses, and CAFF is one of the key members of this coalition.

AB 541 protects California farmers and the food supply in four ways:

1. Establishes the right of farmers and landowners to compensation for economic losses due to genetic contamination of their crops
2. Protects farmers from being sued by a GE manufacturer if their crop is contaminated by that company's GE product
3. Establishes a county-level GE crop notification process so that farmers can trace contamination to the GE manufacturer
4. Protects the food supply by prohibiting the open-field cultivation of GE food crops used to produce drugs and biologics such as hormones and antibiotics

This bill represents a reasonable, fair and coherent policy proposal that addresses the risk of GE contamination without banning any GE crop.

To read a longer summary of the issue, please refer to the Position Paper posted on the CAFF web site (www.caff.org/policy/GMO_debate.shtml). For a more in-depth discussion of all of the issues, see the wealth of information posted on the web site of our coalition, the Genetic Engineering Policy Alliance (www.gepolicyalliance.org). On both web sites you can also find a sample letter of support that we encourage you to submit to the Assembly Agriculture Committee, where AB 541 will be heard on April 25. Please get your comments in at least a week in advance if this newsletter reaches you in time. You can refer to the CAFF web site for updates on the bill's status. 

FARMER^{TO}FARMER

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

SPRING 2007

Sacramento Valley Opportunities

BY MARK CADY

Through its Biological Agriculture Department, the CAFF has built a strong history of support for orchard crop growers and their pursuit of economically and environmentally sustainable crop production. Building on this record of success, we have been expanding this work in the Sacramento Valley. With financial support from the State Water Resources Control Board and the US EPA, we have two new programs that help farmers improve the environmental outcomes of their farming practices.

We are working with partner organizations and agencies to help farmers reduce the pollution risks associated with common pest control practices. Many people are aware of the problems associated with applying pesticides during the winter in California: it rains, and storm water runoff can carry pesticides into waterways. Unfortunately, when traditional growers of orchard commodities are feeling the stress of lower prices for their crops, coupled with higher costs for inputs, it is difficult to take on new risks. Farmers will often be concerned that changing the way they grow their crops to protect the environment may introduce significant risk in their tenuous economic situations.

That's where CAFF comes in. With our partners we can help individual farmers try out pest control methods that reduce environmental risks. We can provide services that reduce economic risks, including intensive pest monitoring that helps farmers have a better picture of the pest situation on the farm. We can offer consulting on innovative production methods and suggest opportunities with government agencies that will share the cost of innovative farming methods.

In Sutter and Yuba counties, we are working with University of

California farm advisors to find better ways to deliver information on good farming practices to farmers who have not taken advantage of traditional extension services. We are also working with private farm consultants to help a small group of farmers demonstrate good environmental practices like using low-toxicity pesticides, and changing spray timing to avoid the rainy season. The experiences of these farmers will serve as models to their neighbors who will be more willing to try out these methods when they see them in action.

In Colusa County, CAFF is starting a project in cooperation with the Colusa County Resource Conservation District and Audubon California. The Central Valley has experienced a boom in the planting of almond orchards. With these new orchards come new challenges in protecting the rural environment. Like the rest of the Sacramento Valley, Colusa County can receive intense rainfall from winter storms, subjecting soils in the young hillside orchards to the possibility of erosion. On the valley floor, sediment from winter flood waters can cover roads and clog waterways. Also, with so many acres devoted to a single crop, the environmental risks associated with pest management practices can be great.

CAFF's Colusa County almond project will focus on demonstrating the value of Integrated Pest Management and ecological restoration practices such as growing cover crops, planting native grasses in swales and along field edges, and stabilizing stream banks with native shrubs and trees.

With these and other Biological Agriculture projects, CAFF continues to do its part to help farmers protect their rural environment and to ensure that farming can continue in California for generations to come. ■

New Faces on the CAFF Board of Directors

At the spring Board meeting on March 3, the 2007 Board was officially seated. This 17-member Board includes two attorneys, a physician, a policy specialist, a water quality expert, rice growers, a vintner, consumer and farmer advocates of various other stripes, and fruits, nuts, vegetables, and sprouts growers. Thanks to all the CAFF members who voted in the election and helped assemble this amazing team to guide us in our mission of fostering family-scale agriculture.

