

California Right to Know

Since October my husband Ron Whitehurst, and I and our staff, have been working on the Label GMOs California state ballot initiative. Ron is leading the Ventura campaign, and there are 75 other volunteer area leaders in the state recruiting and training volunteers to circulate voter petition forms from January through mid-April.

At Ventura College classes, churches and community centers Ron and I are giving presentations on the health hazards of GE food and the decade of sordid politics that has blocked mandatory labeling. We cite animal studies showing damage to the liver and pancreas of mammals, and we show photos comparing normal and abnormal lining of the GI tract that doctors say explains the rise in "leaky gut syndrome." We cite the rise in severe allergic reactions during the decade in which GMOs have pervaded the food supply that Robyn O'Brien lays out in *The Unhealthy Truth*. We also describe Dr. Árpád Pusztai's discovery that got him fired when he talked about it, the first story in Jeffrey Smith's *Seeds of Deception*.

We enjoyed Jeffrey Smith's speaker training in October. We cite evidence of Bt in human cord blood, wondering what proportion is from the high levels of high fructose corn syrup in the American diet. We also describe how Roundup Ready plants do not "resist" the herbicide, but rather, they "tolerate" it. We tell it like Dr. Gilles-Eric Séralini tells it in his paper and in the interview Chris Dudley did with him for his documentary *Genetic Chile*, and offer copies of the DVD for \$10 for house parties. We commiserate as listeners ponder how the tofu, soy milk and snack bars they thought were healthy may actually contain foreign invader proteins and toxic chemicals.

We touch on political themes, the grab to patent all seeds and own all food crops and the revolving door at regulatory agencies and the resumé of Michael Taylor, current food safety

czar at FDA and the awesome nature of the political forces that appear to prevent Barack Obama from following through on his 2007 campaign promise to immediately require labeling of GE food. We discuss the importance of the statement of the American Academy of Environmental Medicine (AAEM) calling on all doctors to prescribe non-GMO diets for all their patients

and also for a moratorium on the release of GM seed until standard toxicological food safety tests have been done. We are fundraising for educational materials, especially the first printing of a Spanish language information flyer. Our educational and campaign aids designed by Suzette Brown can be found at www.rinconvitova.com/CA_label_GMO.htm.

A major theme of our talks is the independent science behind the health risks of GE food and the hard-won discoveries made through years of persistent legal wielding of the Freedom of Information Act. How otherwise will people know that FDA scientists have opposed use of GE seed for food crops from the outset? Without the Novem-

ber 2010 Food and Water Watch report, we would only be speculating rather than being able to follow the over half billion dollars in campaign contributions in the past decade to stop introduced labeling laws from getting to the floor of the U.S. Congress.

The health risks and failure of government oversight are more than many of our listeners can emotionally process. We don't try to cover what we know the most about from our backgrounds in natural pest control. We reserve themes about environmental damage for another talk such as GE cropping systems destroy soil life and never help yields, support evolution of superweeds and Bt resistant caterpillars and no longer stop corn rootworm, not to mention the contamination and reduced diversity of the genetics of land races of plants possibly for eternity. We show pictures of dead water buffalo and sheep in the Bt cotton stubble, possibly caused by disruption of rumen

Notable

"I conceive that land belongs for use to a vast family of which many are dead, few are living, and countless members are still unborn."
— Nigerian tribesman



"To be economical, agriculture must be ecological."
Founded by Charles Walters, 1926-2009

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bacteria. And we remark about the discrimination of livestock choosing non-GE feed when given a choice.

Ron and I are proud members of the Grange. I had the honor of taking a resolution from our Ojai Valley Grange to the California State Grange Convention. It thus became legislative policy of the 10,000-member state Grange to support initiatives for labeling GE food! Some of our volunteers would like to get a GMO-free ordinance passed, like in Mendocino, Marin and Sonoma Counties. It will be interesting to see how that plays out, because there is a Monsanto facility here. We've heard that the employees are proud of supplying a disease-resistant organic spinach seed and other products of their non-GE vegetable breeding (used to be Seminis Seed Company). We also heard that the organic food in the company cafeteria is labeled in a culture of very bright discriminating people seeming to believe they are at the vanguard of saving humanity from starvation. Ponder deeply what wonderful jobs and what a cohesive culture they must be wrapped up in that they so easily proclaim the gospel of science according to Monsanto and dismiss the plethora of unanswered requests from all over the Internet to, "show me the data, any data," and "show me data less than seven years old," and "show me a citation that wasn't first published by a researcher funded by the biotech industry or one of its front organizations."

The Label GMOs campaign in California is gearing up already as a lively public meeting of irreconcilable paradigms. Some generously call it a "debate" despite the specious arguments from the biotech team. The biotech industry is currently proposing (in the farm press here) to have the best of both worlds by allowing GE seed in the National Organic Program, a strategy that met massive backlash back in 1998. The California ballot initiative will elevate the quality of the arguments and help more people sort out fact from fiction, while more pest resistance and crop failures will highlight the benefits of organic methods and the economic risks of GE methods. Spouting the gospel of science according to Monsanto as the only real science and calling someone who discovers or explains contradictory evidence an irresponsible, radicalized ignoramus is already wearing thin for many.

