

SUSTAINABLE FARMING

VOLUME 9 | ISSUE 3

FALL 2024 | \$9

LIVE AND LET DIE

ORGANIC FARMING'S SECRET
(DIS)SERVICE

PLUS
GET MEDIA SAVVY
ZOO NOTIC DISEASES
TALKING TREES



DEFINING REGEN



We always predicted “regenerative” was going to be challenging to define on a broad scale, and this has borne out as interest in regenerative agriculture has increased. AGW recently submitted a comment to The

California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) on the topic of defining “regenerative agriculture” for that state’s policies and programs.

We believe any regenerative claim should be meaningful, validated, and inclusive of different regions, climates, and production systems. But some organizations argue that ‘regenerative’ should only start from an Organic baseline. At present, certified organic land represents less than 1% of U.S. farmland and just over 2% in Canada. In total, just 1.6% of global farmland is certified organic. With the overwhelming environmental and social challenges facing us, this policy would limit the impact of regenerative to a thin slice of an already-tiny pie. We simply can’t afford to exclude the vast majority of non-organic producers from embarking on their regenerative journey. (See page 4 for further details.)

Site visits and regenerative plan writing is now underway for participants in our USDA Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities project in partnership with Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI) and Soil Health Institute (SHI). We’re excited about this high-impact project to incentivize climate-smart practices with a wide range of farmers, many of whom are small and/or underserved.

Our annual producer survey is one way we can check in with producers in our network, inviting you to let us know how we’re doing, what you need, ideas you have, and what we can do better. We recently surveyed our farmer network and are in the process of analyzing responses to impact our work going forward. Many thanks to all who responded.

Our work is made possible by generous supporters and donors who fuel the mission of the AGW program. With extreme weather worsened by climate change leading to disastrous hurricanes like Helene and Milton, the spread of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in North America (which AGW’s technical team continues to monitor and will update farmers appropriately), and changing economic and political climates, we appreciate that farming is an increasingly challenging way of life. We remain here and prepared to help farms and ranches navigate these changes into the future, and we rely on our supporters to help us do that. As we approach the end of the year, be on the lookout for our end of year fundraising campaign. We would be grateful if you could share it with your networks.

Wishing you all the best for the coming holiday season.

Emily Moose
Executive Director
A Greener World

Sustainable Farming
Fall 2024
Volume 9 / Issue 3
Cover price \$9

Editor: Peter Mundy
info@agreenerworld.org

A Greener World
PO Box 115, Terrebonne
OR 97760

1-800-373-8806

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THE WHOLE STORY

Leading retailer embraces AGW certification

Whole Foods Market has recognized Certified Animal Welfare Approved by AGW as a third-party certification that meets its quality standard for high-welfare meat.

The leading natural and organic foods retailer announced it is furthering its commitment to animal welfare for their frozen, smoked, cooked, and cured meat by increasing the number of approved third-party animal welfare programs that certify meat products sold in more than 530 stores across the U.S., Canada, and the UK.

“Expanding the scope of our meat standards is just another step forward in providing high quality choices for our customers,” says Wes Rose, Vice President of Perishables at Whole Foods Market. According to the company statement, implementing these measures will increase access to the market for farmers and ranchers around the

world by allowing suppliers to choose the trusted certification program that best complements their farming system.

“Whole Foods Market’s announcement is a significant step forward for animal welfare and for high-welfare, sustainable farmers around the world,” said Emily Moose, AGW’s Executive Director. “Including Certified Animal Welfare Approved by AGW is also welcome recognition of the high-quality, high-welfare products supplied by our certified farmers and ranchers around the world,”

“As well as providing its customers with an even greater range of food they can feel good about, this announcement from Whole Foods Market will help to expand market access for sustainable, high-welfare farmers across the country,” Moose adds.

Visit media.wholefoodsmarket.com



LPETTET/STOCK

IN THE NEWS...

FARMING BENEFITS

Diversified agricultural systems yield more positive environmental and social outcomes than intensively managed farms, according to new research published in *Science*.

Drawing from 24 studies in 11 countries across 2,655 farms, researchers led by the University of Copenhagen found that farms applying strategies, such as managing multiple species, incorporating areas of noncrop vegetation, or conserving soil or water, created beneficial environmental and social outcomes, especially for biodiversity.

WHEY BETTER

Using milk from Certified Animal Welfare Approved by AGW cows, AGN Roots whey protein powder has won Protein Product of the Year at the recent 2024 Mindful Awards Program.

The Mindful Awards Program honors companies and products that offer transparency to consumers, pay workers fair wages, ensure sustainable business practices, use recycled or recyclable materials, and create healthier products using natural or organic ingredients.

Visit mindfulawards.com

WELSH WONDER



Hebron Vineyard is the first vineyard in Wales—and the UK—to be Certified Regenerative by AGW.

Situated near the Preseli Hills, Jemma Vickers and Paul Rolt (pictured) produce natural wines of Wales. “Our goal is a natural wine of Wales with zero intervention in the winery and with zero intervention in the vineyard and with zero intervention in the winery,” says Vickers. “Our Certified Regenerative by AGW logo means a great deal to us, both as custodians of the land and as a business.”

Visit hebronvineyard.com

HURRICANE DAMAGE

Farm communities across the Carolinas, Florida, Georgia, and Tennessee are facing devastating losses following unprecedented rainfall and flooding after Hurricanes Helene and Milton.

