

Sham Organics Imports Hurt U.S. Farmers and Consumers

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Imports aren't something most people think about when it comes to organic food. But the U.S. produces only about 60% of organic corn and 30% of organic soybeans the U.S. market requires, and demand continues to grow. The difference is domestic supply and demand is being met with imports.

And for the last two years, organic grain producers in the U.S. have seen prices for their crops and the number of buyers interested in them, fall. Many believed that fraudulent imports of organic crops were to blame. This spring, an investigative report by the Washington Post confirmed their suspicions with one headline: "The labels said 'organic.' But these massive imports of corn and soybeans weren't."

The article explained what was impacting U.S. markets for organic corn and soybeans: surging levels of imports of organic corn created new opportunities for fraud, with products that didn't meet all of the requirements of the USDA organic label still being sold as organic.

How can this happen? Groups like the Organic Farmers' Agency for Relationship Marketing (OFARM) which works with organic grain producers across the Midwest, point to the breakdown in certification and inspection systems that is the backbone of the organic label.

The USDA organic label is controlled by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) but relies on a system of certifiers - third party entities that the USDA allows to inspect farms and other businesses - to check that operations are meeting the organic standards. No matter where a farm or processor is based, if they want to use the USDA organic label on their products, one of the USDA's approved



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certifiers has to inspect and certify them. But huge questions remain about how well the USDA is overseeing certifiers, especially when it comes to looking at foreign operations.

The Washington Post investigation found that one cargo ship full of 36 million pounds of soybeans that originated in Ukraine and ended up in California added approximately \$4 million to its value when the word "organic" was fraudulently added to its shipping records. The impact of these imports have had on U.S. organic producers is dramatic.

OFARM estimates the losses to organic grain producers in the Midwest at \$150 million for the crop years 2015 and 2016.

To stop imports from unfairly undercutting U.S. organic producers, the USDA needs to tighten up their oversight of organic imports. Members of Congress also need to put pressure on the USDA to require ELECTRONIC IMPORT certificates for organic imports, require importers and brokers to be certified organic and inspect shipments upon arrival at U.S. ports.

EDITOR'S NOTE

For more info. check out May 12th Washington Post expose by Peter Whoriskey, as well as, the earlier article about fake organic imports by OFARM's John Bobbe published in the Sept 2016 of the Milkweed and available at:

<https://www.cornucopia.org/2016/09/organic-grain-imports-threaten-domestic-market-standards/>

We Are A Nation of Immigrants---Always Have Been

Jim Goodman - Dairy Farmer from Wonewoc, WI

Resentment of immigrants in America began in 1492 when European explorers began the process of taming the wilderness in this "newly discovered" land. The Americans who were living here at the time, always knew exactly where they were, and, I am sure, had a decidedly different view of who needed taming.

Immigrant resentment has progressed ever since, with different ethnic groups targeted, in different times for different reasons. Currently, Hispanics are targeted because they supposedly take our jobs and Muslims are targeted because many people cannot accept diversity.

Without a doubt, immigration issues affected the outcome of the 2016 Presidential Election. The big beautiful border wall, immigrants stealing American jobs, immigrant crime (immigrant crime rates are actually lower than the general population) — these lies had their intended effect.

Perhaps the current, intense resentment of immigrants began in the late 1980s when, as the US economy faltered, Mexican immigration to the U.S. was increasing. The passage of the North American Free Trade agreement in 1993 and the subsequent dumping of subsidized US corn into Mexico further hastened the migration of Mexican farmers to the US.

I remember driving in Phoenix AZ in 2006, a time when immigration had again, become a hot button issue. I noted the Hispanic workers paving the streets, building houses, working on power lines, mowing lawns, working in stores and restaurants, and wondered who would take care of these Arizonians if the immigrants were deported?



Source: Pase lo que pase

During this current wave of immigrant hatred, I again wonder, who will do the work if immigrants are deported? The dairy industry is built on the shift to fewer and larger farms that depend on low wage immigrants to produce the cheap food Americans demand.

People ask, "Why don't farmers just pay more and hire American workers?" Wouldn't this eliminate the need for immigrant workers? No, it's not that simple.

With the exception of the higher farm-gate milk prices of 2014, dairy farmers are generally paid below the cost of production for the milk they produce. Making a profit depends on keeping costs low—, they need cheap feed for their cattle and cheap labor. So, granted immigrant workers are underpaid with some reason, Fair Farm Prices might help, but, mostly, immigrants are underpaid because they have no recourse— to whom would they protest?

Then there is the problem that not many "American" workers are willing to do this kind of work. I have milked cows all my life and consider it to be the best job I could have asked for, but you either have to love it, or really need the paycheck, and I mean, really need it.

Milking my 45 cows is vastly different

than milking cows on today's "modern" dairy farms with hundreds or thousands of cows. Ten or twelve hour shifts are not uncommon, a working environment that is constantly wet, noisy and dangerous — cows are big animals and don't always act in a congenial manner.

These immigrants are not unskilled, they are hard working and good at their jobs. Most of them were farmers in Mexico and Central America, without them, without their farming skills, US domestic agriculture production would be in serious trouble.

Immigrants also do a disproportionate share of the work on fruit and vegetable farms nationwide.

I have watched immigrant workers in the tomato fields of Immokalee, Florida — men, women and children—paid a minimum wage at best, few breaks, long hot hours, all stoop labor and constantly exposed to toxic crop chemicals. No one could love these jobs, but this is what immigrants do, because no one else will and because immigrants have few options.

In a society like ours, where there is no such thing as a living wage for a good share of our population, we depend on a cheap food supply. It is unconscionable that we have such an income disparity, that we have allowed this cycle of poverty to exist. Unconscionable that in a nation with so much, so many must survive on so little. We depend on poorly paid immigrants to feed us, and then point at them as the problem. Immigrants are vilified when they want to be accepted for what they contribute, it is immoral. A Salvadoran immigrant noted, "We only want to live in peace," he said, "Work, have a home, be a family". Clearly, in Trump's mind: