



April 2009

## North By East—Musings from Maine

### Ladybug Invasion

*There's good news and bad news.*

It's a new rite of spring — vacuuming the dead ladybugs off the windowsills and shooing the live ones out the door. Each year about this time, we look up from the desk and are amazed at the number of ladybugs that have suddenly crawled out of the woodwork — literally — to flit around the room and creep across the windows. Where do they all come from, and why don't we remember this pestilence from twenty years ago?

“They're such a conundrum,” explains state entomologist Kathy Murray. “They're beneficial to farmers and gardeners, but they're such a pest at the same time. If they're in the garden chowing down on aphids, they're great. If they're in the house causing allergies and offensive odors, not so much.”

Maine has some thirty native ladybug species, but the culprits of the spring explosion are three invasive species, all of them deliberately introduced from Asia to help American agriculture, according to Murray. “They were actually initially released by the government back in the 1970s,” Murray says. “We had been telling people that they were a new invasive from Asia that came in through New Orleans, but that's only part of the story.” Over the past couple of decades, all three species have moved into Maine, and they like what they've found.

In Asia, the bugs overwinter in rocky outcrops. “Here they like our homes better,” Murray says. Clapboards and shingle siding are especially convenient cold weather quarters. “My house is a ladybug magnet,” Murray says. “The first sunny day after the first frost in the autumn, we see them mobbing the house and crawling in around the windows. If they can find cracks and crevices, they overwinter in the wall voids.”

The Asian ladybugs have few natural enemies here, and people quickly learn that the insects emit a powerful odor when crushed. They can also cause allergic reactions. Murray suggests disposing of the home invaders with a vacuum equipped with a high efficiency air filter. Otherwise, “we just have to bear with it and remember that they're actually beneficial,” she advises. “Eventually the populations will even out and find an equilibrium, but that often takes quite a long time.”

We can hardly wait.

## **BANGOR DAILY NEWS EDITORIAL—March 11, 2009**

### **Pesticides and Perceptions**

A change in attitude, not state law, is needed to ensure that the Board of Pesticides Control fulfills its obligations.

Last year, the Legislature's Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee voted against the governor's nominee for the board, Deborah Aldridge of Jonesboro, saying that her views that pesticide use should sometimes be restricted disqualified her from the board. Ms. Aldridge, a blueberry grower who switched from conventional to organic growing, had supported a 500-foot buffer for aerial spraying, putting her at odds with others in the industry.

By statute, the board's members must include three people knowledgeable about pesticides in agriculture, forestry and commercial applications. One person must have a medical background and another must hold a faculty position in either agronomy or entomology at the University of Maine. The remaining two members are selected to represent the public and must have an interest in environmental protection. Ms. Aldridge was meant to fulfill the last category.

Seven members of the committee voted against her even though none of the state's agricultural groups testified against her nomination and she was slated to replace another organic blueberry grower who was leaving the board.

This episode left the impression that the committee believed the board was responsible for pesticide promotion, not regulation.

Now one of the committee members who voted against Ms. Aldridge's nomination has submitted a bill to change the makeup of the board.

Sen. John Nutting, D-Leeds, has proposed to increase the board to eight members to include a representative of a statewide organization of organic farmers and gardeners. A public hearing on LD 68 is scheduled before the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee today.

Aside from the problem of having an even number of people on the board, this bill is unnecessary. The public nominees with interest in environmental protection now required could, if the committee were more open-minded, be members of organic groups. Or, the requirements for one of the two public representatives could be revised to include interest in organic farming without increasing the size of the board.

The bill also would set a bad precedent. If the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association has a seat set aside on the board, why not the Maine Blueberry Commission or the Maine Potato Board? The board is meant to have a broad perspective, not to advocate for specific industries and practices.

That should not change.

# Editorial – Thinking about Pesticides and the Long View



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by **Russell Libby**, MOFGA Executive Director, Spring 2009

During the cold days of January and February, on my way home I can see more than 50 miles to the White Mountains, and equally far to the mountains of the north and west. That chance to catch the long view lasts for only a limited time each year.