“Farmers have lost livestock, buildings and feed, not to mention power outages that require generators to run essential equipment like milking machines,” says Callie Casteel, AGW’s Marketing Services Coordinator. “To learn about AGW’s Farmer Relief Fund supporting recovery for impacted producers visit agreenerworld.org.”



IN THE NEWS...

GOLDEN STATE REGENERATES

A Greener World has submitted a position statement to the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) as part of the state's process to define "regenerative agriculture."

CDFA is seeking to incorporate a definition of regenerative agriculture to provide a science-based criterion for the designation or recognition of the term "regenerative" for state policies and programs. According to CDFA, "By defining 'regenerative agriculture' and its associated practices, we are working to formalize holistic methods of farming that are designed to protect, sustain and enhance natural resources on our farms and farming communities throughout California." In 2023, CDFA appointed 14 individuals to serve on a Regenerative Agriculture Work Group to consider public input.

According to AGW's submission, any definition

of 'regenerative agriculture' should be rigorous with meaningful expectations and impact; be validated by an independent third party; be inclusive of different regions, climates, and production systems; must encompass animal welfare, soil health, biodiversity, and social fairness; and should not be limited to those with Organic certification.

"This consultation is a unique, potentially historic opportunity to help shape what 'regenerative agriculture' means in California and beyond," says Emily Moose, AGW's Executive Director, "especially as other groups with varying opinions have already weighed in. We encourage you to share your thoughts or amplify our key points to make sure they are heard by both the public and decision-makers."

To submit your comments to the CDFA—and read AGW's submission—scan the QR code.



Solar panels at Certified Regenerative by AGW Pleasant Grove Farms in the Sacramento Valley, CA

TYSON ACCUSED

Tyson Foods, Inc. is making "false or misleading" marketing claims, according to a law suit issued by Environmental Working Group (EWG).

EWG accuses Tyson of exploiting growing consumer interest in climate-friendly foods by falsely claiming it will be net-zero by 2050 and marketing its industrial beef products as "climate-smart."

According to the EWG, Tyson is capitalizing on rising consumer concern by "making outrageous and unsubstantiated claims about its sustainability efforts that simply don't hold up under scrutiny."



BLUE CHEESE WIN

Three Certified Animal Welfare Approved by AGW farms took home numerous awards at the 41st annual American Cheese Society Competition at the Buffalo Convention Center, NY.

Blue Ledge Farm in Salisbury, VT (pictured), won first place in the Open category for 'Rily's 2x4'; second place in the Fresh Goats Milk Cheese (0-30 days) category for 'Lake's Edge'; and third place in the Soft Ripened (cow's milk) category for 'Camembrie.'

Fantello Farmstead Creamery in Enumclaw, WA, won second place in the Farmstead Cheese with Flavor Added category for 'Spicy Filomena' and second place in the Open category for 'Plateau.'

Green Dirt Farm in Weston, MO, won first place in the Open category for 'Dirt Lovers'; first place in the Fresh Unripened Cheese with Flavor Added category for 'Fresh Rosemary'; second place in the Open category for 'Wooly Rind'; and third place in the Feta category for its 'Feta.'

This year's competition saw 1,596 entries from across North America. The event highlights the exceptional quality and diversity of cheeses being produced across the continent.

TRUTHFUL LABELS

The USDA has released new guidance on meat or poultry label claims "to protect consumers from false and misleading labels." Released at the end of August, the guidance seeks to strengthen the supporting documentation required to make voluntary meat and poultry label claims, such as 'Raised Without Antibiotics,' 'Grass-Fed,' 'Regeneratively Farmed' and 'Climate-Friendly.' The guidance also "strongly encourages the use of third-party certification to substantiate animal-raising or environment-related claims."

PECKING ORDER

Stacyville Poultry Processing in Iowa played host to an AGW poultry welfare training day in August for poultry processing plant employees in Minnesota and Iowa.

Led by Dr. Andy Grist, Senior Lecturer in Veterinary Public Health at the University of Bristol in Langford, UK, this world-renowned training course gives plant owners and line operators practical knowledge and understanding of poultry welfare. The course explains the science behind the slaughter process and how 'best practice' handling can not only improve welfare at slaughter, but also product quality.

"Based on post-training evaluation reports, 94% of respondents said they had learned new information, while 100% said they are likely or extremely likely to recommend this training to a friend or colleague," says Tim Holmes, AGW's Director of Compliance. "We plan to offer this valuable training again in 2025."

"Everyone in the poultry industry ... need[s] to take this course. Having processed thousands of birds myself, I wish I had taken this course prior to ever picking up the knife."

PWO training participant



WELFARE WINS

European consumers value animal welfare more than environmental sustainability when buying meat and dairy products, according to research.

Published in *Food Quality and Preference* journal, over 3,000 people from across five European countries—Czechia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK—took an online survey, which asked them to rate the importance of 18 different factors when shopping for meat and dairy products. The study was conducted by the universities of Portsmouth and Newcastle in the

UK, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, University of Córdoba in Spain, Mendel University in Czechia and Agroscope from Switzerland.

"Consumers indicated that information related to animal welfare, food safety, and health and nutrition was considered more important than environmental sustainability when making food choices," says co-author Dr Andy Jin. In contrast, factors such as food miles, carbon footprint, and organic production were deemed less important.

Visit port.ac.uk

AGW TEAM TALK

AGW staff from North and South America and Europe met up in September for a group training event in North Carolina.

