



## INSTITUTE NEWS

### **Jill Auburn Becomes Director of SARE Program**

Dr. Jill Auburn, a member of the Wallace Institute's Board of Directors, became the director of the USDA's SARE program in January. She had previously been the Associate Director of the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program at the University of California, Davis.

From 1994 to her appointment at SARE, Dr. Auburn worked half-time as the Regional Training Coordinator with the Western Region USDA-SARE program. She also served as Chair of the Sustainable Agriculture Network Management Committee, and was instrumental in launching not only SANET, the communications and outreach arm of the SARE program, but also many other SAN projects from 1991 to 1995.

She joined the Wallace Institute Board in 1996.

### **Paul Johnson, Retired from USDA, Rejoins Wallace Institute Board**

Paul W. Johnson, who served as chief of the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service for three years before resigning last year, has been re-elected to the Wallace Institute's Board of Directors. Johnson was an Iowa farmer and former state representative before taking over the agency in 1994, when it was called the Soil Conservation Service. He had been a board member and consultant with the Wallace Institute before he joined the USDA.

Johnson resigned from the USDA in November, saying he wanted to re-establish livestock on his farm, which recently has produced Christmas trees.

### **Norm Berg Wins NACD Award**

The National Association of Conservation Districts has honored Norm Berg, a member of the Wallace Institute's President's Council and the Soil and Water Conservation Society's Washington Representative, as the recipient of the 1998 NACD Distinguished Service Award. This award is presented annually to recognize individuals for outstanding work and leadership in soil and water conservation.

Berg worked at the USDA's Soil Conservation Service from 1943 to 1982, when he retired after a three-year term as chief of the service. He played a key role in many USDA projects, including serving as Chair of the USDA Land Use Executive Committee, leader of the Resource Conservation Act Management group, and member of the Secretary of Agriculture's Coordinating Committee for the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act.

Since his retirement from the USDA, Berg has been the Washington Representative of the SWCS and the Treasurer of the Natural Resources Council of America.

### **PROPOSED NATIONAL ORGANIC STANDARDS—FINALLY**

The USDA has released proposed rules for organic production which spell out an agency-run accreditation program for state and private organic certification agents, and the first-ever national standards for organically grown food. The proposed rules "take a step in the right direction, but several deal breaker issues remain, and we need to tell USDA how to fix the proposal," according to Kathleen Merrigan, the Wallace Institute's Senior Analyst and a member of the National Organic Standards Board. She praised the USDA for ending its historic opposition to organic agriculture, saying "the willingness of this Administration to embrace organic agriculture indicates real progress. Strict national standards and qualified inspectors will bolster consumer confidence and lead to market

growth. The likely outcome is that more farmers will go organic and our soil, water, and wildlife will be better off."

The proposed standards, which took seven years to develop and release, define "organic" as agricultural products produced through a natural versus synthetic process.

The proposal drew criticism from environmentalists and organic farmers who "worried that the rules could permit use of germ-killing irradiation, growth of genetically altered crops, and spreading of sewage sludge as fertilizer," according to the Associated Press. The National Organic Standards Board rejected all three practices, about which the USDA put off a final decision, calling for public comment on them.

According to Merrigan, "Our major

concern with the USDA program is the attempt by the Secretary to usurp the role of the National Organic Standards Board in determining which synthetic substances may be used in organic production."

The proposed organic standards rules are available for public comment until May 1. Written comment may be sent to Eileen S. Stommes, Deputy Administrator, Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA, Room 4007-S, Ag Stop 0275, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, D.C. 20090-6456; fax, (202) 690-4632. They can also be sent via the Internet through the National Organic Program home page at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop>, where the rules are posted, and other public comments are available for review.