The same seems to be true for our political system. Each year begins with the enthusiasm of a fresh start, with a chance to think beyond the current situation, yet we rapidly get caught in the realities of solving day-to-day problems.

I suggest that we think again about that longer view as we move through the year ahead. Forty-five years ago Rachel Carson went before Congress and suggested that we need to secure the right of people to be safe in their homes from widespread and indiscriminate pesticide spraying. Isn't it time – even past time – to change how we think about pesticides?

A decade ago Sharon Tisher of MOFGA's Public Policy Committee led an initiative that resulted in the Maine Legislature passing "An Act to Minimize Reliance on Pesticides." That law sets a reasonable goal – working to lower pesticide use in Maine. However, due to political realities of the day, no targets were set and no funds were allocated to encourage the kind of research needed to make progress on the issue.

The result: MOFGA has spent the last 10 years working for incremental change. Organic farm numbers doubled. Forty thousand acres of land is now managed organically. But we still haven't eliminated conflicts about pesticide use, or removed many of the most toxic pesticides from regular use.

This year, we've proposed legislation that would lead to another important step in the right direction. "An Act To Require Citizen Notification About Powered Outdoor Pesticide Applications" would require people who want to spray to notify their neighbors in advance about what they are planning. The Act would also establish a free registry for people who want up-to-date notifications before each pesticide application. This Act, if passed by the Maine Legislature, would establish a clear sense of who is responsible for notification – the person who wants to spray. (By the way, the law would also cover organic farmers who apply pesticides with powered equipment.)

We think that's an important first step. Longer term, the challenge is how to move Maine into a leadership position, where pesticides are applied only as a last resort, where a wide range of low toxicity options exists, where we have agreement on a research agenda to move us forward.

In January, the European Union Parliament passed wide-reaching legislation that severely limits pesticide applications near public spaces, including schools and parks; essentially prohibits aerial spraying except for designated emergencies; and puts any pesticide known to cause cancer or disrupt hormones on a rapid, five-year phase-out.

Maine can take the same steps, with the agreement of many farmers, if we can establish a long-term strategy that gives farmers clear alternatives to traditional pesticide applications. If we are looking ahead, that is going to be necessary for us to go beyond the incremental approach that has marked pesticide policy for the last 40 years.

Link to fact sheet on the proposed legislation: "An Act To Require Citizen Notification About Powered Outdoor Pesticide Applications"

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**The New York Times**

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**February 20, 2009**

## **Crop Scientists Say Biotechnology Seed Companies Are Thwarting Research**

By [ANDREW POLLACK](#)

Biotechnology companies are keeping university scientists from fully researching the effectiveness and environmental impact of the industry's genetically modified crops, according to an unusual complaint issued by a group of those scientists.

"No truly independent research can be legally conducted on many critical questions," the scientists wrote in a [statement](#) submitted to the [Environmental Protection Agency](#). The E.P.A. is seeking public comments for scientific meetings it will hold next week on biotech crops.

The statement will probably give support to critics of biotech crops, like environmental groups, who have long complained that the crops have not been studied thoroughly enough and could have unintended health and environmental consequences.

The researchers, 26 corn-insect specialists, withheld their names because they feared being cut off from research by the companies. But several of them agreed in interviews to have their names used.

The problem, the scientists say, is that farmers and other buyers of genetically engineered seeds have to sign an agreement meant to ensure that growers honor company patent rights and environmental regulations. But the agreements also prohibit growing the crops for research purposes.

So while university scientists can freely buy pesticides or conventional seeds for their research, they cannot do that with genetically engineered seeds. Instead, they must seek permission from the seed companies. And sometimes that permission is denied or the company insists on reviewing any findings before they can be published, they say.

Such agreements have long been a problem, the scientists said, but they are going public now because frustration has been building.

“If a company can control the research that appears in the public domain, they can reduce the potential negatives that can come out of any research,” said Ken Ostlie, an entomologist at the [University of Minnesota](#), who was one of the scientists who had signed the statement.

