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Zoology

**“Organic farmers have been research pioneers for many of us... when you do organic research, everybody in the agricultural system benefits.”**

*Kathleen Merrigan, keynote*

## Organic research valued



**Jim Koan, owner of Almar Orchard in Flushing, Mich., discusses why he made the move from conventional to organic apple farming during the First World Congress on Organic Food. Photo/Trent Wakenight**

## Growers through retailers converge at MSU to talk safety

Lower and different pesticide use is among the reasons organic fruits, vegetables and grains may be safer for growers and consumers, according to about 100 attendees who gathered at the First World Congress on Organic Food: Meeting the Challenges of Safety and Quality for Fruits, Vegetables and Grains, March 29-31 at the Kellogg Center on the Michigan State University campus.

The Congress, organized and co-sponsored by the NFSTC, was the first of its kind to closely examine the research, policy and education/communication behind food safety research and organic fruits, vegetables and grains by researchers, growers, producers, retailers and others in the organic or conventional agricultural sector.

Keynote speaker Kathleen Merrigan, director of the Agriculture, Food and Environment Program at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at

Tufts University, who co-authored the national organic standards, discussed some of the “slam dunks” for organics (among them fewer pesticides and no GMOs) and future research needs (endocrine disruptors, microbiological studies). The USDA organic seal, introduced in October 2002, lets consumers know that the product is in compliance with the standards of the USDA National Organics Program.

Ewen Todd, director of the NFSTC and the main organizer, says the Congress will lead to important recommendations and further need for research to provide more information about the food safety aspects of organic produce and grains. “By bringing together a variety of people to openly talk about food safety issues as related to the organic food industry, we have initiated an important dialogue that will be continued through future events and through our distance learning education program.”

**(Organics - continued on page 3)**



## Michigan aims for thermometer use

The NFSTC will join the efforts of MSU Extension's Paul McConaughy, the lead on a new initiative to promote the USDA-FSIS Food Thermometer Education Campaign that will place Michigan as the model state for the nation in food thermometer education and usage beginning in August. "The main goal of the campaign is to promote behavior change and increase the use of meat thermometers by American consumers," says McConaughy. For details, contact Trent Wakenight at 517-432-3100.

## Task force releases power outage info



The Michigan Food Safety Task Force announces "Power Outage Do's and Don'ts" as a result of the recent Lansing blackout to provide consumers with

timely consumer food safety information. The guide includes PSAs and on-air scripts to use when a power outage occurs. The task force also has prepared a fact sheet with egg safety/power outage information. In addition, the Tri-County Food Safety Task Force has created a food safety video about improper food safety in the kitchen. For details, contact Trent Wakenight at 517-432-3100 x. 218.

## MDA expands grant program

The Michigan Department of Agriculture has provided additional funding for the Consumer Food Safety Education Program through Sept. 30, 2004. The program is run through the NFSTC. In a letter dated Dec. 16, 2003, to the NFSTC announcing the additional monies, Katherine Fedder, director of the MDA Food and Dairy Division, said "The efforts of these groups are invaluable. It goes without saying that these funds allow the many organizations to reach thousands of Michigan's consumers to improve their awareness and knowledge of proper food safety." A third round of mini-grants were funded beginning in January and will conclude in December. So far, 21 programs have been funded since 2002 to give 1.4 million Michigan consumers food safety information and tools.

## RUsick2 partners with consumer group

Founded as a research project to "give power to the people," the RUsick2 Foodborne Forum will join forces with STOP, a nationwide consumer group committed to stopping foodborne illness. Through a grant from the MDA mini-grant program STOP will promote the forum through its web site and a media campaign beginning in May. The forum is featured in upcoming issues of *Shape* and *Prevention* magazines.

## Town meeting connects faculty with consumers



A town hall meeting connected consumers with professors and government to discuss current food safety concerns such as mad cow disease, chronic wasting disease and more on April 13 at Southwestern Michigan College, Mathews Conference Center in Dowagiac. The public meeting was sponsored by MSU Extension – Cass County along with MSU's Food Safety Area of Expertise Team. The open forum featured consumer tips and information from experts at the NFSTC at Michigan State University and Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA). Faculty and staff panelists from the NFSTC and/or MSU included: Craig Harris, Lillian Occena, Toby Ten Eyck, Jim Trosko, Brad Upham and Trent Wakenight. Katherine Fedder and Dan Wyant of MDA were featured panelists.

