

A Quality Agriculture Newsletter
A Call to Farms



Welcome to the inaugural edition of the *A Call to Farms* newsletter!



Judson Berkey, Editor

Welcome

The idea for this newsletter germinated organically. Your editor has written about food and agriculture policy since law school (in the mid 1990s for those who really want to count). Having created two websites over the past six years to collect resources related to geographic indications specifically and sustainable agriculture generally and started an informal distribution list for spreading information about related developments, the time has come for more formality.

Thus, this newsletter (distributed monthly to start) will contain a mix of news/analysis, links to web/print resources, and information on events related to quality agriculture. The focus will be on policy but may mix in the occasional gustatory treat. The topics will include all aspects of what might be called quality agriculture (e.g. bio/organic, geographical indications, sustainability, etc). The coverage will try to be balanced as I do believe that big is not always bad and that technology (process as well as science) does have its place.

Suggestions are always welcome. You can reach the author via the websites below or directly at judson.berkey@ubs.com

News

One of the most interesting developments since the 2008 Slow Food Nation event in San Francisco has been the growth of a concept called "Slow Money." Led by Woody Tasch, a veteran of socially responsible investing, the goal is to increase the capital available for local food systems and economies. The Slow Money Concept, based in part of the principles of the Slow Food Movement that sponsored Slow Food Nation, is focused on increasing what it calls "nurture capital" to encourage more local production. This could effectively create the ultimate geographical indication – a local product supported by local capital.

Tasch has documented his approach and beliefs in a book – *Inquiries into the Nature of Slow Money*. Further information is available on the web – www.slowmoneyalliance.org. A goal for the second half of 2009 is to raise the profile of the concept and serve as a catalyst for major social transformation over the next 5-10 years. A kick-start will occur at a national conference scheduled for Santa Fe, New Mexico in early September. This could well be the start of a major new plank in the effort to support alternatives to industrial agriculture and bears further watching.

Resources

The new movie, *Food Inc.*, continues to stir the pot and generate commentary about food and agriculture, particularly in the U.S. Information on a screening held in California by the Humane Society of the U.S. is here - www.hsus.org/farm/news/ournews/food_inc_documentary_screening_052709.html

The U.S. based Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) has published a new report analysing the impact of EU and US policies on the food crisis available here - www.iatp.org/iatp/publications.cfm?accountID=451&refID=106054 IATP also has a fairly complete collection of links to recent publications on the activities under that are being labelled "Land Grabs" (i.e. purchases of land or long term leases on agricultural production in emerging market countries) on their website - www.tradeobservatory.org/

The UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific has published a report entitled *Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security in Asia and the Pacific*. This report predicts (as many others have) that the decrease in food prices in late 2008 and the first half of 2009 is only temporary and that major challenges lie ahead for the APAC region specifically. The report is available - www.unescap.org/65/theme_study2009.asp

Signalling a potential policy shift, the new Chairman of the US Commodities Futures Trading Commission, Gary Gensler, stated in testimony to the US Senate that greater transparency and regulation of commodities markets are necessary as he believed index funds and other investors participated in a bubble. The testimony is available here –

www.cftc.gov/stellent/groups/public/@newsroom/documents/speechandtestimony/opagensler-2.pdf

On 18 May Argentina passed a new law on geographical indications to give a legal basis for recognising and protecting place names for products that have qualities derived from a specific place. An electronic copy of the law (in Spanish only) is available from the editor.

Finally for some views on the potential dangers of the reductionist thinking that dominates some of the local and organic food movements see <http://civileats.com/2009/06/03/a-lunch-with-wes-jackson/> and www.motherjones.com/environment/2009/02/spoiled-organic-and-local-so-2008

Upcoming Events

24-26 Jun: oriGIn – the Organisation for an International Geographical Indications Network – is holding its IV General Assembly meeting in Teruel Spain. There will no doubt be some major new initiatives announced. More details www.origin-gi.com

10-11 Sep: Slow Money Alliance will hold a national gathering to launch a new push in its effort to catalyse changes in the food and agriculture system through innovative finance. More information will be available on the Slow Money Alliance website noted above.

18-21 Sep: Slow Food will hold its next edition of the biennial Cheese exhibition on 18-21 September in Bra, Italy. Information is not yet available but for those who want to begin planning there is information on the last edition in 2007 www.cheese.slowfood.it/