What is striking is that the scientists issuing the protest, who are mainly from land-grant universities with big agricultural programs, say they are not opposed to the technology. Rather, they say, the industry’s chokehold on research means that they cannot supply some information to farmers about how best to grow the crops. And, they say, the data being provided to government regulators is being “unduly limited.”

The companies “have the potential to launder the data, the information that is submitted to E.P.A.,” said Elson J. Shields, a professor of entomology at Cornell.

William S. Niebur, the vice president in charge of crop research for [DuPont](#), which owns the big seed company Pioneer Hi-Bred, defended his company’s policies. He said that because genetically engineered crops were regulated by the government, companies must carefully police how they are grown.

“We have to protect our relationship with governmental agencies by having very strict control measures on that technology,” he said.

But he added that he would welcome a chance to talk to the scientists about their concerns.

[Monsanto](#) and [Syngenta](#), two other biotech seed companies, said Thursday that they supported university research. But as did Pioneer, they said their contracts with seed buyers were meant to protect their intellectual property and meet their regulatory obligations.

But an E.P.A. spokesman, Dale Kemery, said Thursday that the government required only management of the crops’ insect resistance and that any other contractual restrictions were put in place by the companies.

The growers’ agreement from Syngenta not only prohibits research in general but specifically says a seed buyer cannot compare Syngenta’s product with any rival crop.

Dr. Ostlie, at the University of Minnesota, said he had permission from three companies in 2007 to compare how well their insect-resistant corn varieties fared against the rootworms found in his state. But in 2008, Syngenta, one of the three companies, withdrew its permission and the study had to stop.

“The company just decided it was not in its best interest to let it continue,” Dr. Ostlie said.

Mark A. Boetel, associate professor of entomology at North Dakota State University, said that before genetically engineered sugar beet seeds were sold to farmers for the first time last year, he wanted to test how the crop would react to an insecticide treatment. But the university could not come to an agreement with the companies responsible, Monsanto and

Syngenta, over publishing and intellectual property rights.

Chris DiFonzo, an entomologist at [Michigan State University](#), said that when she conducted surveys of insects, she avoided fields with transgenic crops because her presence would put the farmer in violation of the grower's agreement.

An E.P.A. scientific advisory panel plans to hold two meetings next week. One will consider a request from Pioneer Hi-Bred for a new method that would reduce how much of a farmer's field must be set aside as a refuge aimed at preventing insects from becoming resistant to its insect-resistant corn.

The other meeting will look more broadly at insect-resistant biotech crops.

Christian Krupke, an assistant professor at Purdue, said that because outside scientists could not study Pioneer's strategy, "I don't think the potential drawbacks have been critically evaluated by as many people as they should have been."

Dr. Krupke is chairman of the committee that drafted the statement, but he would not say whether he had signed it.

Dr. Niebur of Pioneer said the company had collaborated in preparing its data with universities in Illinois, Iowa and Nebraska, the states most affected by the particular pest.

Dr. Shields of Cornell said financing for agricultural research had gradually shifted from the public sector to the private sector. That makes many scientists at universities dependent on financing or technical cooperation from the big seed companies.

"People are afraid of being blacklisted," he said. "If your sole job is to work on corn insects and you need the latest corn varieties and the companies decide not to give it to you, you can't do your job."

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## New System Minimizes Pesticide Pollution Of Aquifers

ScienceDaily (Mar. 6, 2009) — One of the effects of the application of pesticides and herbicides in agriculture is the pollution of aquifers, because the pesticide is carried by irrigation water or rain along the soil profile (leaching). Minimizing such contamination is possible adjusting the maximum dose of herbicide. Nevertheless, it is difficult to totally avoid it because sooner or later the chemical will be dragged by the water.

Another problem is that when applying pesticides by spray part of their molecules are volatilized. Failure to comply with strict security measures implies risk for people who repeatedly apply the compounds as they are exposed to the neurotoxic effects of some of these substances.

Scientists in the Institute of Natural Resources and Agrobiology of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) have developed a method to encapsulate and slowly release pesticides so that prevents the leaching as well as the volatilization of their molecules.

