



## Alert Update: Vilsack and Riddle

Despite a deluge of over 100,000 emails and petition signatures from organic consumers and farmers objecting to the appointment of biotech and biofuels booster Tom Vilsack as Secretary of Agriculture, the Senate is scheduled to begin confirmation hearings for Vilsack today.

The Organic Consumers Association (OCA) is disappointed in this controversial appointment, and we are calling on our national network and allies to pressure Obama to move beyond "agribusiness as usual" by drafting Jim Riddle to head the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), the department that oversees organic food, farming, and standards. Riddle is an organic farmer from Minnesota, former Chair of the National Organic Standards Board, and a longtime advocate for sustainable and organic farming. With Riddle heading up the AMS, farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture, transition to organic programs, and the National Organic Program will finally receive the attention, technical assistance, and funding they deserve. Take action: [organicconsumers.org/vilsack.cfm](http://organicconsumers.org/vilsack.cfm)

## How Much Change Will There Be?

On January 8, the US Senate began confirmation hearings for President-Elect Obama's cabinet. *The Salt Lake Tribune* sums things up neatly in a headline indicating Obama's Cabinet may be short on reformers. According to OCA director Ronnie Cummins, "The latest polls show that 60% of Americans say we're in serious straits and need some major changes, but he's going to have to be pushed if we're going to see anything other than small change."

Please send letters to President-Elect Obama and your Senators. The Senate is expected to confirm all the nominees in a floor vote on Inauguration Day, January 20.

## Your Guide to Self-Sufficient Living

"Sick of flavorless, genetically modified, pesticide-drenched Franken-vegetables? It's time to start growing food in your back yard. Before you start thinking that you have to move somewhere else to grow your own food, take another look around. With a couple of notable exceptions, American cities sprawl. They are full of wasted space. As a homesteader, you will begin to see any open space as a place to grow food. This includes front yards as well as backyards, vacant lots, parkways, alleyways, patios, balconies, window boxes, fire escapes and rooftops. Urban homesteading is an affirmation of the simple pleasures of life. When you spend a Saturday morning making a loaf of bread, or go out on a summer evening after work to sit with your chickens, or take a deep breath of fresh-cut basil, you unplug yourself from the madness. Many of us spend a lot of each day in front of a computer. Homesteading hooks us into the natural world and the passing of the seasons, and reminds us of our place within the greater cycle of life."

-From *How You Can Start a Farm in Heart of the City* by Kelly Coyne and Erik Knutzen [alternet.org/story/118483/](http://alternet.org/story/118483/)

Learn about OCA's **Organic Transitions** campaign, mobilizing communities and consumers to develop transition strategies in the new era of Peak Oil and climate change, with organic food & farming providing the healthy cornerstone for a new green economy: [organicconsumers.org/transitions](http://organicconsumers.org/transitions)

## Web Video: I'm Broke! Why Buy Organic?

During these times of economic hardship, many green-minded shoppers are questioning whether it's worth it to cough up the extra dough to buy organic food. This entertaining video provides an excellent summary of the benefits of organic food and farming. If you have friends or family that are skeptical of organics, shoot 'em a link to this video, and they may end up joining you on your next trip to the local co-op.

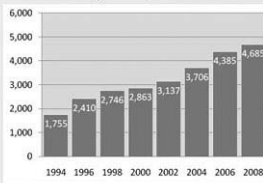
[organicconsumers.org/articles/article\\_16444.cfm](http://organicconsumers.org/articles/article_16444.cfm)

## Tell Millstone Coffee: Unfair Trade is Rotten!

Millstone Coffee has multiple lines of organic and fair trade coffee, but it is currently using a rogue company called Oak Harbor Freight Lines as its distribution hub in the Seattle area. Oak Harbor Freight Lines workers in Oregon, Washington and Idaho have been on strike for four months now in protest of the freight company's violations of US labor laws, as well as hostile efforts by the company to intimidate workers. Oak Harbor even cut off health benefits to its retirees. Take action: [salsa.democracynetwork.org/0/642/campaign.jsp?campaign\\_KEY=26350](http://salsa.democracynetwork.org/0/642/campaign.jsp?campaign_KEY=26350)

### FARMERS MARKETS GO BOOM

#### Number of Operating Farmers Markets



Use OCA's Buying Guide to find Farmers Markets, CSAs and organic goodies near you: [organicconsumers.org/btc/BuyingGuide.cfm](http://organicconsumers.org/btc/BuyingGuide.cfm)

## Medicinal Plants Face Extinction

According to a report this week from the international conservation group Plantlife, 15,000 of the world's 50,000 plants used as medicines now face extinction. Not only are most of the patented, synthetic pharmaceutical drugs used in Western medicine originally derived from naturally occurring medicinal herbs, in addition, the majority of the world's population in the developing world still obtains most of their medicines from plants. Scientists warn that this mass extinction is a result of over-harvesting, loss of habitat, pollution, and invasive species. Sara Oldfield, the secretary general of Botanic Gardens Conservation International says, "The loss of medicinal plant diversity is a quiet disaster." Learn more in OCA's Health Resource and Action Center: [organicconsumers.org/health.cfm](http://organicconsumers.org/health.cfm)

## Saving Energy at the Fridge

The average refrigerator consumes more energy than any other household appliance. We spend over \$10 billion in the US, alone, to supply energy to our household refrigerators. The following tips will save you money and reduce your carbon energy footprint:

- 1 • Clean the filter and coils annually: A dusty coil can increase energy consumption by 20 percent or more.
- 2 • Keep it full but not stuffed: A fridge and freezer will be able to retain their coolness better if they're full. If you're not at full capacity, place a few containers of water in the freezer.
- 3 • Think about what you want before you open the fridge. Every time you open the fridge to browse for a snack, you consume around of 9 to 13 watt/hours, which is enough power to light a 60-watt bulb for 10 minutes.
- 4 • Let hot items cool before placing them in the refrigerator.
- 5 • Defrost the freezer regularly.
- 6 • Check the door gasket for a tight seal.
- 7 • Cover liquids and foods stored in the refrigerator. Uncovered foods release moisture and make the compressor work harder.
- 8 • If your fridge is older than 1993, get a new one. You'll actually save money on your electric bill. New models use less energy than a 75-watt light bulb. Be sure to look for the Energy Star label.

## Please Donate

We'd like to send a special thanks to all of you who took part in OCA's end-of-year donation drive. We still need to raise \$50,000 in January to guarantee our financial stability for the coming year. We look forward to continuing to fight for health, justice and sustainability in 2009!

Donate online at: [organicconsumers.org/donations.cfm](http://organicconsumers.org/donations.cfm)