We also said goodbye to three valued Board Members. Poppy Davis, our long-time treasurer, resigned from the CAFF Board and moved to Washington DC to accept a fabulous new job with the USDA. Jim Eldon of Fiddlers Green and Julian Kayne have also resigned from the Board for personal reasons. We thank them all for their service to the CAFF community and wish them well in their new pursuits.

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Delhi, Merced County

CAFF Action on 2007 U.S. Farm Bill

BY KARI HAMERSCHLAG & DAVE RUNSTEN

With the Democrats assuming control of the House and Senate, the U.S. Farm Bill, which is authorized every five years, is on the front burner for 2007. CAFF is active on the Farm Bill through CCFE* (formerly CA-SAWG*), a coalition of 45 organizations that support a sustainable food system. CCFE allows us to coordinate activities with the organic farmers (CCOF*, OFRF*, EFA*), groups supporting beginning farmers (ALBA*, FarmLink), and urban food interests (CFJC*). We are trying to bring urban and rural constituencies together to rally California congressional support—including the urban representatives—for Farm Bill legislation that embraces our vision for a more just and sustainable agriculture and food system. Nearly \$300 billion is at stake over the next five years.

Two California Congressmen, Representatives Dennis Cardoza (D-Merced) and Joe Baca (D-Rialto) now chair Agriculture Subcommittees that will be responsible for drafting key portions of the Farm Bill. Two other California representatives, Jim Costa (D-Fresno) and Kevin McCarthy (R-Bakersfield), also sit on various House Agriculture Subcommittees. In a letter to Representative Cardoza, Chairman of the newly established House Agriculture Subcommittee on Horticulture and Organic Agriculture, more than 100 farmers, businesses and organizations, wrote that, “At the very least, federal investment in organic agriculture should be equivalent to its proportional share of the U.S. food market.” Current federal funding aimed specifically at organic growers makes up less than one-tenth of one percent of current Farm Bill spending. Estimates put the current market share of 2006 organic retail sales at about 3%, and sales are growing at an average 20% annually. The letter was presented to Representative Cardoza at a listening session in his district in late February.

“We need greater public investment in organics and local food systems, especially to help small- and mid-sized growers remain competitive in this increasingly globalized system,” said CAFF board member Cindy Lashbrook, an organic producer of fruits and nuts from Representative Cardoza’s district, who presented the letter to the congressman. “California’s organic growers protect our environment in so many ways. We help conserve our state’s water, soil and air quality. We help reduce our dependency on fossil fuels. Yet, unlike corn, soybeans, and other major commodity groups, we receive almost no federal support.”

As part of this Farm Bill effort, various CAFF members have gone to Washington, DC to lobby their representatives. Cindy Lashbrook and CAFF members Tony Azevedo and Glenn Anderson,

together with CCFE* and four other California organizations, took part in Capitol Hill lobbying efforts organized by the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and CCFE. In all, the two delegations met with staff from more than 20 California House members and both of California’s Senate offices to advocate for:

- Increased *funding and improved effectiveness of conservation programs*, especially the severely under funded Conservation Security Program
- Increased *support for organic farmers*
- Increased *investment in local food systems*, new markets, and regional food distribution
- *Increased access to fresh, local, healthy, and nutritious food*, especially in limited resource communities and schools
- *Increased support for beginning and minority farmers*
- *Implementing meaningful payment limitation reform* and gradually replacing commodity subsidies with a new system of farm income stabilization policies.

At the end of March, CAFF member Jim Churchill helped organize a Farm Bill forum in Ventura in collaboration with CFJC. He had also gone to D.C. with them to lobby, as had board member George Davis, with CFU*. In the coming months, we need everyone who cares about a sustainable food system to reach out and contact his/her member of Congress—whether rural or urban—about these priorities for the upcoming Farm Bill. If you would like to be involved in a Farm Bill Action team in your district, please contact Kari Hamerschlag, calfoodfarming@gmail.com, (510) 295-4781.