Tomas Undabeytia, principal investigator of this project, explains that the new method encapsulates the pesticide in lecithin liposomes or vesicles, which in turn are fixed on the surface (adsorption) of clay. The final product is a complex that combines liposomes, pesticide and clay and, at a first glance, looks like clay powder. This complex, which is dispersed in water, allows the chemical compound to be slowly released, as it is fixed to the clay. This also prevents the compound to be washed away by irrigation water or rainfall to subsurface layers and aquifers.

Although the formulation has been designed for agricultural products, it could be applied to other areas, such as mosquito lotions. The components of this formulation, the lipid to form liposome and the clay mineral, are classified by the Environmental Protection Agency of USA (USEPA) as substances of minimal toxicological concern.

### **Fewer doses, more time, less cost**

The new development allows a safer pesticide formulation, thus avoiding repetitive applications or the need for higher doses and reducing the risk of contamination of water and soil while maintaining the desired effect of the pesticide on the target.

One of the major advantages of this system, as the authors explains, is that this formulation can be applied to molecules of pesticides of any kind, either hydrophobic, or acidic or basic. This greatly reduces complications. Experts know that when talking about pesticides, the interaction between chemicals and different soil types must be taken into account. For example, in Mediterranean agricultural areas predominates the calcareous soils. These kind of soils do not retain the anionic herbicide, which means that once there is an excess of water, then all the pesticide is leached to lower layers of soil. On the other hand, there are some new herbicides developed to minimize the required dose and reduce these pollution problems. But they are precisely anionic herbicides, which leach easily into calcareous soils. So, depending on the physico-chemical properties of the soil, the potential benefits of these last generation of herbicides can be lost. This is just one example that demonstrates why it is so important to obtain a slow release system, as these researchers have developed, able to be applied to any molecule of pesticide.

### **EU Regulations**

Safety problems with pesticides are not trivial. The EU has recently adopted new rules to restrict the use of chemical compounds that pose a risk to health and the environment. The new regulations forbid, among other things, production of pesticides that may be carcinogens or affect human health. Some of the compounds that are used at the farm level are very neurotoxic and, although they degrade after a few days, humans and wildlife exposed while the molecules are still active can be affected.

# Passengers deserve better info on in-flight insecticides: Calgary traveller

Last Updated: Monday, March 9, 2009 | 9:04 PM MT

[CBC News](#)



*Amber Wright said she was shocked that flight attendants began spraying insecticide in the cabin as the Air Canada plane she was on was landing in Montego Bay. (CBC)*

A pregnant Calgary woman who was sprayed with an insecticide on a flight to Jamaica wants the practice to be publicized better to give passengers an informed choice about whether they want to take the trip.

Amber Wright, an engineer from Calgary, said she was excited as her Air Canada flight got ready to land in Montego Bay on Feb. 23, but an announcement was made that the cabin would have to be sprayed before the landing.

Wright said she and other passengers were puzzled because they were not told exactly what was going to be released into the plane.

"Five minutes later, flight attendants started marching down the aisles with ... they looked like hairspray canisters and started misting the air," Wright told CBC News on Monday.

Alarmed, Wright grabbed a blanket to cover her body and face and held her breath as best she could.

"I was just trying not to breathe, thinking about being 10 weeks pregnant and worrying about what this unknown chemical, at the time, what effect it would have on my fetus," she recalled.

Wright and her friend, who was also pregnant, asked the flight attendant to see the aerosol can and discovered the spray contained two per cent permethrin, a chemical commonly used in insect repellent.

The process, which is called disinsection, is a requirement of some tropical countries including Jamaica, Cuba and Australia. Cabins are fogged in order to kill pests carrying diseases that may harm crops or public health.

Calgary endocrinologist Hamid Habibi said high doses of permethrin could cause birth defects or cancer, but the chemical is generally safe at levels released on a plane.

"Unless they are exposed on a daily basis, I would not be very concerned," he said.

Wright said after researching the issue further on her return, she's no longer alarmed by possible health risks, but believes Air Canada should do a better job letting passengers know what will happen.

