

Small Bites: Nibbles from the world sphere

Art follows life?

The existence of conundrums in the food trend/politics scene isn't new, but can be mind-boggling, i.e. the promotion by the FDA of high fat foods such as cheese, the power of big food lobbies (such as sugar, and fast food buddies Simplot & Monsanto) in government food directives, and the emergence in TV-land of the disease driven and dedicated show **dLife TV**. The program airs on Sundays 7pm ET, and is focused on living with diabetes. "Profiles of athletes and celebrities with diabetes, inspirational stories of real people plus practical information and cooking diabetes-friendly recipes," are the purview of the show. And who is the featured advertiser on the show's press release web page? Nestle—and their toll-house cookies.

But It's Organic . . .

Organic is big business these days, but for all the focus on small and local, most consumers shopping in grocery chains, whether Whole Foods or Costco, are purchasing industrially manufactured and distributed organic foods. Egg and dairy products, while labeled "organic" are often produced in similar factory settings to their conventional brethren, but sold at a premium price.

The Cornucopia Institute (www.cornucopia.org), a farm policy research group based in Wisconsin, is one of the many self-appointed watchdog and advocacy groups for the local and organic movement. Their latest action involves legal complaint against factory organic dairies (some milking as many as 7000 cows in two barns) for importing conventional calves into their herds. This practice is common, though prohibited by USDA rules, and has far reaching ramifications for the integrity of products that consumers assume are humane for animals and supportive of farmers because of the "organic" label. Although the "illegal laundering" of conventional calves hardly seems like cause for alarm to the average consumer, such covert (with a wink from the government) practices beg the question of trust.

Organic factory egg farms are no better. "Meaningful" outdoor access for laying hens is open to distressingly loose interpretation, and is in fact in debate before the National Organic Standards Board. Meanwhile, industrial organic egg farmers claim, among other things, that "chickens don't like to go outside" (thus the cement porch that classifies as "outdoor access") and that it is risky for chickens to eat insects (thus no access to dirt, grass, insects).

Cornucopia researches and publishes ranking for eggs and dairy products. Eggs are easier to get locally at small groceries or farmers markets—this is the best bet. Misty Meadows Farms and Trout Lake Abbey, both Washington state egg farms, as well as Phoenix Egg Farm, from Portland, all get a five egg rating for full compliance to both

the letter and spirit of organic practice. Washington based and widely available Stiebers gets three eggs, while Costco, Safeway, and Trader Joe's organic eggs are coming from factory farms.

Dairy products of integrity include Julie's Ice Cream from Eugene and Nancy's organic in Springfield (both with a four cow rating). Organic Valley, based in Wisconsin, has national distribution and a four cow rating. Noris Dairy of Crabtree, Oregon was non-responsive to numerous attempts at contact by Cornucopia Institute, though Noris is often the glass-bottle milk of prominence at local food co-ops. Visit www.cornucopia.org for full access to their reports, rankings, and helpful guides to who owns who in the organic food scene.

Ecogeek Goes to College

Good news for the young, restless, and sustainable-inspired: The University of New Hampshire is pioneering an [EcoGastronomy Program](#) designed to integrate three broad fields of study and practice: sustainable agriculture, regional cuisine and hospitality management, and nutrition. Students will learn about this growing industry by spending time on farms and in greenhouses, and traveling to Italy for a stint at the University of Gastronomical Science to observe the farm-to-fork industry firsthand. The program was inspired by the Slow Food Movement, according to faculty coordinator, Dan Winans. "It's an emerging field and something that people are already studying. We need to help define it, give it more credibility in academia. It will help people get reconnected with their food, especially a generation raised on McDonald's."

Speaking of McDonald's

Mickey-d's is jumping on the college bandwagon too. The BBC reports that the fast food behemoth is good to go for their management training program, accredited by Manchester Metropolitan University. The degree is a two-year business management foundation course, and will enable McDonald's employees to get a degree without giving up their jobs. The company employs 85,000 people in the UK, and wants to pioneer educating employees in the workplace. Like 'em or not, pioneering is what got them to the top.