The two-day event included a day of workshop training and planning sessions and a farm walk at AGW-certified Reverence Farms near Graham, kindly hosted by Suzanne Nelson and Hue Karreman. "The benefits of meeting face to face like this and sharing ideas and experiences are immeasurable," says Katie Amos, Director of Communications and Outreach.



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Opinion

PROOF OF PURCHASE

Andy Griffiths considers the value of farm certification

We know consumers are often bamboozled by the range of possible certification logos displayed on today's food products. But they're not alone.

Here in the UK, where I raise Red Poll beef cattle (pictured above) and Kerry Hill sheep, the volume of audits that farm businesses now face can feel overwhelming. Whether it's Farm Assurance (a UK food quality assurance scheme required to access most major markets), organic production, or the many retailer-required audits, farmers can face significant demands on their time simply to market their products.

Audit fatigue

Alongside farming, I work as a freelance auditor, inspecting farms across the UK for AGW and a leading organic certifier. One thing I've noticed is that farmers are becoming increasingly cynical about certification. They're weary of additional paperwork and 'bureaucracy' and don't like people they've never met—many who have no real farming experience—visiting their farms and 'telling them how to farm.' Speaking to farmers at a recent agricultural show, I observed what could best be described as 'audit fatigue'. Some were saying they'd had enough of farm audits and could "do it for themselves" by making their own claims.

As an independent auditor, this caused me some concern. I know only too well that self-defined and unverified label claims are a dangerous game, particularly as an increasingly savvy and informed consumer is now influencing buyers from the smarter retailer supply chains.

Andy Griffiths is a beef cattle farmer and freelance farm auditor

In this context, meaningful certification is more important than ever in order to gain access to wholesale markets—let alone for farms that are selling directly to the public. In a world that is rapidly (and thankfully) waking up to the climate crisis, every farm needs to be on the front foot, actively promoting farming's pivotal role as a part of the solution, not the problem.

Looking forward

Twenty years ago, my Dad attained Farm Assured certification when our farm was an active dairy holding. But it wasn't his choice: dairy farms couldn't sell milk unless they were registered Farm Assured. (It's still the case now.) Fast-forward to today and we are not Farm Assured because none of the produce from this farm is processed by large-scale companies. Yet we recently decided to apply for AGW's Animal Welfare Approved and Grassfed programs for our farm. Why?

If a potential customer asks about the welfare of my cattle or what they are fed, I can tell them we're Certified Grassfed by AGW—and have a certificate to prove it. An independent certification (backed by science-based environmental and welfare standards) is also becoming increasingly important as UK policymakers look at ways to reward farmers for the public environmental good and services we provide—including carbon capture.

After all, without a trusted independent certification, how can I prove that I really am farming the way I say I am?



DARIO GAGNA/ISTOCK

THE FARMYARD CONNECTION

Some zoonotic diseases are lethal to humans, and many can cause long-term health consequences. Jennifer Gravley steps into her hazmat suit

Diseases that can be transmitted between animals and humans—known as zoonotic diseases—are in the news with increasing frequency, and for good reason!

Zoonotic diseases represent a significant concern for farmers and ranchers worldwide. As a livestock producer, what is your role in mitigating risks to your family, animals, and community? How can you maintain public trust as well as productivity in your operation?

A general understanding of zoonoses and zoonotic disease transmission pathways and prevention strategies will help you implement effective preventive measures and collaborate with veterinarians to safeguard your farm as well as public health.

What are zoonotic diseases?

Zoonotic diseases are caused by bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites that can infect both humans and animals. These pathogens can exit an infected animal in a variety of ways.

Some need to enter another animal immediately in order to cause disease, while other pathogens can move extensively in the environment. In any case, the disease agent cannot spread illness unless it also enters another susceptible individual.

Knowing how diseases move from one individual to another can help you develop sound strategies for prevention and management of zoonotic disease in your operation.

Impact on farming communities

Farmers will readily recognize the direct economic effect of disease, such as reduced productivity and increased veterinary costs. In recent years, HPAI (highly pathogenic avian influenza) has also led to trade restrictions in poultry worldwide—and for dairy cattle in the U.S.

While these concerns are enough to keep many farmers and veterinarians awake at night, they are overshadowed when diseased livestock cause people to get sick. The fact is that some zoonotic diseases are lethal to humans, and many can cause lifelong or long-term health consequences.

It's no surprise, then, that a zoonotic disease outbreak can have devastating effects on the public's perception of a farm or its products. Food safety scares can significantly impact sales for individual farms and entire product sectors alike. Producers whose livelihood includes tours or an on-farm store know that, while consumers may recover quickly from a farm-acquired illness, consumer confidence generally does not.

Prevention

Use these prevention strategies to reduce zoonotic disease risk:

- ▶ **Perimeter biosecurity:** Keep pathogens off the farm. Develop and implement a biosecurity plan tailored to the farm's specific risks and needs.
- ▶ **Hygiene:** Wash hands, and avoid mucous

Livestock feed contaminated by bird and animal feces can transmit disease, such as paratuberculosis, salmonella, and cryptosporidiosis

Modes of transmission and routes of entry

How do pathogens move to the individual, and how do they get in?