**'I am upset that I wasn't given the chance to say no, that I wasn't given the chance to research what this product was and make an informed decision about whether or not I would allow myself to be exposed to it.'**

—Amber Wright, Air Canada passenger

"I am upset that I wasn't given the chance to say no, that I wasn't given the chance to research what this product was and make an informed decision about whether or not I would allow myself to be exposed to it," she said. "Air Canada can't change the rules, but they can be more open about what's going to happen."

Air Canada spokeswoman Angela Mah said the company's procedures are approved by health authorities. "All of our procedures are clearly laid out on the website as well," she said.

Wright said the information should be made clear when people are buying their tickets.

WestJet said it sprays the insecticide before anyone gets on a plane.

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March 4, 2009

## It's Organic, but Does That Mean It's Safer?

By [KIM SEVERSON](#) and [ANDREW MARTIN](#)

MOST of the chicken, fruit and vegetables in Ellen Devlin-Sample's kitchen are organic. She thinks those foods taste better than their conventional counterparts. And she hopes they are healthier for her children.

Lately, though, she is not so sure.

The national outbreak of [salmonella](#) in products with peanuts has been particularly unsettling for shoppers like her who think [organic food](#) is safer.

The plants in Texas and Georgia that were sending out contaminated peanut butter and ground peanut products had something else besides rodent infestation, mold and bird droppings. They also had federal organic certification.

"Why is organic peanut butter better than Jif?" said Ms. Devlin-Sample, a [nurse practitioner](#) from Pelham, N.Y. "I have no idea. If we're getting salmonella from peanut butter, all bets are off."

Although the rules governing organic food require health inspections and pest-management plans, organic certification technically has nothing to do with [food safety](#).

"Because there are some increased health benefits with organics, people extrapolate that it's safer in terms of pathogens," said Urvashi Rangan, a senior scientist and policy analyst with [Consumers Union](#), the nonprofit publisher of Consumer Reports. "I wouldn't necessarily assume it is safer."

But many people who pay as much as 50 percent more for organic food think it ought to be. The modern organic movement in the United States was started by a handful of counterculture farmers looking to grow food using methods that they believed were better for the land and produced healthier food. It was a culture built on purity and trust that emphasized the relationship between the farmer and the customer.

By 2002, those ideals had been arduously translated into a set of federal organic regulations limiting pesticide use, restricting kinds of animal feed and forbidding dozens of other common agricultural practices.

To determine who would be allowed to use the green and white “certified organic” seal, the Department of Agriculture deputized as official certifiers dozens of organizations, companies and, in some cases, state workers.

These certifiers, then, are paid by the farmers and manufacturers they are inspecting to certify that the standards have been met. Depending on several factors, the fee can be hundreds or thousands of dollars. Manufacturers who buy six or seven organic ingredients to make one product are especially dependent on the web of agents.

If agents do a thorough job, the system can be effective. But sometimes it falls apart.

Texas officials last month fired a state worker who served as a certifier because a plant owned by the [Peanut Corporation of America](#) — the company at the center of the salmonella outbreak — was allowed to keep its organic certification although it did not have a state health certificate.

A private certifier took nearly seven months to recommend that the U.S.D.A. revoke the organic certification of the peanut company’s Georgia plant, and then did so only after the company was in the thick of a massive food recall. So far, nearly 3,000 products have been recalled, including popular organic items from companies like Clif Bar and Cascadian Farm. Nine people have died and almost 700 have become ill.

The private certifier, the Organic Crop Improvement Association, sent a notice in July to the peanut company saying it was no longer complying with organic standards, said Jeff See, the association’s executive director. He would not say why his company wanted to pull the certification.

A second notice was sent in September, but it wasn’t until Feb. 4 that the certifier finally told the agriculture department that the company should lose its ability to use the organic label.

Mr. See said the peanut company initially appeared willing to clear up the problems. But he said the company was slow to produce information and then changed the person in charge of the organic certification, further delaying the process.

He said his organization finally decided to recommend suspending the organic certification after salmonella problems at the plant were exposed.

