

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

# GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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## Italy

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### **Agricultural News for Italy EU and World August 2011**

**Report Categories:**

Agriculture in the News

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**Report Highlights:**

Report contains agricultural news items of interest for Italy, the EU and the world for the month of August 2011.

## General Information:

### Agricultural News for Italy EU and World August 2011

#### FEATURE ARTICLE

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##### **Analysis: Climate Change Presents Fresh Challenges for Food Security Needs**

Natural disasters can challenge food security with the loss of productive land from rising sea-levels, destruction of crops, and damage to food distribution networks. We live in a world so interconnected that a drought or a flood in one part of the globe one day can challenge supply chains and move commodity markets the next. According to the UN, competition over scarce water and land, exacerbated by regional changes in climate, are already a key factor in local-level conflicts in Darfur, the Central African Republic, northern Kenya and Chad. With respect to food security, temperature rises alone may be more severe in impact than previously thought. In a UN Science study recently published shifts in the climate over the past three decades have been linked to a 5.5% decline in global wheat production. In terms of temperature, North America has not exhibited any changes over the past 30 years, whereas places like Europe, China and Brazil have seen remarkable warming.

However, existing estimates of how much food we can grow in a warmer world are out of date, not incorporating the latest knowledge about how crops respond to a changing climate. Field experiments have shown that when temperatures rise above 30-36°C during flowering, crops such as wheat, rice and maize experience a sharp decline in yield. Meanwhile, climate change will pose a number of challenges to food safety over coming decades, from boosting the rates of food and water-borne illnesses. Depending on the greenhouse gas emissions scenario, global average temperature is expected to rise between 1.1° and 6.8° Celsius by the end of the century. Warmer temperatures are known to increase rates of some diseases. Climate change can increase disease risks and enable the spread of pathogens.

One of the key challenges to future food safety will be to maintain and improve disease surveillance, especially in developing countries. While deaths attributable to food and water-borne illnesses in industrialized nations are measured only in the hundreds each year, in developing countries the annual death toll for the same diseases is around 2.2m.

*The Guardian*

#### THE EUROPEAN UNION

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##### **Better Guidance for European Consumers on Health Claims**

Nutrition and health claims will soon be harmonized across Europe in order to better protect consumers and help them make more informed dietary choices. An EU regulation has established procedures to ensure that all claims on food labeling, presentation and advertising are clear, concise and based on evidence accepted by the whole scientific community. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has published a two-year long scientific evaluation of 2,758 of health claims for the

marketing of food products. Of these, only about 20% of these claims were ultimately approved. Rejected claims include those where beneficial effects to humans lacked evidence, such as some foods claiming "antioxidant properties" or easing "renal water elimination". Similarly, vague claims such as assertions of added "energy" and "vitality" were rejected. EFSA's evaluations may lead to an effective EU-wide ban on claims in advertising and packaging for food products it does not consider to be substantiated.

*AGRA Press*

## **THE UNITED STATES**

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### **Record Number of Americans Get Food Aid**

A record 46 million Americans (15 percent of the population) receive government aid to buy food, according to data released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The majority of the recipients on food stamps are in Alabama, (a state badly hit by natural disasters), followed by Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas. To be eligible for food stamps, a household cannot have more than \$2,000 in so-called "countable" resources, including bank savings, and cannot earn more than 30 percent above the federal government's poverty guideline (\$1,174 per month for an individual and \$4,010 for a family of eight). Non-citizens who are in the U.S. legally are eligible for food stamps provided they meet income and resources criteria. Food stamp benefits vary from state to state and based on resources, but the average amount paid out in 2007 was \$95 a month for an individual and \$214 for a household.

*USDA website*

### **Agriculture Crucial For Economic Growth**

Agriculture and agricultural bioscience are providing opportunities for economic growth and job creation in the United States by addressing crucial national and global needs, including agricultural productivity and food security, improved human health, renewable resource development (such as bio-energy and bio-based materials) and environmental sustainability. These findings were released in a study released by Batelle, an Ohio-based independent research and development organization.

Agricultural bioscience is a core driver of economic growth and business expansion opportunities for the U.S. and is an extremely dynamic sector, leveraging sustainable bio-based resources to produce goods that meet large-scale market needs. The full Batelle report is available online at:

<http://nccea.org/documents/powerandpromiseweb.pdf>.