- ▶ **Direct contact:** Contact with infected animals, their bodily fluids (for example, saliva or urine) or contaminated materials, such as bedding or equipment.
- ▶ **Foodborne:** Consumption of raw or undercooked meat, unpasteurized dairy products, or contaminated fruits and vegetables.
- ▶ **Vector-borne:** Bites from infected vectors, such as mosquitoes, ticks, and flies, that carry zoonotic pathogens.
- ▶ **Airborne:** Inhalation of pathogens present in dust, aerosols, or droplets from infected animals—for example, during cleaning or handling procedures.
- ▶ **Health care:** Called “iatrogenic” in the medical community, examples of health care transmission include re-use of a contaminated needle, or double-dipping and re-using contaminated salve or ointment.

Note that each of these transmission routes contains two factors: the vehicle (such as food or insects) that moves the pathogen to the victim, and the entry point into the body. That’s good news for prevention, because it gives you two separate tactics to reduce risk for each type of disease. Use them all!

“A zoonotic disease outbreak can have devastating effects on public perception of a farm or its products.”

Jennifer Gravley DVM is a veterinarian and educator with a special interest in the intersection of food animal medicine and public health

membrane contact. Keep food and cosmetics out of animal areas. Wear appropriate protective gear, such as gloves and dust masks, when handling potentially infectious materials such as bedding.

- ▶ **Quarantine new animals:** Quarantine and observe all incoming animals for at least 28 days to ensure you are not introducing new infections.
- ▶ **Monitor animal health:** Know “normal” appearance and behavior of your animals, and make a point to notice and investigate changes.
- ▶ **Follow an animal health plan:** This should include vaccination programs and parasite control measures.
- ▶ **Act promptly:** Separate and treat sick animals to prevent spread. Seek veterinary intervention, when appropriate.
- ▶ **On-farm biosecurity:** Use separate equipment for sick or quarantined animals, and save sick pen chores for last. Wash up afterwards—especially before eating. And please, clean your boots!
- ▶ **Sanitation:** Clean and disinfect equipment and facilities regularly. Dispose of animal waste properly to reduce environmental contamination and disease transmission.
- ▶ **Water quality:** Regularly clean drinking water sources, and test as indicated.
- ▶ **Pest control:** Exclude, deter, and remove birds, rodents, and insects that transmit disease.

One health

Case studies, such as the response to avian influenza outbreaks, demonstrate the importance of coordinated efforts in reducing disease spread across human, animal, and environmental sectors. The One Health approach emphasizes interdisciplinary collaboration between farmers, veterinarians, and public health professionals. Work with your veterinarian to assess animal health, discuss preventive measures, and monitor disease trends. Conduct diagnostic tests as recommended to detect pathogens and prevent spread. If zoonotic diseases are suspected, notify public health authorities to facilitate timely response and prevent further transmission. If you’re not sure who to call, contact your veterinarian.

Conclusion

Zoonotic diseases pose significant risks to farmers, their families, and the broader community. The key to protecting human and animal health is understanding how these diseases move from one individual to another, and taking specific preventive actions based on those modes of transmission and routes of entry. With proactive management and sound biosecurity, producers can continue to safeguard their families, their livelihoods, and public health.



Quarantine all incoming animals for at least 28 days



Contagious ecthyma (orf) causes painful sores in humans, too



Change clothes and wash hands—especially before eating



Some zoonotic diseases can transfer through open wounds

DO THE RIGHT THING

Is the USDA National Organic Program's prohibition of antibiotics ethical? It's questionable, says Hubert Karreman

"Whatever it takes, doc ... just no antibiotics." I heard these words frequently from organic dairy farmers over the 20 years when I was immersed as a veterinary clinician and emergency responder in the USDA certified organic dairy sector.

Before veterinary school, I'd been a herdsman on a biodynamic, organic dairy farm and was already well acquainted with natural treatments, so this particular request was something I could generally work with. I could usually find an alternative and effective solution.

No antibiotics ... ever

Those 20 years (1995–2015) encompassed a huge surge in the U.S. organic dairy sector, including full implementation of the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) Rule. The prohibition of using antibiotics in organic livestock was effectively 'set in stone' early on and seemingly untouchable, even though the Rule was hammered out in the public arena via semi-annual meetings of the USDA-appointed National Organic Standards Board (NOSB). In NOSB archived meeting minutes, the FDA stated that drugs like antibiotics should be allowed in the organic sector just like with conventional farms. Yet segments of the organic sector viscerally reacted. Perception among some organic farmer groups was that organic consumers wouldn't want antibiotics to be allowed because of perceived abuses by conventional livestock owners. Also, the organic sector was rightly trying to draw clear lines between themselves and the conventional sector for marketing. In the end, the farmer groups carried the day with the NOSB and the NOP enacted rule 7CFR205.238(c)(7):

► **Prohibited practices.** An organic livestock operation must not: Withhold medical treatment from a sick animal in an effort to preserve its organic status. All appropriate medications must be used to restore an animal to health when methods acceptable to organic production fail.

"I disagree in the strongest possible terms with anything that penalizes us for doing the right thing for an animal's best welfare"

Livestock treated with a prohibited substance must be clearly identified and neither the animal nor its products shall be sold, labeled, or represented as organically produced.

Simply put: if you use prohibited substances like an antibiotic, the animal must leave, forever.

Left out of the discussions leading up to 7CFR 205.238(c)(7), however, were the professionals who daily link animal care, the relief of animal suffering, and the food supply: farm animal veterinarians.

Veterinarians: a duty of care

Veterinarians take the Veterinarian's Oath upon graduation and, while not legally binding, it is in the back of any practitioner's mind on a daily basis:

► Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine, I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health and welfare, the prevention and relief of animal suffering, the conservation of animal resources, the promotion of public health, and the advancement of medical knowledge ...