Although certifiers have some discretion in giving organic companies time to fix compliance problems, Barbara C. Robinson, acting director of the agriculture department’s National Organic Program, said her agency is investigating the gap between the first notice of noncompliance and the recommendation that the peanut plant surrender its organic certification.

To emphasize that reporting basic health violations is part of an organic inspector’s job, Ms. Robinson last week issued a directive to the 96 organizations that perform foreign and domestic organic inspections that they are obligated to look beyond pesticide levels and crop management techniques.

Potential health violations like rats — which were reported by federal inspectors and former workers at the Texas and Georgia plants — must be reported to the proper health and safety agency, the directive said.

“For example, while we do not expect organic inspectors to be able to detect salmonella or other pathogens,” Ms. Robinson wrote, “their potential sources should be obvious from such evidence as bird, rodent and other animal feces or other pest infestations.”

Even some certifiers say that while their job is not to assure that food is safe, taking account of health inspections will help consumers.

“It’s a reassurance that they have another set of eyes, and more eyes is always a good thing,” said Jane Baker, director for sales and marketing of California Certified Organic Farmers, a nonprofit certifying organization in Santa Cruz, Calif., and one of the largest and oldest in the country. “But let’s not confuse food safety controls with the organic side of things.”

Organics has grown from an \$11 billion business in the United States in 2001 to one that now generates more than \$20 billion in sales, so the stakes for farmers, processors and certifiers can be high. But the agency overseeing the certifying process has long been considered underfunded and understaffed. Critics have called the system dysfunctional.

Arthur Harvey, a Maine blueberry farmer who does organic inspections, said agents have an incentive to approve companies that are paying them.

“Certifiers have a considerable financial interest in keeping their clients going,” he said.

Meanwhile, consumers are becoming more skeptical about certification, said Laurie Demeritt, president of the Hartman Group, a market research firm.

Some shoppers want food that was grown locally, harvested from animals that were treated humanely or produced by workers who were paid a fair wage. The organic label doesn’t mean any of that.

“They’re questioning the social values around organics,” Ms. Demeritt said.

The Organic Trade Association, which represents 1,700 organic companies, wants to shore up organic food’s image. This week it’s beginning a \$500,000 Web-based campaign on the benefits of organic food with the slogan: “Organic. It’s worth it.”

Supporters of the National Organic Program think additional money in the recent farm bill will help improve its reach.

And great hope is being placed in Kathleen A. Merrigan, director of the agriculture, food and environment program at [Tufts University](#), who was appointed the deputy agriculture secretary last week. Dr. Merrigan helped design the national organic standards, and is seen as a champion of organic

farmers and someone who can help clarify and strengthen federal food laws.

Meanwhile, consumers remain perplexed about which food to buy and which labels assure safer and better-tasting food.

Emily Wyckoff, who lives in Buffalo, buys [local food](#) and cooks from scratch as much as possible. Although she still buys organic milk and organic peanut butter for her three children, the organic label means less to her these days — especially when it comes to processed food in packages like crackers and [cookies](#).

“I want to care, but you have to draw the line,” she said.

But the line stops when it comes to basic food safety.

Recently, a sign near the Peter Pan and Skippy at her local grocery store declared that those brands were safe from peanut contamination. There was no similar sign near her regular organic brand.

“I bought the national brand,” she said. “Isn’t that funny?”

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# Health groups push pesticide ban using new survey results

*Last Updated: Wednesday, February 18, 2009 | 7:33 AM*

[CBC News](#)

Health groups have released an opinion poll that they hope will persuade the New Brunswick government to push forward with a ban on "cosmetic" pesticides.

A poll commissioned by the Canadian Cancer Society, the Lung Association of New Brunswick and the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment suggests 79 per cent of people in the province would support a ban on those chemicals used to improve the look of lawns and gardens.

The results released Tuesday were similar to those found in a government report released in December.

Gideon Forman, executive director of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, said the poll shows there is deep support for the province to prohibit pesticides used for cosmetic purposes.

Forman said the survey also found that 72 per cent of the New Brunswickers surveyed don't use pesticides.