Dan Wyant, director of the Michigan Department of Agriculture, answers a consumer question at the town hall meeting in Dowagiac while NFSTC faculty members Craig Harris, Toby Ten Eyck and Brad Upham look on. Photo/Trent Wakenight



## NFSTC faculty contribute expertise in Costa Rica



**Ewen C.D. Todd**  
NFSTC Director

I'm pleased to report that four faculty members of the NFSTC have been invited to present a symposium on "Emerging Issues in Food Safety" at the Third National Congress of Food Science and Technology in Costa Rica in late April, as part of an agreement to establish a Center of Excellence in Food Safety for Central America by Michigan State University. The symposium, sponsored by the non-profit Costa

Rica-United States Foundation for Cooperation, will present information from NFSTC/MSU experts on topics such as risk assessment, genetically modified foods, surveillance systems, risk communication, and bioterrorism. Those invited include: Robert Hollingworth, NFSTC faculty member and former director, Edward Mather, deputy director of the NFSTC, Toby Ten Eyck, sociology professor and NFSTC faculty member, and myself. The symposium is being organized by Karim Maredia of MSU's Institute for International Agriculture, and the NFSTC looks forward to sharing the news of this educational opportunity upon our return in May.

### (Organics - continued from page 1)

MSU Provost Lou Anna K. Simon emphasized the goals of the Congress: "It is not simply economic competitiveness; it's economic competitiveness AND quality of life, food AND health...The real challenge of the day is to find the 'ands.' "

In addition to the NFSTC and MSU, Congress sponsors included: the U.S. Department of Agriculture – CSREES, the Organic Trade Association, the International Association for Food Protection, the CS Mott Foundation at MSU, NSF International, and GSC Mobile Solutions. Also participating: the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, the Organic Crop Improvement Association, Organic Growers of Michigan, and the Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance.

Final recommendations are expected to be published in the printed and CD-rom proceedings, available in mid-May from the NFSTC. Please check the Congress web site for more information: [www.foodsafe.msu.edu/organics](http://www.foodsafe.msu.edu/organics)



## Spring seminar series provides research links

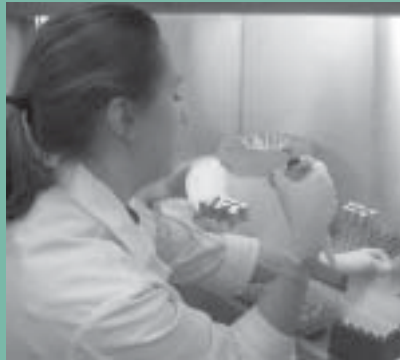
Paul Hall, above right, of Kraft Foods, presented "Food Microbiology in the 'Real World': A Global Food Manufacturer's Perspective" on March 15 during the Spring Seminar Series (VM 828). Jeffrey Kornacki, below, second from right, private consultant for microbial food safety, from Madison, Wisc., presented "Enterobacter sakazakii - An Emerging Foodborne Pathogen" on Feb. 23. Other spring seminars addressed issues on Listeria, antimicrobial resistance, endocrine disruptors, PCBs and dioxins. The Fall 2004 Seminar Series begins on Aug. 30. Photos/Kirsten Khire





## NIH projects at full speed

The first two projects have been approved to begin food safety basic research within the new Microbiology Research Unit (MRU), one of two such units nationwide funded through an NIH contract. The projects will address areas such as the evolution of strains of *Salmonella* Enteritidis across species. The principal investigator for the MRU is Thomas Whittam, NFSTC faculty member. The recently-funded projects include: 1/ Research Center to Facilitate Study of STEC, and 2/ Profiling the Emergence of *Salmonella* Enteritidis (Co-investigator: Mahdi Saeed).



**Lindsey Ouellette, a research technician in Thomas Whittam's laboratory, extracts DNA from freezer stocks for the STEC collection.**

*Photo/Kirsten Khire*

## USDA awards \$500,000 grant

A project entitled "Optimizing the design and operation of commercial cooking systems for ready-to-eat meat and poultry products" has been awarded to MSU faculty Bradley Marks, Al Booren and Elliot Ryser from the USDA-CSREES National Integrated Food Safety Initiative. Marks and Ryser are members of the NFSTC. The award is \$500,000 from September 2003-2006.

## Toxicology faculty, students bring home honors from SOT

At the Society of Toxicology annual meeting held in March in Baltimore, Md., Quanshan Jia, a student in Jim Pestka's laboratory, won the Taylor and Francis Award from the Food Safety Specialty Section. Jim Luyendyk, a trainee in Bob Roth's lab, was not only active at the meeting as Chair of the Student Advisory Committee to the SOT Council but also received the Novartis Graduate Fellowship Award, the only graduate fellowship awarded by the SOT. Darrell Boverhof, whose thesis advisor is Tim Zacharewski, was a finalist for this award. In addition, Jack Harkema was elected to the SOT membership committee, and Norb Kaminski to a three-year term as SOT treasurer. All faculty and students are members of the NFSTC. Congrats to each of them!

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