

Renewable Energy International

For the first time, the American Solar Energy Society's (ASES) National Solar Conference will be held in conjunction with the biennial World Renewable Energy Congress. The combined event, WREF (World Renewable Energy Forum) 2012, will examine how renewable energy technologies address the world's economic, environmental and security challenges at every scale—from off-grid villages to gigawatt-sized power plants. Renewable energy researchers from around the world have submitted more than 800 proposals for an additional 158 panels, forums and workshops at the WREF in Denver, May 13 through 17. The spectacular response more than doubles the number of papers submitted for the 2011 conference. “We're delighted to see that the level of participation reflects the vigorous progress in deployment of renewable energy technologies around the world,” noted Susan Greene, president of ASES. “The conference is going to be a gold mine of information and networking contacts for renewable energy professionals, clean energy advocates and students.” Scientists, engineers, architects and economists from 66 nations and 37 states sent in proposals for presentations. The United States leads the count with 400 submissions, including 144 from national laboratories operated by the U.S. Department of Energy, and 191 from university faculty and students. For more information and to register for the conference, visit www.wref2012.org.

—Seth Masia, Solar Today

Preserving Heirloom Apples

In October, the Seed Savers Exchange (SSE) broke ground on an expansion of its Historic Apple Orchard. The project will help the organization protect more than 350 of our country's most valuable apple varieties—apples that speak to the breadth of our nation's cultural heritage: the ‘Gravenstein’ apple that found a home in California and fed the troops in World War I, The ‘Ben Davis’ and ‘Arkansas Black’ varieties that let Southern travelers know they were home, the ‘Rhode Island Greening’ and ‘Newton Pippin’ apples loved by New Englanders, and ‘Wealthy’ and ‘Fameuse’ apples that have stood up to harsh Midwestern winters for more than a century, to name but a few. In addition to propagating and sharing rare apple varieties, the new orchard will also feature educational facilities for instructional workshops on grafting and cider pressing, public access for visitors and those with limited mobility, and signs detailing the history of these rare varieties. The primary goal is to make these varieties available to Seed Savers members through the SSE Yearbook, but the organization hopes to offer these historic varieties later to the public in the SSE Catalog.

—Seed Savers Exchange

If you love apples and heirlooms, why not make a tax-deductible donation to support this project? Visit goo.gl/vJW71. —MOTHER



Nanotechnology—No One Is Evaluating The Risks!

The use of nanotechnology in food production is becoming more commonplace in many countries, including the United States. At a November 2011 workshop in London, however, an independent advisory panel to the United Kingdom's Food Standards Agency demanded public debate and regulation of nanomaterials in foods ([go to goo.gl/ErXGM](http://goo.gl/ErXGM)).

Nanotechnology allows the manipulation of materials on the scale of atoms, measured in nanometers (one billionth of a meter). The resulting nanoparticles are now being used in everything from appliances to cosmetics to clothing, yet the public knows little about them or the risks they may pose to human health.

To many food technologists, nanoparticles hold the potential to improve food safety, quality, and shelf life. Many companies are already using them in agriculture, food processing, food packaging, and supplements, yet often the food companies themselves don't even know whether they're using nano-based materials or not!

To help companies learn about the topic, the California-based nonprofit environmental and social responsibility organization **As You Sow** has issued a Sourcing Framework for Food and Food Packaging Products Containing Nanomaterials (at goo.gl/5XMY8), in which it says:

“The risks and benefits of this emerging technology are still being discovered, yet the development, use and manufacturing of nanomaterials are being conducted with little transparency and inadequate regulatory oversight. This is particularly concerning to the food industry where human exposure is virtually guaranteed. The food industry is reported to be extensively researching and developing the use of nanomaterials; however, there is little known about the extent to which nanomaterials are used in food products, processing or packaging.”

As You Sow is conducting a survey of nanotechnology's use in food, with plans to share results in mid-2012. Meanwhile, findNano is a free Apple app that lists products containing nanotech.

Companies using this technology should be required to be more informed and more transparent. Nanotechnology is technical, and difficult to grasp intuitively. The public must demand that its risks and benefits be formally assessed for each new application. For an excellent series of reports by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Andrew Schneider, about the health risks of nanotech, see goo.gl/xEvWb.

—Marion Nestle



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Are there nanotech particles in your food? It's about time we found out.