How do we, in real time, reconcile the NOP prohibition on antibiotics (use them but the animal must be permanently removed) with the best possible care of organic animals?

A bitter pill

The reality is that both certified-organic farmers and veterinarians are at times seriously hindered by 7CFR205.238(c)(7) in providing timely, effective care. The regulation sounds great on paper but in practice it's a very difficult pill to swallow.

As a dairy practitioner, 7CFR205.238(c)(7) has been both a blessing and a curse. A blessing in that I can honestly say the USDA certified-organic livestock sector is leading the way globally in reducing antibiotic use. A curse in that too many animals have suffered needlessly.

Of course, not all conditions require antibiotics. As a holistic practitioner, I have successfully treated countless cases of pink eye, mastitis, uterine infections, hoof rot, and even pneumonia using only botanicals, biologics and homeopathic remedies ... when caught early enough. If left too long without effective treatment, however, any of these conditions can result in needing "rescue chemistry" (antibiotics). I have too many memories of certified-organic animals not receiving antibiotics when they should have.

A matter of life or death

But some bacterial conditions *are* immediately life-threatening and need an antibiotic without delay. Blackleg is perhaps the most clear-cut case to immediately use an antibiotic. With its gangrene, death *will* quickly occur without antibiotics. And yet even in those situations I sometimes have to convince the farmer that antibiotics really are needed (and that's coming from 'the organic vet').

I've sometimes had to remind them that it's better to have a live animal than a dead organic animal. Most agree, but not all. It depends on the farmer's outlook on life in general, as well as their knowledge and ability with alternative treatments. Some have balked at using antibiotics simply due to the penalty of having to remove the animal permanently if treated with an antibiotic. I've been implored many times to use something, anything. A homeopathic remedy, IV colloidal silver, cold laser treatment, acupuncture, a chiropractic device—whatever it takes, doc ... "just no antibiotics!"

Sometimes I need to remind farmers that, over the year, they will likely cull an animal for not breeding back, mastitis or lameness. And this particular animal that is looking us right in the eye will live but have to be culled, just like some others. In this case, because of antibiotic use.

It's hopefully a rare instance that an animal

needs an antibiotic at all. That, in part, depends on the local veterinarian's ability to use tools outside the conventional tool box. Indeed, many efforts over the years have been made to reach out to the mainstream veterinary community. However, so many veterinarians are "wed" to using a conventional med that adopting natural treatments is a tall order.

Yet even for me, a veterinarian who practices much like veterinarians did before the advent of the antibiotic era, the NOP antibiotic prohibition is the single reason our farm (which is certified by AGW as Animal Welfare Approved and as Grassfed) will *never* be certified organic by choice. My wife and I disagree in the strongest possible terms with anything that penalizes us for doing the right thing for an animal's best welfare, such as using an antibiotic to save its life.

It's not written in stone

Is the NOP prohibition on using antibiotics ethical? It's questionable. What would the customers say if they knew what I know?

Can 7CFR205.238(c)(7) be changed to reflect a kinder, more humane reality? Difficult but far from impossible. Actually, all that needs to be done is look at the Canadian organic standards. They require a 30-day milk withholding period for organic dairy animals treated with antibiotics. A 30-day milk withhold is lengthy. But without the penalty of permanent removal from certified production, a farmer at least has the incentive to first try natural treatments and then use antibiotics only if truly needed—and that has to be a good thing.

With nearly 30 years of experience, Dr. Hubert Karreman is a pioneer of organic and holistic veterinary medicine. He was appointed to the USDA National Organic Standards Board in 2005–2010 and has written three books on natural treatments for dairy cows.

"How do we, in real time, reconcile the NOP prohibition on the use of antibiotics with the best possible care of organic animals?"

READ ALL ABOUT IT!



MAN_HALF-TUBE/ISTOCK

Emily Davies offers a few tips to help you prepare for media interviews

Do you have a story to tell, but you aren't sure how to tell it? Perhaps you'd like to constructively engage with the media but you feel reluctant or nervous about it? If your answer is yes, then don't worry—it's a perfectly natural response!

Talking to the media can feel daunting, but there are strategies you can follow to help you effectively communicate with the press and prepare for media interviews.

Whether you're looking to promote sustainable practices, enhance your public image or learn how to tell your own stories—without a press officer or PR person giving you a script!—here is some advice that can help.

Don't believe the hype

Public perception of the agricultural industry comes mostly from the media. Unless you sell direct to consumer, there won't be many chances for you to explain to customers what you do outside of social media and talking to the press.

Journalists (predominantly urban) can struggle to find good talkers without a wider agenda and negotiating access on to farms can often be tricky. They often lack time and resources, so easy-to-find interviewees are often used again and again, and conversations around the industry narrow, with less variety of opinion. As a result, some voices become too dominant within the media.

This is why it's up to individual farmers to discover what engages people when it comes to conversations around food, farming, and the environment, and to gain the confidence to tell their stories with pride.

What makes a good story?

To engage the consumer and make a story human, you need to make it relevant—to everyone. Real connection comes from understanding your audience, finding that sweet spot of mutual relevance. As this will be different for every single story, there's no direct formula. However, there are a few things that journalists will take note of.

► Is your story new or exclusive?

If you're the first to break the news, you can guarantee that will grab interest. No self-respecting media outlet wants to tell a story that's been told many times before!