Dr. Séralini's forecast that essential standard safety testing is too costly means that the AAEM's call for safety testing, regardless of the results, will end crop gene modification. In other words it is too costly to apply the precautionary principle to the otherwise highly profitable business concept of achieving ownership of the world's food supply by genetic modification of species after species. Real scientific data keeps supporting the conclusions of the World Bank, World Health Organization, UNFAO joint IAASTD in *Agriculture at the Crossroads* that organic and sustainable breeding and production methods are more productive and capable of the necessary resilience and economic sustainability not shown by GE/chemical farming methods. Biotech PR folks will have an increasingly hard time denying a growing preponderance of data about the economic value of GE food with a straight face while defaming and informally blacklisting independent scientists their lawyers have already gagged.

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It's odd that the word dichotomy has come to mean polar opposites. It is common to read about two extremes as being a dichotomy: good and evil, organic and chemical.

Botanists of course understand that a dichotomous branching is equal or similar forking branches originating from a common stem. So for two positions to be a dichotomy, they must have common stock. Here's where chemical and biological farming systems most assuredly are not dichotomies.

At the recent Acres U.S.A. Conference speaker after speaker lucidly explained the elegance and sophistication of eco-farming systems and nature's mechanisms. High-tech methods of building internal resistance in crops were explained, but the concept of domination over the natural process was nowhere to be heard. There was a deeper skill set of farming in those meeting rooms.

The importance of being deeply skilled is more important now than ever. As so-named *expert systems* seek to displace thinking people and companies strive to automate, offshore, outsource, what have you, there is a reaction among large groups of people to instead seek the non-automatic, the human, more thoughtful processes and the high-quality products that result from such thought. It helps that the taste and nutritional quality are almost universally higher than the industrial counterparts.

Almost a century ago the Bauhaus school of design strived to return to the crafts. Its founder, Walter Gropius, wrote of such. But the need isn't a "return" to craft but a "turn." So many organic farmers speak of farming the way their grandfathers did. Practitioners of modern ecological agriculture do not feel this is the way; hence the need for a *turn*, not a *return*.

Respecting tradition without being bound to it opens doors to new understandings of nature and science. Witness the elegant new ecological farming inputs, modern fencing systems, advanced knowledge of soil fertility and crop nutrition. These are the fruits of deeper learning from true masters of the craft of farming. And that's the view from the country.

production standard accomplishments cited by NOP Deputy Administrator Miles McEvoy in Savannah. There were two: a final rule/comment discussion on access to pasture for ruminant slaughter stock and a proposed rule on periodic residue testing. With the slaughter stock pasture rule, the NOP rejected a straightforward NOSB recommendation which was consistent with historical organic certification requirements in lieu of its own nonsensical (literally) improvisation. Acting in the absence of an NOSB recommendation on periodic residue testing, the NOP directed certifying agents to use a blindfold (figuratively) when selecting an arbitrary number of operations on which to conduct expensive sampling for laboratory analysis.

We all know wonderful apple varieties that produce biennially and, after a productive year with the dairy pasture rule in 2010, the NOP may be preparing to blossom and fruit anew in the coming year. If that were the case, it would be most welcome for them to begin with the long overdue dairy animal replacement standard which McEvoy cited once again in Savannah as an NOP priority. However, I am willing to wager that we'll see rulemaking on adding the "natural" DHA and ARA that was approved by the NOSB in Savannah to the National List before action on either the dairy replacement or poultry welfare, handling and slaughter recommendations. Ten years after full implementation of the federal organic standards, the dairy pasture revisions remain the only improvement made to the crop and livestock production standards. How many synthetic materials have been approved for use in organically processed food during this period?

It is true that the NOP has made a significant commitment to training certifying agents and monitoring their performance and this effort qualifies as improving the standards by insuring that they are enforced more consistently. However, if we understand organic production as a system of continuous improvement, we should expect no less from the standards that govern it.

Mark Keating is senior scientist with Beyond Pesticides in Washington, D.C. and has worked in organic agriculture for more than 20 years. Visit www.beyondpesticides.org for more information.

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Whether through legal means like this initiative, or crop failures, and/or more informed consumers shopping for non-GMOs, appreciation for the efficacy of ecoagriculture will be reborn. The youth of today will have to take it from there. We must teach biology well so they will be prepared to re-learn and refine resilient biological systems. Our company was founded on this premise a half century ago with the first production of trichogramma and green lacewing to control cotton and corn pests. Now that they are becoming resistant to a 14-year diet of Bt, ecologically based strategies including natural enemies will rescue corn and cotton and resources will be available to protect all cultivars.

The campaign in California was conceived and is being nurtured by an amazing woman from Chico named Pamm Larry. As I write this she is sleeping in the guest bed of some volunteer in the

next town on her road trip hundreds of miles from home. She may have spent the evening at a fundraising event or training a dozen people in that locality how to collect valid signatures. She will soon drive to the next town and repeat this grassroots development work for a few weeks before going home for a little rest. Her colleague Stacey Hall is developing the resources in Southern California.

We will get the petition forms in early January and by mid-April have the 850,000 signatures of registered voters statewide towards making GMO labeling a reality. Maybe labeling GMO food will catch on for the rest of the country so that Americans have benefit of the same right to know as do citizens of the EU, China, Japan, Australia and others. To make a donation or find a local area coordinator visit www.LabelGMOs.org. Attend a volunteer training session and help put GMO labeling on the California ballot in 2012!

— Jan Dietrick, M.P.H., President,
Rincon-Vitova Insectaries, Inc.

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