You can also send a message directly to your member of Congress urging support for our priorities highlighted above. To send a message to your member of Congress, go to www.house.gov/writerep

More information on these programs and positions is available on the CAFF web site (www.caff.org) under Policy/Farm Bill or at CCFE’s web site, www.calfoodandfarming.org. ■

*CCFE=California Coalition for Food and Farming

*CA-SAWG=California Sustainable Agriculture Working Group

*CCOF=California Certified Organic Farmers

*ORFR=Organic Farming Research Foundation

*EFA=Ecological Farming Association

*ALBA=Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association

*CFJC=California Food and Justice Coalition

*CFU=California Farmers Union

Growers Collaborative continued from page 1

consolidated delivery, GC resembles a typical vendor in terms of paperwork, delivery, and ordering. Unlike a conventional distributor however, GC offers a delicious way to strengthen our local farms and economy. The collaborative dramatically reduces the distance that fruits and vegetables travel from farm to fork, and reclaims the connection of knowing the people that grow one’s food. Packaging local produce with the stories of the farms it was grown on, highlighting

the inherent values of local food, and sharing promotional resources are critical pieces of the GC business model.

Started in 2004, to source fruits and vegetables specifically for the farm-to-school program in the Ventura Unified School District, the GC has expanded its customer base in Southern California to include three-dozen colleges, universities, corporate cafeterias, and grade schools. Bon Appétit Management Company oversees many of these sites and is a strong supporter of the Growers Collaborative.

In addition to the work in Ventura, the Growers Collaborative was critical to starting a relationship with Kaiser Permanente. Kaiser now sources produce from small-scale growers in the Central Valley for their 19 Northern California hospitals. With a successful pilot program completed, discussion with Kaiser Permanente has turned to ways to expand the use of local foods in 2007.

In addition to the Ventura Growers Collaborative, the Sacramento Valley and Fresno are new homes for GC, each with its own regional manager and distribution network. Funded by a USDA grant, the Sacramento Valley Growers Collaborative has found its home on “Impossible Acres”—a fruit and berry U-Pick



Impossible Acres, the cold storage site of the Sacramento Growers Collaborative.

farm in Davis known for its kid-friendly pumpkin patch each year (www.impossibleacres.com). Owners Clyde and Katie Kelly recently installed a large cold-room—powered largely by solar panels—for pressing and storing apple cider, fruits and vegetables. They are allowing GC to lease some of their cold-space for consolidating local produce before shipping it to institutional buyers. Sacramento Valley Growers Collaborative (SVGC) has made promising connections with several universities, hospitals, corporate cafeterias, and school districts. The long-term goals of the SVGC include extensive coordination of institutional menu planning with the planting schedules of interested grower partners.

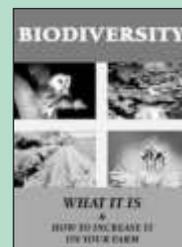
With the assistance of several grants, infrastructure is now in place in Fresno, where regional manager Peder Rude provides support to refugee and limited resource growers. He helps them acquire liability insurance, provides assistance with pre-production planning, and aids in bringing their harvest to markets eager to support farm-specific, traceable, and sustainably grown food.

Growers interested in selling their produce to the Growers Collaborative must meet a number of expectations: a commitment to sustainable farming practices (more information available at www.growerscollaborative.org), a fulfillment of GC's food safety guidelines, and the possession of liability insurance for their produce.

The Growers Collaborative is committed to working with interested growers and helping them meet these expectations. Sacramento Valley growers interested in participating or learning more about the Collaborative are encouraged to contact Dave Levin at (530) 756-8518, ext 18, david@growerscollaborative.org. In Southern California, Alex Moore can be reached at (805) 653-5450, alex@growerscollaborative.org. In Fresno, Peder Rude can be reached at (805) 850-8795, peder@growerscollaborative.org. 