### **Approval Uncertainty for GM Salmon**

According to Purdue University, by not allowing genetically engineered salmon to be consumed in the United States, scientific efforts to increase food production may be stalled. Any new technology can have risks, and those risks need to be assessed in a thorough and convincing manner. However, once the assessment has been completed (with no evidence of harm either to the environment or to consumers) then the next step is to allow production and sale of the product. AquAdvantage (AA) salmon, developed by AquaBounty Technologies, was given a gene from Chinook salmon that speeds

growth and improves feed efficiency in farm-raised fish. Once approved for commercialization, the fish will be spawned in Canada and grown in Panama in land-based, contained facilities. The full Purdue study is available online at:

<http://www.purdue.edu/newsroom/research/2011/110805MuirSalmon.html>

### **MOU Between USDA, DOE and the U.S. Navy**

President Obama recently announced that the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Energy and Navy will invest up to \$510 million during the next three years in partnership with the private sector to produce advanced drop-in aviation and marine biofuels to power military and commercial transportation. The initiative responds to a directive from President Obama as part of his *Blueprint for a Secure Energy Future*, the Administration's framework for reducing dependence on foreign oil. Combining DOE's leadership in genome-scale technologies with USDA's experience in crop improvement will accelerate the efficient production of biofuels," according to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

*USDA Website*

### **Food Safety, Many Priorities but Little Money**

The landmark Food Safety law passed by Congress last December is supposed to reduce the frequency and severity of food safety problems, but the roll call of recent food-related illnesses underlines the magnitude of the task. It's an enormous undertaking, and outlining a coherent set of rules that farmers, food processors and importers can follow and regulators can enforce will not be easy. The Food and Drug Administration is taking on the expanded mission at a time when Washington budget-slashing means that regulators have little hope of getting additional money and may instead have their budgets cut by Congress. FDA is now in the process of writing the food safety rules called for by the law, with the goal of preventing food related outbreaks. One of the most complex jobs involves setting standards for farmers to grow and harvest fruits and vegetables safely. The task is all the more delicate because the agency has never before had a major presence on American farms.

*FDA Website*

## **A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE**

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### **FAO Calls for Action to Arrest Famine in Africa**

Famine is spreading in the Horn of Africa (Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) warns that immediate action is needed. FAO says that longer term measures designed to build greater resilience to drought and climate change are needed, including the development of drought-resistant seeds, the improvement of dry land crop and livestock production systems, development of irrigation infrastructure, improved storage and more effective water and pasture management. Drought, conflict and high food prices have been identified as the causes of the existing food crisis in the region. However, underinvestment in agriculture and inadequate management of natural resources in these regions made them vulnerable to these stresses. View the FAO media release at <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/86457/icode/>

### **Water Crisis, Population Surge Prompt Rethink on Food**

According to a UN report, population growth and water stress are driving Earth to a food and

environmental crunch that only better farming techniques and smarter use of the ecosystem will avert. The number of humans is expected to rise from seven billion in 2011 to at least nine billion by 2050, boosting demands for water that are already extreme in many countries and set to worsen through global warming. Currently, 1.6 billion people live in areas of physical water scarcity and this could easily grow to two billion soon if we stay on the present course. According to the report, "with the same farming practices, increased urbanization and dietary patterns, the amount of water required for agriculture in terms of evapo-transpiration would increase from 1,711 cubic miles today to 70-90 percent more to feed nine billion people by 2050."

*Associated Press*

## **FAS Italy Regional REPORTING**

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IT1134 - Italian Food Processing Ingredients Sector

IT1135 - Italy Wood Report

IT1136 - Italy Stone fruit 2011

IT1137 - Italian Ministry of Agriculture Tests Seeds for GMOs

GR1107 – Greece -FAIRS Country Report 2011

GR1108 – Greece - Stone Fruit Annual 2011

GR1109 – Greece - Tree Nuts Annual 2011

BK1107 - First American Restaurant Chain Opening in Bosnia

BK 1108 – Bosnia - Farmers Protest Today in Sarajevo and Block Borders

BK1109 – Bosnia - Farmers Reach Agreement with Government and Unblock Borders

HR1112 – Croatia Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and

HR1113 – Croatia Grain Report Mid Year Estimate 2011

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