

ECONEWS

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Promoting the Vision of a Sustainable Vancouver Island

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A WORLD FREE OF PESTICIDES

For countless millennia, right back to the origins of life, evolution has created and sustained Earth's organisms and creatures, using naturally occurring mutations and natural selection to build the incredibly rich and diverse ecosystems that are the foundation of all life on Earth today.

For ten thousand years, humans have actively shaped the evolution of food-bearing plants by selectively breeding the seeds of wild plants.

For a hundred years, plant breeders have used classical breeding techniques to create new hybrid varieties.

And for the past 25 years, agribusinesses have used genetic engineering to introduce characteristics such as longer shelf-life, and crops that are resistant to chemical herbicides - mostly soybeans, corn, alfalfa, cotton and canola. Genetic engineering is also being extended to sugar beet, papayas, zucchini, sweet peppers, tomatoes, petunias, carnations, roses and poplars.

Some say this is a happy story of our increasing mastery over Nature. Others say that with genetic engineering we have crossed a dangerous line, and risk damaging the integrity of Earth's ecosystems and the biological integrity of our own bodies.

Most genetic engineering is being done to make plants resistant to herbicides, so that huge areas of farmland can be sprayed (eg) with Monsanto Roundup, which intentionally kills all vegetation except genetically engineered Roundup Ready crops.

The pesticide industry claims that glyphosate - one the main ingredients in Roundup and other herbicides - is safe. But a new review of the academic research by Greenpeace and GM Freeze suggests that exposure to glyphosate can cause cancer, hormonal imbalance, birth defects, and neurological illnesses including Parkinson's disease.

There are now reports coming in of escalating levels of birth defects and cancers in areas of South America

where glyphosate is being heavily sprayed on crops.

Chemically fertilized soil that is deprived of organic nutrients also soon becomes mineral deficient. This is passed on in the food, and opens the door to disease.

The weeds have ways of evolving, anyway. Glyphosate resistance has been confirmed in more than twenty different weed species on six million hectares, primarily in Argentina, Brazil and the US. Monsanto's solution will be to spray with even more toxic herbicides.

Needless to say, glyphosate also runs off into creeks, rivers and lakes.



None of this is necessary. Food can be grown organically with only marginally lower yields (higher yields in drought years) and 132% increased yield in the developing world.

A 2007 study that compiled 293 different comparisons concluded that organic methods could produce enough food on a global per capita basis to sustain the world's current and potential future population without increasing the agricultural land base.

Here in British Columbia, polls show that more than 70% of the public favours a province-wide ban on the sale and use of cosmetic pesticides, and the NDP leader Adrian Dix has proposed legislation to that end. His move has

been supported by Premier Christy Clark, but rather than do so, a committee has been struck to research the issue and report back in the fall.

I spent four years researching and co-authoring the book *Cancer: 101 Solutions to a Preventable Epidemic*, and during this time it became abundantly clear that pesticides should have no place in our lives.

The doctors certainly think so. In 2004, the Ontario College of Family Physicians scrutinized 12,500 studies, concluding that there was "consistent evidence of health risks to patients with exposure to pesticides" including cancer of the brain, prostate, kidney and pancreas, and blood (leukemia).

They also found consistent links between a parent's occupational exposure to several agricultural pesticides and effects on the growing fetus, ranging from damage to death.

Pesticides are also killing our pets. When researchers interviewed the owners of Scottish terriers with bladder cancer, they found that the dogs of owners who had used herbicides on their lawns were 400% to 700% more likely to have cancer than the dogs of owners who did not.

It is time for us to get together and firmly demand a strong legislated ban the cosmetic sale and use of pesticides, as Ontario has already done.

Croplife International, representing the pesticide industry, has a lobbyist in Victoria who is doing the rounds of our MLAs arguing that pesticides are safe, and that weaker legislation like Alberta's that allows Integrated Pest Management is all we need.

Over the summer, can you write a letter to Premier Christy Clark, and ask your friends sign it? The Hon Premier Christy Clark, Box 9041 Stn Prov Gov, Victoria V8W 9E1. She has already said: "I don't want to see anyone's child playing on a lawn with toxic pesticides." A big yea to that!

Guy Dauncey