► What's the 'peg' or 'hook'?

In other words, what's the context? Why now? What makes this story timely and relevant? You might have a great story about saving a rare breed of goats from extinction but it's far more interesting if the story is pitched ahead of the 250th goat's arrival, for example. Journalists love to mark an occasion.

► What's the angle?

To put it bluntly: why should your audience care? Returning to our goats, why is it important to save that breed? What does this mean for the consumer? For a changing climate or food security, for example?

► What access can you provide?

We've already said that journalists can struggle to gain access to farms. A journalist would much rather report on a story if they can see the whole picture. Invite them to your farm so they can see how it's done.

Journalists will look for other things, too. Humans are naturally drawn to 'bad' news, so crises and conflict will always attract media interest. However, stories about the underdog, where someone has triumphed over adversity, will also capture attention. Fascinating stories that present a challenge and easy-to-grasp solutions will, too. And, of course, politics will always play its part!

Preparation pays

A journalist may have contacted you or perhaps you've reached out to them. Either way, your interview is coming and you need to prepare. The good news is that it's best not to prepare too much!

A journalist won't want you speaking from a script. It's good to be prepared but don't rehearse. If you can sum up what you want to say in an easy to understand sentence, you're on the right track. A journalist will rarely send you questions in advance but they will give you a guide on the topic of discussion. So, have in mind a few key points that you want to get across (but don't get frustrated if you forget them on the day!).

Have confidence in what you want to say and remember that they are interviewing you, which means you are the expert. No one knows your farm better than you, so speak from the heart about what you know. Don't try to answer anything that you are not able to. If you get asked a question that you don't know the answer to, it's fine (even on live TV) to say it's not a topic you can

comment on. Better that than trying to fake it.

Lastly, consider the different forms of media. A TV producer will want a great location with good visuals, while a radio or podcast producer will embrace the background noise—the sound of boots on the ground or a tractor engine purring away in the distance. A newspaper journalist will have an interest in strong, dramatic images. What can you offer the journalist that will help them bring your story to life?

What makes a good talker?

Now you're prepped and ready to go. How do you make sure that you sound confident when the cameras start rolling?

A good interviewee can explain challenging topics to the widest audience. This means no acronyms or industry jargon. Remember: you live farming, while most of your audience does not. Imagine you're explaining your topic to a 10-year-old. How would they understand it? Never assume knowledge.

It's ok to show emotion. Open up and speak from the heart. Passion is important, but be careful not to preach and try to refrain from being defensive. Journalists really aren't out to trip you up. Asking questions is their job. Simply listen to what they ask and engage in a way that everyone can easily understand. Above all, just be yourself, (try to!) relax, and tell your story.

Emily Davies is Managing Editor at Just Farmers

STAY ON TRACK

Concerned an interview may have a negative slant? Here are some tips to ensure your perspective is accurately represented:

- Research the reporter to identify any biases or risks. Remember: you don't have to do every interview!
- Ask about areas they want to cover.
- Anticipate any tough questions they may ask.
- Use evidence to support your points and bridge negative questions to positive messages.
- Follow up afterward with clarifications, if needed.

JUST FARMERS



A TV producer will always want a great location with good visuals

JUST FARMERS

Just Farmers is a Community Interest Company that enables farmers to use their voice for positive change in UK farming; giving farmers and growers the confidence to tell their stories with pride through fully-funded media education workshops; while helping journalists and program makers find independent voices at the grass-roots of farming. Visit justfarmers.org



BRANCHING OUT

What can trees do for you? Austin Unruh takes us on a walk in the woods

As someone who spends a lot of time talking with farmers about planting trees, there's a certain phrase I've heard more times than I can count. "Why in the world would someone do that? My Grandad spent years clearing the woods so we can farm."

Busting tree myths

If you're reading a grazing publication, I'll assume you're a bit more open to new ideas than the typical farmer. If you've converted to pastured livestock, chances are your neighbors already think you're a bit loony. But to plant trees in that pasture?! You'd be nuts!

If you have some hesitations about planting trees (not least because several ancestors would roll over in their graves), that's normal. But here's the deal: these are not your grandpa's trees.

If the trees your grandpa cleared were a rusty jalopy sitting out back with a broken axle, what you can now plant is more akin to a shiny F-150. We're not talking planting random trees at random places and crossing our fingers that they'll survive. We're talking planting the right species with the right genetics in the right places in a way that will complement your farm.

Two paths

When thinking about what trees can do for a farm, I like to think about two paths that people can go down.

First, we can choose to plant trees that will add new enterprises to the farm. Here we're talking

about growing timber, fruits or nuts. Planting pecans or English walnuts for their nuts, apples for cider, or black walnuts and black locust for timber. Each one will allow you to diversify the farm operation and develop new income streams. The second is to choose trees that will strengthen your current livestock operation. Whether you raise dairy or beef or sheep or hog or poultry or alpacas, you can plant trees that will make what you already do more profitable and resilient. We do this by planting trees that will provide the shade, fodder, windbreak, and nitrogen that will keep your livestock healthier, more comfortable, and better fed than could be done with pasture alone.

Of course, these two paths don't have to be mutually exclusive. You can focus on adding trees to serve your livestock while also planting a patch of heartnuts or chestnuts. Just keep in mind that planting fruit and nut trees across the whole farm for commercial yield is a whole other game than planting for home use alone.