"And then they asked people who do use pesticides, 'Would you be willing to switch if we showed you how to?' ... most of those say yes they would," he said.

The opinion poll also found 47 per cent saying they completely support a ban, while 32 per cent said they mostly support one.

The poll was conducted by Ipsos Reid in December and surveyed 438 people in New Brunswick.

## **Environment minister says decision coming in spring**

Environment Minister Roland Hache said he has heard what New Brunswickers think through a series of provincewide hearings last summer. He'll take that information into account when government makes a decision on a possible pesticide ban during the spring session of the legislature.

"Whether that calls for legislation or ministerial authority that has to be debated ... we're not there yet," Hache said.

The four options examined by the province during the public consultation process range from education and voluntary reduction to a full provincewide ban on pesticides.

The summary of the public consultation process that the department released in December said most of people who took part in the discussions backed a ban over other options.



## Dead rodents, excrement in peanut processor lead to recall

- Story Highlights
- Texas orders recall of products shipped from Peanut Corporation of America plant
- Order applies to all products shipped since plant opened nearly four years ago
- Order comes day after dead rodents, rodent excrement, bird feathers found in plant
- Plant officials voluntarily stopped operations Monday night

**(CNN)** -- The Texas Department of State Health Services on Thursday ordered the recall of all products ever shipped from the Peanut Corporation of America's plant in Plainview, Texas, after discovering dead rodents, rodent excrement and bird feathers in the plant.

The order, which applies to products shipped since the plant opened nearly four years ago, came a day after the discovery of filth in a crawl space above a production area during a health services inspection, Texas Health Department Press Officer Doug McBride told CNN in a telephone interview.

The plant's ventilation system pulled debris "from the infested crawl space into production areas of the plant resulting in the adulteration of exposed food products," a health department news release said.

Officials at the plant, which opened in March 2005 and produced oil-roasted peanuts, dry-roasted peanuts, peanut meal and granulated peanut, voluntarily stopped operations Monday night.

"Our understanding is that the bulk of their products go to other food manufacturers," McBride said. "We're not aware of any direct sales to consumers."

The state has the authority to stop a company's operations and order a recall if it finds "a condition that poses an immediate and serious threat to human life or health," as was the case here, he said.

Though tests are being carried out to determine if the products contain salmonella or other disease-causing organisms, the orders are not contingent on what is found, he said.

The plant is barred from resuming operations without health services approval.

The [company's](#) peanut butter and peanut paste products produced at its plant in Blakely, Georgia, have been linked to a nationwide outbreak of salmonella poisoning that has affected 600 people, killing nine.

A call to the company's telephone number, which was working earlier this week, elicited a recording that said it was no longer in service.

**All About**[Peanut Corporation of America](#)

### Find this article at:

<http://www.cnn.com/2009/US/02/12/peanut.butter.recall/index.html>

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March 7, 2009

## **Economic Crisis Takes a Toll on Flower Shows**

By **[ABBY GOODNOUGH](#)**

BOSTON — In March 1929, unaware that the start of [the Great Depression](#) was just months away, the [Massachusetts Horticultural Society](#) staged a flower show for its centennial with lavish abandon.

“A desert garden valued at \$25,000 has been brought all the way from California,” a New York Times correspondent marveled, noting waterfalls, forests, houses with backyards and a rambling tropical garden. “Remarkable acacia trees reach from floor to ceiling across one of the wide walls of the Great Hall. It really is magnificent.”

The annual spectacle, known as the New England Flower Show, survived the Depression era and all the way to 2008, motivating winter-whipped Bostonians to endure the last desperate weeks of the season with over-the-top exhibits.

But this year, when an early glimpse of sweet peas or a whiff of lilac might be more urgently needed than ever, the show is gone. So, too, are flower shows in Bangor, Me.; Allentown, Pa.; and Cleveland, victims of the economic crisis and shifting demographics.

The Greater New York Orchid Society has canceled its annual show, a rite of spring in Manhattan, “due to a variety of circumstances beyond our control,” according to its Web site. In addition, longtime flower shows in Seattle and San Francisco will end this year if their founder, who said he could no longer bear the financial risk, cannot find a buyer.

