

Radicchio growers ponder vision for future organization

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

Some growers can't raise enough radicchio for their customers. An hour's drive away, others are still explaining what it is.

Such are the circumstances growers of the purple chicory face as they decide what a Pacific Northwest Radicchio Association might look like.

"Lots of people have spoken really eloquently over the years about the deeper promise of Northwest radicchio as a year-round crop, as something that substitutes for California-grown salad during the winter," Duvall, Wash., farmer Siri Erickson-Brown said. "It goes really deep, and it's brought us all together in a way that I think is very unusual for a vegetable."

Erickson-Brown and her husband, Jason Salvo, are grower-leaders in forming the association.

Growers held their first

meeting on Zoom March 27. About 25 people attended, including farmers from Canada, Michigan and South Carolina.

"There is a lot of radicchio action going on," said Lane Selman, founder of the Culinary Breeding Network and an Oregon State University professor of practice, providing a recap of efforts to boost the crop so far, in the region and internationally.

The meeting was a casual and open discussion to get farmer feedback. The actual form of the association is still to be determined, Erickson-Brown said.

"We get to decide," she said.

The biggest needs include continued education for growers through events and field days about varieties, timing and seed dates.

"It sounds like we know what we need — we need help with selling, we need help with growing," Erickson-Brown said.



Shawn Linehan/Culinary Breeding Network

Pacific Northwest radicchio farmers are considering an association to help develop production and marketing opportunities.

An association's duties could include marketing radicchio to local customers and stores, and to restaurants on the East Coast.

"We've got this amazing cult of radicchio here in the Northwest, but we have a skewed perspective," Erickson-Brown said.

CHICORY WEEK

<https://www.chicory-week.com/>

Contact Siri Erickson-Brown at siri@localrootsfarm.com

INITIAL GROWER SURVEY

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RadGrowers-Survey>

could be indoor growing facilities or practices to raise it year-round.

"How many of us wish we could sell more radicchio?" Erickson-Brown asked. "If suddenly a market just appeared, would you expand production? How much more radicchio are people interested in growing?"

The organizers discussed continued sponsorship of an annual Seattle event, Sagra del Radicchio, with participating growers and restaurants. Smaller events are in the works for Bellingham, Walla Walla and Spokane.

The current effort uses funding from a \$250,000

USDA specialty crop block grant through the Washington State Department of Agriculture, designed to increase awareness and consumption of radicchio.

Selman plans to pursue other grants.

Erickson-Brown welcomes feedback from growers, and those interested in getting involved in a steering committee for the association. Another meeting is slated for the fall.

"This is really the phase where we're envisioning and exploring needs, possibilities and opportunities," she said. "We're experiencing a radicchio renaissance. Everybody loves radicchio in the Northwest ... It's very exciting."

USDA walks back its eartag mandate

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press

USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service announced on Wednesday it is pulling back on mandating the use of radio frequency identification eartags on cattle and bison in interstate commerce.

It will instead use the rulemaking process for any future action related to the proposal.

The agency's decision is a win for R-CALF USA, which filed suit against USDA over the agency's first attempt to mandate the use of RFID eartags with an April 2019 notice.

Represented by the New Civil Liberties Alliance, R-CALF alleged the mandate violates current traceability regulations that allow other forms of identification.

Within weeks, APHIS withdrew that mandate but issued essentially the same mandate in July 2020.

"Today's announcement is good news for cattle producers, as it means the impending threat of a costly RFID mandate is now removed," Bill Bullard, R-CALF's CEO, said in a statement.

"But we must not stop defending the rights of producers because it's clear the agency fully intends to continue efforts to force this costly mandate upon America's independent cattle producers," he said.

APHIS' 2020 notice stated RFID eartags would become the only identification devices approved as an official eartag for cattle and bison on Jan. 1, 2023.

Until the agency takes further action, cattle and bison producers can continue to use metal or plas-

tic eartags, brands, tattoos, group/lot identification and backtags authorized under current law.

APHIS made the decision to go through the rulemaking process after reviewing more than 900 public comments on its 2020 notice, the agency said in its announcement.

R-CALF filed an amended lawsuit following APHIS' withdrawal of its original mandate, alleging the agency also violated the Federal Advisory Committee Act by relying exclusively on a hand-picked group of individuals who have been advocating the use of RFID tags — including eartag manufacturers.

The lawsuit contends the Federal Advisory Committee Act requires balanced representation on advisory committees.

R-CALF attorney Harriet Hageman of the New Civil Liberties Alliance said her organization is pleased APHIS is coming to the realization it must follow the law when considering animal identification and traceability. NCLA is a nonprofit and nonpartisan public interest law firm.

"Mandating RFID requirements through an illegal process doesn't serve anyone in the livestock industry, least of all our cattle and bison producers," she said.

Regulated identification applies to sexually intact animals over 18 months old.

APHIS stated it continues to believe the RFID tags will provide the cattle industry with the best protection against the rapid spread of animal disease and it will continue to encourage the use of RFID tags while rulemaking is pending.



USDA

The new USDA rules for how organic livestock and poultry are raised may be reinstated.

Organic livestock rule back on the table

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press

A hotly debated organic animal welfare rule finalized during the Obama administration and quashed by the Trump administration seems to be getting another look.

The Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices Final Rule included new standards for raising, transporting and slaughtering animals.

It was set to go into effect in March 2017 but was delayed by an executive order when President Trump put implementation of all pending regulations on hold.

USDA delayed implementation again in May and November 2017 and withdrew the rule in March 2018, stating it exceeds the agency's statutory authority and could have a negative effect on voluntary participation in the National Organic Program.

The Organic Trade Association challenged the delays in court in September 2017, amending its complaint twice and challenging the withdrawal of the rule.

In December, OTA filed a motion to extend the deadlines for summary judgment briefing to permit the incoming administration time to evaluate the case.

The court granted the motion, and OTA and USDA in February sought a 30-day stay to explore the potential for an agreement that would allow resolution without further litigation.

OTA and USDA on March 22 jointly requested another 30-day extension in the deadline of a joint status report, saying they have conferred on several occasions regarding a potential amicable resolution.

A spokesperson for OTA told Capital Press the association can't comment on ongoing negotiations but its goal from the beginning has been full reinstatement of the final rule.

The rule has also garnered support from four

Democratic lawmakers who have sent a letter to President Biden to reinstate the rule. The letter was signed by Sens. Patrick Leahy of Vermont and Jon Tester of Montana and Reps. Chellie Pingree of Maine and Peter DeFazio of Oregon.

By withdrawing the final rule, the Trump administration "erroneously concluded that the Organic Food Production Act does not authorize existing federal organic livestock and stand-alone animal welfare standards," they said.

"We urge the administration to take this opportunity to collaborate with the organic industry by reinstating the final rule and restoring organic policymaking authority to its proper role," they said.

The OTA and other groups jointly sent a letter to Susan Rice, director of the

U.S. Policy Council, asking her to rescind the previous administration's withdrawal of the final rule and reinstate it.

"These steps are necessary to restore consumer confidence in the USDA Organic seal, improve animal welfare, protect the environment and support thousands of family farms that are the backbone of the organic industry," they said.

Conventional livestock and poultry groups, however, fiercely opposed the rule, citing health threats to animals and the public. They argued its animal-welfare standards aren't based on science and are outside the scope of the Organic Food Production Act, which they said regulates only feeding and medication practices.

In addition, some contended the rule would have vilified conventionally raised livestock.

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