The next level

What is certain is this. When adding trees to pasture, the low-hanging fruit is not fruit (or nuts). The easiest place to start is to hone in on those trees that will take your grazing management to the next level.

Plant persimmons to drop high-energy fruits packed with vitamins in the fall. Plant black locust to fix nitrogen while letting dappled shade cool your livestock and forages. Best yet, plant honey locust for a complete package of nitrogen fixation, light canopy, and calorie-packed pods dropped from October through January.

Left: Iberian pigs fattening on oak tree acorns



Silvopasture at Fiddle Creek Dairy in Lancaster County, PA



Honey locust trees offer shade and yield high energy pods

FURTHER READING

The Grazier's Guide to Trees is a comprehensive, step-by-step guide to getting trees established in active pastures, including how to select species to address your needs; how to plant and protect trees in active pastures; how to lay out trees in a way that makes sense for your farm; how to access funding; and the long-term aftercare of trees.

Visit treesforgraziers.com



If you already have your hands full and don't foresee more folks joining the farm business, this is a great place to stop reading. However, if junior is coming up and wants a role on the farm, or you want the farm to support multiple families, adding trees for saleable crops is vertical integration of a business in the most literal sense.

You'll need to go into it wide-eyed about the investments you'll need to make in order to harvest, process and market your wares, as well as an awareness of food safety regulations. But, thankfully, there's a growing body of information to help you make those decisions. If you're interested, I would suggest reading *Perennial Pathways: Planting Tree Crops* by the Savanna Institute for starters.

Planting a legacy

Your grandpa never really had the opportunity to plant trees this way. The information, support, genetics, and resources were just so much tougher to come by. If he had pulled it off somehow, you might now have a farm with towering honey locusts feeding the herd through the winter, hybrid oaks for fattening hogs, and apples for pressing into cider. Today, the resources, support and information are all available, ready for you to take grazing to the level. What are you waiting for?

Austin Unruh is CEO of *Trees for Graziers*, a multi-species mix of innovators who work together to make silvopasture possible for those who take the long view. Visit treesforgraziers.com

Silvopasture is an NRCS-defined "climate-smart" practice (#381). Visit nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/natural-resource-concerns/climate

Springing up

Most folks come to silvopasture with the simple goal of shade for their livestock. That was certainly the case for Dwight Stoltzfoos of Springwood Dairy in Pennsylvania.

As one of the largest grassfed dairies in the state, he has a lot of cows that spend a lot of time outside. And production really drops when they get heat stressed. Even though this is expensive grazing ground, Dwight didn't see any reason not to plant trees, given that he plans to keep the farm in grass in perpetuity.

We worked with Dwight to develop a planting plan, as well to identify funding to pay for the trees, planting, and care of the trees.

We planted about 1,200 trees across 40 acres, with a spacing of 60' between rows and 20' between trees in the row, all laid out in a grid for easy accessibility. The trees were a mixture of fast growers for quick shade, such as black locust and poplar, plus long-lived species like honey locust and persimmon as a high-energy feed supplement.

Visit springwoodfarm.com



Certification news

ALL CHANGE

Every year, important changes are made to the AGW standards, says Tim Holmes

AGW standards have been written and developed by scientists, farmers and farm animal welfare experts from around the globe. Every year, our Standards Board reviews and updates the current standards.

How does it work?

Throughout the year, we collate and examine any new science relating to the different AGW certifications to ensure our standards reflect scientific consensus on best practice. Anyone can submit a suggestion or Standard Amendment form during the year (as outlined in P.2.4.5 in AGW's Policy document), so the Standards Board looks at any suggestions or requests received during the year about possible changes.

Finally, we also examine our auditing process and review how standards were scored throughout the year to identify any trends or possible problems on the ground. This also lets us know if we need to clarify any standards so the intent and meaning is clear for our certified businesses.

Stakeholder consultation

Once we have completed our initial review process, we notify all operations who have been accepted into the program about the possible changes. We also announce the consultation process, providing details on where to access information on our website and the expected timeframe. After the close of the consultation, the Board will then look at feedback before making any final decisions. We then publish the updated standards on the AGW website.

This year's review process resulted in some new standards, as well as clarifications for several others.

Tim Holmes is AGW's Director of Compliance

Standards updates: examples

The previous AWA standard 7.0.18 recommended that farmers should avoid using manure and fertilizer that may have a negative effect on soil microbial life and/or which contain heavy metals. The updated 2024 standard now requires that manures and fertilizers that can have a negative effect on soil microbial life and/or which contain heavy metals **must** be avoided. Based on scientific advice, this standard has changed from a **recommendation** to a **requirement**.

The new Certified Non-GMO by AGW standard 1.0.5 requires that any certified non-GMO products containing or derived from animal ingredients must come from livestock certified to the Certified Animal Welfare Approved by AGW (AWA) species-specific standards. (A derogation may be granted in cases where AWA animal ingredients are not available.) The addition of this new standard reflects a tenet of the Non-GMO program that was not previously covered, and thus makes it clear what the program is looking for and when a derogation may be possible.

A change to the Standards for Distributors and Processors now includes brands, as well as specific standards that cover the use of single ingredient, multiple ingredient claims, and 'made with' claims, in addition to others that verify traceability and mass balance.

These are just a few examples of recent changes that have been incorporated. We strongly encourage you to take part in future consultations and read the updated standards on the website.

If you are interested in certification and have any questions, please get in touch. We are here to help. See page 20 for contact details.