In Maine, Scott Wilkerson, whose nonprofit group, Keep Bangor Beautiful, has run the show there since 1991, said: “We’ve had increasing costs and decreasing revenues. We basically just fell on the sword and said, ‘Hey, this is more than we can handle without gardening ourselves into the poorhouse.’ ”

The loss of the Boston flower show, which is older and more celebrated than any other in the nation but Philadelphia’s, has been especially hard to bear. The horticultural society, known as Mass Hort, is one of Boston’s most storied institutions, once fabulously rich but now hobbled by mismanagement.

Its former building, a Victorian behemoth across from Symphony Hall, is a testament to its historic importance, as is its claim to introducing the Concord grape, the Bartlett pear and the concept of garden cemeteries.

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In the late 1800s, membership was said to be enough of a guarantee of affluence to qualify women for department store credit accounts.

But Boston Brahmins stopped showering bequests on the society as their ranks thinned and competing interests grew. Because of periodic financial crises over the past 30 years, Mass Hort sold a magazine it published, [Horticulture](#), and most of its rare-book collection. It lost the title to its building in 1991 and moved to the suburbs a few years later.

The society's reputation suffered further when its plan to raise tens of millions of dollars for a glass-enclosed garden above the highway tunnels of the Big Dig failed.

Last year, after its trustees learned that their new director had been jailed in 2007 after not paying back wages to employees at a former firm, the organization fired most of its staff, froze payments to creditors and called off the flower show for the first time in 137 years.

In an [Internal Revenue Service](#) filing from 2007, the group said it made \$3.28 million that year but spent \$4.85 million. It reported that the flower show, which charged adults \$20 for admission, cost nearly \$2 million and lost money.

Paul Miskovsky, a trustee, said the show might return but not until the 8,000-member society got back on firm ground.

"We need to settle our past scores and get our house in order," said Mr. Miskovsky, a landscape designer from North Falmouth.

Duane Kelly, who founded the [San Francisco Flower and Garden Show](#) and the Northwest Flower and Garden Show in the 1980s, said the shows are as expensive as staging a play on Broadway, complete with elaborate lighting and scenery.

"Twenty years ago, it was invigorating, and now it's just draining," said Mr. Kelly, 59, whose final San Francisco show will begin March 18. "It's lost its appeal."

But the financial crisis, which has affected things as disparate as sponsorship of flower shows and the amount of greenhouse space that growers can afford to heat, is only part of the problem, Mr. Kelly said. Attendance at his shows has been dropping for some time, a trend he attributes to baby boomers' aging and their children's embracing gardening for different reasons, if at all.

While Mr. Kelly said he saw "tremendous interest" among younger generations, he said they were putting off gardening — as well as buying homes and having children — longer than their parents did. Younger people are also less interested in the aesthetics of gardening and more in the environmental benefits, like composting, he said.

They are also more likely to look for gardening tips and inspiration on the Internet than at flower shows.

That, to Mr. Kelly, is a pity.

“Gardening is extremely visceral,” he said. “You want to smell, you want to see firsthand, you want to touch. The first time I went to the Philadelphia and Boston shows, I was transported from the end of winter to the middle of May or June. It was a very heady experience.”

All is not lost for flower shows — [Philadelphia’s](#) is drawing thousands to the Pennsylvania Convention Center this week, and Chicago’s is on for next week. The people behind some of the canceled shows plan to bring them back next year, and Mr. Kelly said he was “fairly optimistic” that someone would continue his.

In Boston, the horticultural society’s trustees decided at the last minute to put on a miniature show this month, with donated exhibits in three downtown buildings and at three malls. David Haskell, a grower in New Bedford, is forcing lilacs, lobelias and azaleas to bloom in his 90-degree greenhouse for the event.

“It’s something I always looked forward to since I could walk,” Mr. Haskell said of the canceled show, at which his father started exhibiting in 1953. “You usually do what your customers want. But with the flower show, you have your own blank palette.”

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