



## Join OCA's Delegation to Cuba and Lift the Travel Ban

Since 1990, Cuba has carried out the world's most comprehensive and successful organic food and farming revolution, including the ongoing cultivation of over 60,000 organic urban gardens that supply 50-80% of its urban food needs (learn more). The Organic Consumers Association and our friends at Global Exchange and Food First are organizing a study delegation May 21 -29 to Cuba to see and experience firsthand how our Caribbean neighbors have survived economic depression and a life-threatening cut-off of oil and food imports by moving from chemical-intensive agriculture to nearly 100% organic and local production. In the process of carrying out this organic revolution, Cubans have qualitatively improved the island's public health, biodiversity, and environment, not to mention drastically reducing fossil fuel use and greenhouse gas pollution.

OCA invites you to join Ronnie Cummins and other leading organic food and farm activists for this inspirational trip to Cuba from May 21 -29. OCA believes that the only way we can overcome our own domestic economic, food, health, energy, and climate crisis is through sharing information and "best practices" with organic practitioners and communities across the globe. This is why we are calling on President Obama to immediately normalize relations with Cuba. Its high time to lift travel restrictions to Cuba for all Americans, restore our right as United States citizens to travel freely, and take a giant step toward restoring our country's reputation in Latin America and the world. Support the Freedom of Travel Bills in the House and Senate at OCA's Cuba Delegation web page: [organicconsumers.org/cuba.cfm](http://organicconsumers.org/cuba.cfm)



## Is Baby Formula Tainted with Antibiotics?

NaturalCheck, a company dedicated to helping people ensure that food is healthy, safe and natural, is looking for 20 volunteers to provide samples of milk-based baby formula for testing. The project will test for the presence of antibiotics given to dairy cows, but supposedly not allowed in consumer milk products. "News of baby formula contaminated with melamine last year made us wonder if there are other chemicals in milk and milk products," said Larry Bohlen, President of NaturalCheck. Scientists are concerned that antibiotic residues in milk could cause bacteria to become resistant to the same antibiotics used to treat people when they are seriously ill. This OCA/NaturalCheck project needs volunteers from all over the country to send in samples of baby formula, because there are so many brands nationwide. In return, testing will be conducted for free and results will be shared with volunteers, as well as the general public. Learn more: [organicconsumers.org/articles/article\\_17303.cfm](http://organicconsumers.org/articles/article_17303.cfm)

## Salt Water Elixir May Be New 'Miracle Liquid'

A "new" product is being dubbed the latest "miracle liquid". It's a degreaser, it cleans windows, it's nontoxic, it combats food pathogens, and it's so safe you can drink it. It's electrolyzed salt water, and people around the world are swearing by it. Housekeepers at hotels, like the Sheraton in Santa Monica, CA, say they were skeptical at first, since it doesn't foam, make suds or stink, but they say it is cleaning up their toughest messes while sparing their lungs from the usual toxic cleaners. In Japan, they are using it to fill their swimming pools, because it's safer than chlorine and it costs about a penny per gallon to make. The drawback is a very short shelf-life, but some are saying this could be the elixir of the future. Minnesota food scientist Joellen Feirtag said she was skeptical, but now encourages food processors to use the water, because it kills E. coli, salmonella, listeria and other food pathogens. Yet it's gentle enough to soothe sunburns and acne. "This sounds too good to be true, which is really the biggest problem," said Feirtag. "But it's only a matter of time before this becomes mainstream." Learn more: [organicconsumers.org/articles/article\\_17014.cfm](http://organicconsumers.org/articles/article_17014.cfm)

## DC Report: NAIS & USDA Secretary Vilsack

On March 11, the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy and Poultry held a hearing on the controversial National Animal Identification System (NAIS). With most of the committee members in favor of NAIS, the committee's "review" of the program was used primarily to urge the USDA to act quickly to make NAIS mandatory for all farm animals—even tiny farms or backyard animal pens such as what Republican Representative Mike Conaway described as operations consisting of "one, big, fat horse." Rep. Conaway further suggested that, if NAIS is just as important as organic (his tone of voice implied that he thought NAIS was more important than organic), the USDA could pay farmers as much as it pays them to help with organic certification costs (\$750, which he didn't seem to think was very much) to enroll in NAIS. Read more about the hearing: [organicconsumers.org/articles/article\\_17297.cfm](http://organicconsumers.org/articles/article_17297.cfm)

March 16 was the deadline to submit comments to the USDA regarding the standardization of NAIS. OCA submitted comments opposing NAIS from more than 10,000 of our members. We joined in comments submitted by a coalition of more than 70 organizations spearheaded by the Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance. Read the coalition's comments: [farmandranchfreedom.org/content/files/Ltr\\_Vilsack\\_090316.pdf](http://farmandranchfreedom.org/content/files/Ltr_Vilsack_090316.pdf)

On March 16, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack addressed the inaugural meeting of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. He was introduced by Iowa farmer Ron Rosmann who gave Sec. Vilsack, former Iowa Governor, bragging rights to the success of his organic corn. The corn yielded 200 bushels per acre, making it competitive with industrially-grown corn and proving that organic agriculture can feed the world. In his speech, Sec. Vilsack made no promise to support organic agriculture or any particular sustainable agriculture program, but he gave support to the movement in general terms. He drew the largest applause when he mentioned the appointment of OCA-endorsed organic advocate Kathleen Merrigan as Deputy Secretary of Agriculture and talked about his USDA People's Garden, which he said will be organic, fertilized with compost from USDA cafeteria waste, and a source of food for local food banks. [organicconsumers.org/articles/article\\_17123.cfm](http://organicconsumers.org/articles/article_17123.cfm)

The Organic Consumers Fund is OCA's allied legislative action group, lobbying on behalf of organic consumers in Washington, DC. Please consider supporting our work at [grassrootsnetroots.org/donate.cfm](http://grassrootsnetroots.org/donate.cfm)

## Will HR875 Outlaw Organic Farming?

There's been a lot of hype circulating the internet about the ramifications of a controversial new bill in congress: HR875, the Food Safety Modernization Act of 2009. OCA weighed in on the issue in last week's *Organic Bytes*, taking a middle-ground position on HR875. We think food safety legislation is needed. We'd like to see factory farming stopped along with the practices of confining animals, feeding them slaughterhouse waste and manure, and not letting cows eat grass. These practices would virtually eliminate mad cow, salmonella and E. coli. HR 875 doesn't do this, but it does make food recalls mandatory and allows for civil penalties, two important tools the government could use against the factory farms that are making us sick. Linn Cohen-Cole, the most vocal opponent of HR 875, and the person who initially shared her concerns about the bill with the OCA, responded to our article with deep concerns. We've posted her main points for our readers to discuss: [organicconsumers.org/forum/index.php?showtopic=2564](http://organicconsumers.org/forum/index.php?showtopic=2564)

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