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NORTH AMERICA
info@agreenerworld.org
+1 (800) 373-8806

INTERNATIONAL
info@agreenerworld.org.uk
+44 1271 320715

CERTIFICATION
Ashley Khteian
Outreach Specialist
ashley.k@agreenerworld.org
+1 562-276-4102

MARKETING AND LABELING
Callie Casteel
Marketing Services Coordinator
callie@agreenerworld.org
+1 931-548-0664

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Apply now to become a part of a network of sustainable farmers, where every action taken is a step toward ensuring the well-being of animals and the planet alike.

Learn more at agreenerworld.org/certifications/animal-welfare-approved



Promoting A Greener World

AGW is proud to offer low-cost branded promotional materials to help raise awareness of your certification and better communicate the wider benefits of your farming practices. Every purchase also supports our work to educate and inform consumers—and helps keep your certifications affordable.

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If required for educational use, please email info@agreenerworld.org



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ECO LUNCH COOLER \$14

- Stylish, insulated four-can lunch cooler made from recycled, post-consumer plastic
- Fold-over flap with Velcro strap
- Graphite color with black text/AGW logo
- 7 ¼" long x 10½" high x 5 ¼" wide

Meet the farmer

BURNING DESIRE

Zach and Christina Menchini own Campfire Farms, 30 acres of pasture and woodland near Mulino in Oregon in the foothills of the Cascades.

How did you get into farming?

Christina and I both lived in New York City in our 20s. We were avid farmers' market customers and cared deeply about animal welfare, climate change, and nutritious food. Along the way, we started learning about the problems in modern agriculture and left New York, eager for a lifestyle change and to be 'part of the solution'. We moved to Oregon in 2014 and raised 20 pigs on our farm the following season. Today, we market about 210 each year.

Describe a typical day

Like most farmers, every day is different! This is part of why I love farming. But things usually start around 8am with chores, before the daily meeting with the farm crew at 9:30am. We then move hogs to new pasture and break at 1pm for lunch. The afternoon is spent doing wellness checks. We aim to stop work around 5:30pm. Of course, some days are longer, but they are rarely shorter!

Sustainable farming: why does it matter?

We're temporary stewards of our animals, the land we manage, and the Earth. The alternative to "sustainable" is the destruction of all of these things. We don't have a choice!

How did you hear about AGW?

It's a label we sought out as shoppers before we raised our own animals. Our certification is a quick way to communicate our values and practices. It's opened up wholesale opportunities because grocery stores can easily understand and communicate our practices. It offers legitimacy and inspires trust—even if we can't speak one-on-one.

Who are your customers?

Mostly families with young children that have similar values to us: a sense of responsibility to do as little harm as possible while also maintaining a healthy, balanced diet.

How can the market for sustainable food products be improved?

Right now we don't produce enough to feed our community. We need more sustainable farms. Our products should be the norm, rather than the exception.

What is the biggest threat to sustainable farming?

Climate change. More specifically here in the west, access to water. We get a lot of rain but now only during about half the year. Our animals need to drink every day!

What keeps you awake at night?

Loose pigs!



CAMPFIRE FARMS (x2)

AT A GLANCE

Farm: Campfire Farms, Mulino, OR
Certification date: February 2024
Size: 30 acres
Soil type: Silty clay loam
Altitude: 850 feet
Annual rainfall: 58 inches
Enterprises: Certified Animal Welfare Approved by AGW pigs
campfirefarms.com



JOE PELLEGRINO

INTERESTED IN OBTAINING FUNDING TO IMPLEMENT REGENERATIVE, CLIMATE-SMART PRACTICES?

RAFI JUST FOODS PROGRAM DIRECTOR KELLI DALE

RAFI, A Greener World, and Soil Health Institute are recruiting farmers for a project funded through the USDA Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities. Want to transition toward regenerative practices, improve operations, access new markets, and join the growing network of farmers committed to environmental conservation?



PROGRAM BENEFITS

- \$1,250 stipend to support the planning for a climate-smart regenerative farm and emissions reduction plan design.
- Opportunity to become Certified Regenerative by A Greener World (up to a \$2,050 value). Steps: Plan, implement, audit, and validate.
- Assistance with accessing new climate-smart markets and premiums, along with customized marketing and labeling support from A Greener World.

Incentive payments average \$10,000 based on examination of emissions reductions and implementation of specific climate-smart agriculture and forestry practices.

ELIGIBILITY/BEST FIT

- All farm sizes are eligible; however, farms of 15+ acres are best suited and most likely to have the optimum experience.
- Farmers with full management and control of their farms ensure a necessary holistic approach to the entire farm operation.
- Farmers who seek to achieve clear traceability of their products will benefit.
- The project focus is the Southeast U.S.; however, any interested U.S. farmer can apply.
- Farmers can be involved in livestock production, cropping, or both.

ELIGIBLE COMMODITIES*



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 Dairy cows, Beef cattle, Sheep, Goats, and Swine

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 Peas, Pumpkins, Squash, Kale, Green Beans, Beets, Carrots, and a range of Fruits

ROW CROPS
 Corn, Soybeans, Barley, Oats, Rye, Triticale, Cotton, Peanuts, Sunflowers, Potatoes, Kidney Beans, Alfalfa, Clover, Rice, and Wheat

*Other commodities may be eligible. Please reach out if interested



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Christy Lohof, LOHOF Grass-Finished Beef, Montana

COVER PHOTO: UENIE HELMIGSTOCK

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