CAFF Publications

Biodiversity: What It Is, and How to Increase It on Your Farm Brochure developed by the Wild Farm Alliance and CAFF defines biodiversity as it relates to agriculture, and describes specific practices that farmers can implement to conserve biodiversity on their farms. On most farms, opportunities exist to accommodate habitat, native species and the larger landscape with few changes. Resources and cost-share opportunities listed.



Hedgerows for California Agriculture This manual will help you choose and care for regionally appropriate plants that attract beneficial insects and prevent erosion. It lists native plant nurseries and consultants/contractors specializing in hedgerow and other restoration projects.

Making the Farm Connection This manual is designed to let farmers know what to expect when hosting a farm visit. The booklet is also very useful for teachers and classes so that they may get the most out of their farm visit.



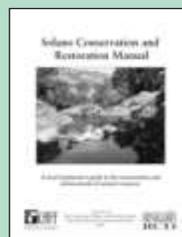
Central Coast Local Food Guide A free booklet



from the *Buy Fresh Buy Local* Campaign, this will tell you where to find seasonal, fresh, locally grown food in the Santa Cruz area, including farmers' markets, CSAs, restaurants, and family farms. Available at various locations. Free. Call (831) 761-8507 for details. Also see www.caff.org/buy local

Solano Conservation & Restoration Manual

Do you constantly battle unwanted weeds on your land? Are you tired of watching the stream carry away your land? Worried about that gully that grows larger every year? Find the solutions to these and other resource concerns in this manual. Establishing native grasses, managing rangeland, pond habitat, hedgerows, grassed waterways, riparian practices, prescribed burns, and much more. 145 pages, easy to use, update and share.



BASIC Cotton Manual Practical Lessons Learned from the Sustainable Cotton Project's Biological Agriculture Systems in Cotton (BASIC) Program, San Joaquin Valley, California, 2001 to 2004. This manual describes management and marketing options for cotton production systems that use bio-intensive, integrated pest management to reduce chemical inputs.

Unless otherwise noted, all publications can be downloaded for free at www.caff.org/publications. For a small fee, you may also order bound copies, call (530) 756-8518 to place an order.



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refrigeration. Even a temperature gap of a few hours can cause a problem. These products travel extensive distances, with many possible ways that there could be gaps in temperature control.

Industry standard for most fresh-cut salads is a shelf life of 15 to 17 days once the product leaves the processing plant, up from 5 to 10 days just a few years ago. This is too long because even an inconsequential presence of the pathogen can multiply in this time frame

into a serious dose. Committee members should *consider reducing the allowable shelf life of bagged spinach and salads.*

Committee members should also *consider a requirement that bagged salads be labeled with the statement that the consumer keep the product refrigerated and wash it before eating.* The “Ready To Eat” label is misleading.

Work on the Problem at Its Source

A second area of high-risk focus is the interface between the salad mix and livestock industries. It may be that the salad mix industry is unable to do this alone and will need support from the livestock industry. Domestic cattle are the primary source of microbial pathogens like *E. coli* 0157. Tainted irrigation water is the most plausible cause of crop contamination in the field.

There are a number of feed-related and animal husbandry risk factors that contribute to the presence of 0157 in livestock. *We must develop methods to reduce 0157 infections and to contain 0157 in manure. Crops for bagged salads should not be grown in fields that are at risk of contamination from nearby livestock grazing or feeding operations.*

Don't Dismantle the Public's Investment in Environmental Stewardship

Conservation Plantings—A primary effort of the Community Alliance with Family Farmers has been the introduction of conservation plantings and installation of many miles of buffer strips, grassed waterways, filter strips and hedgerows on farms up and down the state. Much of this work is funded with public dollars in a national effort to improve our nation's water quality and reduce the use of toxic chemical fertilizers and pesticides. In many cases conservation plantings have been shown to reduce the presence and transport of water-borne bacteria and pathogens and can be specifically designed to address food safety issues.

