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Quote of the Week

"For in the end, we will save only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught." —Senegal

Let's Experiment on Kids

Do your kids eat a hot lunch at school? Would you mind if that food was irradiated? Because of yet another sneaky anti-environmental rider (this one slipped into the 2002 Farm Bill) the USDA was mandated to reconsider their ban on irradiated food subsidy programs. They chose to have a comment period of only 30 days, during December, when people are busy with holiday affairs.

Two public interest groups cried foul. Public Citizen and the Center for Food Safety objected to the brevity and timing of the comment period, as well as the idea of irradiating lunches. As the two groups pointed out, studies have shown that irradiation depletes vitamins and minerals, and creates harmful chemical byproducts, some of which have been shown to cause cancer in laboratory rats. The only controlled study on children was held in 1975 with irradiated wheat, and it found mutagenic effects. No studies on children have been done since, mostly for ethical reasons.

It seems the new plan is to allow a massive uncontrolled experiment on schoolchildren with irradiated lunches. Under pressure, the USDA decided to extend the comment period indefinitely.

For information on how you can write in a comment, or to get a school action kit, go to www.organicconsumers.org/sos.htm

Read the full story:

www.organicconsumers.org/corp/010303_irradiation.cfm

OCA's extensive library of articles on Food Irradiation is at:

www.organicconsumers.org/irradlink.html

Articles on Giuliano can be found at:

www.geocities.com/rainforest/4954/21.htm



ORGANIC BYTES

Organic News with an Edge... From the Organic Consumers Association

The Top Biotech News Stories of 2002

2002 began with major debates raging through the UK over whether to allow genetically engineered (GE) canola to be grown within the country's borders. In January, a government report was released that stated, "if transgenic oilseed rape (canola) is grown on a large scale in the UK, then gene flow will occur between fields, farms and across landscapes." The realization of this likely GE contamination to traditional and organic crops led the UK to put a moratorium on the growth of GE crops altogether. (*Friends of the Earth UK Press Release- 1-2-02*)

Following the UK's warning on biotech, the European Union (EU) researched the threat of genetically modified (GM) crops cross-pollinating with organic and native plants. The results of their studies, released in March, found that three key GM crops (canola, sugar beets and corn) had a medium to high likelihood of contaminating other species. (*Reuters- 3-18-02*)

Despite this research, the EU continued to receive intense pressure from biotech corporations to allow the planting of GM crops. In May a secret EU study leaked to Greenpeace said European farmers would face increased and unsustainable costs if GE crops were allowed to be grown on a large scale. (*Greenpeace Press Release - 5-16-02*)



In North America, GM crops were already bringing economic disaster. A report published by the Soil Association found that the yield and foreign market losses associated with GE soybeans, corn and canola have cost the US economy at least \$12 billion since 1999. At the same time, organic farms have been enjoying an economic boom at levels never seen before. (*Soil Association Press Release - 9-17-02*)

Backing up this economic data, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) released a report in May that further exposed as false the claim that GE crops are more profitable than traditional crops. The report stated, "Perhaps the biggest issue raised by these results is how to explain the rapid adoption of GE crops when farm financial impacts appear to be mixed or even negative." The report shocked food and agricultural experts around the nation, considering the USDA's tight ties with Monsanto and other biotech corporations. (*NLP Wessex - 8-22-02*)

The GE debacle continued in other parts of the world as well. In April, 2002, scientists discovered Mexico's native maize (corn) fields were suffering massive contamination of GE corn. The planting of GE corn is illegal, since Mexico, the birthplace of maize, seeks to protect its valuable maize gene bank. Mexico does allow GE corn seed to be imported for food consumption. Unfortunately, the lack of GE labeling resulted in situations where poor Mexican farmers planted corn seed that they had also purchased for food, not knowing it was genetically engineered. The Mexican government is unable to trace which of the three varieties of GE maize is the culprit, as biotech corporations refuse to disclose information about their seed products. (*Guardian UK-4-22-02*)

Monsanto took advantage of impoverished farmers in India in a similar manner. The biotech company sold its experimental Bt cotton seeds to India's farmers, despite the fact that it had only been through preliminary testing for safety and effectiveness. Small family farmers paid six times the amount they'd normally pay for seeds, with the promise of massive yields. The Bt cotton crops failed miserably. Most farmers suffered 100% loss, as the GE plant was ravaged by the bollworm (the insect it was genetically designed to repel). (*Research Foundation for Science Technology and Ecology- 9-26-02*)

The Best Of Both Worlds

Is it more important to you to buy Fair Trade food that you know is produced by small family farmers who get a fair price for their crops, or to purchase organic food, to protect your health and the environment?

In the UK, a new program is working to combine organic with Fair Trade certification, so consumers won't have to choose. Patrick Holden of the Soil Association said, "This groundbreaking pilot scheme will enable consumers to use their purchasing power to keep farmers on the land and promote ethical trading practices throughout the food chain."