In the proposed production guidelines, deer, geese and feral pigs are identified as animals of significant risk. However, dozens of studies across the U.S. have surveyed *E. coli* 0157 infection rates in various wildlife populations. In all cases, infection rates are very low—less than one animal in 1000. In contrast, while the prevalence of 0157 in domestic cattle is highly variable, tests in many different environments show from 3% to 40% of cattle test positive.

This misguided focus on wildlife diverts attention from much more important things. If conservation plantings are included as a food safety risk *at all*, we can assure you that many farmers will abandon their efforts and millions of dollars of public investment will be put at risk. Even if the rule only applied to bagged salad and spinach, it would cast a pall far beyond those crops. *The limitations on the use of conservation plantings need to be completely removed from the draft metrics.*

Compost—Another good practice that may be mistakenly snared in these rules is the use of fully composted animal manures to improve soil health. It is important that the record is set straight here: The National Organic Standards forbid the use of un-composted animal manures less than 120 days prior to harvest. We endorse the provisions in the proposed regulations to limit the use of raw manure. This brings non-organic agriculture up to the standards that the organic industry must meet.

Heartland Festival & River Fair



Saturday, June 2, 2007

At Riverdance Farms
in Livingston

10:00 am - 5:00 pm

U-pick organic cherries & blueberries ♦ Live music
Kid's activities and entertainment ♦ Farm learning stations
Artist booths ♦ Farm tours ♦ Local and organic food
Water games ♦ Valley Voices Chautauqua ♦ Wagon rides
Poetry ♦ Regional produce ♦ Farm tools ♦ Workshops
\$10 in advance, \$12 at the gate (\$3 children 3-12)

5:00-9:00 pm

Music ♦ Dancing ♦ Food & drinks for sale
Included in festival admission or \$5 at the gate after 4pm

5:00-7:00 pm

Taste of the Valley: Slow Food & Wine Social

Featuring regional chefs and wine
\$20 advance, \$25 at gate

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California Food & Farming Policy Update

BY PETE PRICE

Food Safety

The outbreak last fall of a virulent strain of *E. coli* 0157:H7, in bagged spinach and bagged lettuce grown in California has led to intense scrutiny by health officials and legislators of the practices used to grow and process the leafy greens. As a result, food safety is the top priority issue facing California agriculture in 2007.

Legislation and GAP Metrics—Senator Dean Florez (D-Shafter) has introduced three bills that give broad authority to the Department of Public Health to adopt regulations dictating acceptable practices for the growing of leafy greens. In response to the legislation and pressure from state and federal health regulators to reduce contamination by *E. coli* and other food-borne pathogens, the large players in the industry—Western Growers Association, California Farm Bureau Federation, and United Fresh Produce Association—have prepared a set of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Metrics, which identify growing practices designed to reduce the likelihood of contamination. Through a marketing agreement and subsequent marketing order, all produce handlers would be required to buy leafy greens only from growers who have been certified as conforming to the GAP metrics.

The Metrics cover a wide range of on-farm activities, including many that will affect organic and small-scale growers. The Metrics also are still a work in progress, and Western Growers released the

latest draft only days before the *Agrarian Advocate* went to press. It appears that one of the most troubling provisions of the Metrics—restrictions on the use of hedgerows and vegetative buffer strips—has been removed.

The previous version prohibited the use of hedgerows within 20 feet of farm land producing leafy greens. As many members of CAFF know, buffer strips have been widely recognized as water pollution filters, barriers to soil erosion, and habitat for beneficial insects. CAFF has done more than any other organization in the state to encourage farmers to install hedgerows, so the elimination of language suggesting removal of hedgerows from the latest Metrics is welcomed by CAFF.

It appears that the Metrics still restrict the use of compost within 45 days of harvest. While raw and unfinished compost is a legitimate concern as a possible carrier of *E. coli* 0157:H7, the use of finished compost that meets strict standards should not be restricted. Ironically, only organic growers currently meet the standards being proposed in the Metrics.

While the GAP Metrics restrict a wide range of on-farm activities, including those with negligible connection to food-borne pathogens, they ignore two glaring factors that are beyond the

See **Policy Update** continued on page 7