It makes sense, and would make sense in the US, too. OCA is working to establish these kinds of links, through our ongoing Starbucks campaign and our new Clothes for a Change campaign. Read the full story at:

www.organicconsumers.org/organic/011203_organic.cfm OCA's Starbucks/Fair Trade Campaign and Clothes for a Change Campaign is at:

www.organicconsumers.org/campaigns.htm

International Infestation

One of the main reasons that production and marketing of GE and irradiated foods has proceeded so fast in this country, with so little testing, labeling, or public discussion, is the "revolving door" between corporations and the government agencies that are supposed to regulate them.

www.organicconsumers.org/Monsanto/revolvedoor.cfm

Unfortunately, the same thing is now happening on the international level, according to a report by Norbert Hirschhorn, an independent consultant to the World Health Organization (WHO). Food and tobacco companies are successfully placing their own scientists on committees of the WHO and FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), another big committee of the UN).

www.organicconsumers.org/Toxic/011203_toxic_food.cfm OCA's extensive library of articles on Food Safety is at

www.organicconsumers.org/toxiclink.html

Tasty Tidbit

Weird Fact Of The Week: The original Ronald McDonald was a vegetarian. Geoffrey Giuliano, the clown actor of early McDonalds TV ads geared at kids has set up a "cow protection sanctuary" in New York State with hopes of making amends for his earlier stints as a "meat salesman".



2002 continued

In Argentina, GE soybean crops severely maimed Argentina's agricultural economy. Promising a financial boom, Monsanto convinced Argentina to abandon its corn, cotton and wheat production in favor of its *RoundUp Ready* soybeans. In actuality, *RoundUp Ready* soybeans had a 5–6% lower yield, and the conversion of so much land to soybeans caused a surplus of the crop and global prices dropped through the dirt. As a result, Monsanto's GE soybeans have caused the dislocation of 300,000 farmers from their land in Argentina, as well as the chemical pollution of rivers, lakes and streams from the excessive use of its *RoundUp* pesticide. (*Corporate Watch*- 12.2.02)

Scientists in the US discovered a major problem with Monsanto's GE soybeans. The plant will simply split open and die if it gets too hot, resulting in GE crop losses as high as 40%, where traditional soybeans stand strong. The collapse of Argentina's economy and the release of this shocking study wasn't enough to keep Monsanto from pushing its GE soybeans on other Latin American nations. (*New Scientist*- 11.20.02)

In Canada, farmers were becoming acquainted with "superweeds." Various GE crops have been cross-pollinating with weeds. The crops are genetically engineered to resist certain types of pesticides, so you can guess what happens when a weed takes on that pesticide resistance gene. With so many different types of GE crops throwing pollen into the weeds, farmers were finding superweeds that were resistant to as many as three different pesticides. These superweeds caused major crop yield losses and increased pesticide pollution in the environment, as farmers drowned the fields in chemicals, hoping to fend off these new mutants. (*New Scientist*- 2.5.02)

The spread of these superweeds was also felt in the US, where farm property values dropped by as much as 17% for those areas containing weeds resistant to Monsanto's *RoundUp* pesticide (glyphosate). This is one of the most common and successful pesticides on the market, so barring an organic approach scientists aren't sure what other chemical should be used to combat the superweeds. The Weed Science Society in Iowa stated, "With few, if any, new blockbuster chemicals in the pipeline, the question may become whether there will be alternative programs to switch to if glyphosate loses its effectiveness." (*Norfolk Genetic Information Network*- 12.26.02)



The spread of superweeds wasn't the only story in 2002 reminiscent of a low-budget science-fiction movie. In November, the biotech company Prodigene was busted by the USDA for allowing its GE corn to cross-pollinate with neighboring fields of corn. The real horror is that Prodigene's experimental corn was genetically engineered to create drugs for pigs with diarrhea. It ended up contaminating corn that was headed to the American dinner table. The lack of control over Prodigene's "biopharms" resulted in the contamination of 500,000 bushels of soybeans in Nebraska and 155 acres of corn in Iowa. (*Washington Post*- 11.14.02)

Despite the fact that GE crops are spreading like a virus through the world's food systems, they had never been tested on humans until Newcastle University held a study in the UK last year. The study involved feeding people a meal with GE foods in a milkshake, hamburger and fries. Bacteria in the human intestinal tract were tested after digestion was complete. What the scientists found was alarming. The bacteria in the humans' bodies had taken on the genetically modified genes from the foods. In other words, not only are these experimental new genes spreading from field to field and cross-pollinating with native plants to create "superweeds", they're causing genetic modifications within the bacteria in our bodies—something the biotech companies have repeatedly denied is possible.

Read the full articles of the top stories of 2002 at: www.organicconsumers.org/ge/010103_biotech_problems.cfm OCA's extensive library of articles on GE Food is at: www.organicconsumers.org/gelink.html

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Notes to co-ops and natural food store subscribers: Educate your staff quickly and easily by printing each issue of Organic Bytes and placing on break tables and bulletin boards! Also, please be sure to keep mailing in your Food Agenda 2010 petitions to the address noted above!