

Transformative Change from the Ground Up

Beyond Pesticides' National Forum in April affirmed the spirit and vision of bringing together the energy of local advocacy with those working in the scientific community, as we all work with policy makers and those who practice the critically needed alternative—organic land management. The conference hit at the core of the needed transformation: *Organic Strategies for Community Environmental Health: Eliminating pesticides where we live, work, learn and play.* We co-convoked the conference with the Children's Environmental Health Center of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mt. Sinai, and joined by Columbia University's Children's Environmental Health Center. (See bp-dc-org/Forum2019.)

Seeing change in action

Our visit to an organically managed public park, which includes a small urban farm, perennial garden, and turf and treed areas, represents the vision for municipalities across the country. And our visit with youth managing organic urban farms at public housing developments exhibited the skills acquired by the young leadership team and the community's engagement in producing wholesome food in sync with nature.

Speaking out to end pesticide poisoning

We were honored to have Dwayne "Lee" Johnson join us for a spirited discussion after a showing of the new film *Ground War* with the filmmaker, Andrew Nisker, and organic turf expert and Beyond Pesticides board member, Chip Osborne, and Ling Tan, a parent who fought successfully with the local group Safe Grow to pass legislation banning toxic lawn pesticides in Montgomery County, Maryland. Mr. Johnson, a former groundskeeper who applied Roundup and became terminally ill from non-Hodgkin lymphoma, exhibited his commitment to speaking out. The film is a moving depiction of a son's quest for answers about his father's cancer, which takes him into the world of doctors, scientists, pesticide regulators, victims of pesticide poisoning, activists, and land managers. The issue is exposure to pesticides used to manage lawns, playing fields, and golf courses and the father's exposure as an avid golfer—then landing on a solution in the work of activists and organic land managers.

The film is particularly timely with public controversy about the use of the weed killer glyphosate (Roundup) and three lawsuits with a two billion and multimillion dollar jury verdicts since August 2018 for compensation and punitive damages against its manufacturer, Monsanto (Bayer)—while thousands of lawsuits are pending. All of this widespread pesticide exposure is taking place in the face of inaction by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and headlines pointing to officials sidestepping the law. This is occurring as local jurisdictions consider legislation to stop all toxic pesticide use in their parks and public spaces.

Honing our strategy

The cross-cutting adverse effects of toxic pesticides to air, water, land, people, and wildlife call for an immediate response at the community level—as we consider management decisions that are being made daily by local governments, school and park districts, private institutions, and households. With action to eliminate the use of pesticides in land and building management and the adoption of ecological-based organic practices, we begin to reverse the pending catastrophic events destructive of the ecosystems that support life—exemplified by the dramatic decline in pollinators (the "insect apocalypse") and the climate crisis.

The solutions require a broader community understanding of what is known and still unknown about the delicate balance that is disrupted when toxic chemicals are introduced into living systems. Bringing that scientific knowledge and the clear uncertainty of basic complex interactions—such as exposure to mixtures of chemicals and the impacts on soil and aquatic food webs of life—to every decision on a pesticide use is central to the accountability and transparency required of decision makers.

In this context, this issue of *Pesticides and You* uncovers the limitations of current statutes and regulations governing pesticide use by investigating the failure of EPA to launch a Congressionally mandated program to test for and regulate endocrine disruptors. EPA sits motionless while France and other countries move to ban one of the most widely used fungicides because of its endocrine disrupting effects. Another article in this issue identifies a related benefit of organic management practices—natural and better management of foodborne diseases.

Biodiversity, critical to life

As is pointed out in a new United Nations report, covered in this issue, the need for change is urgent. The UN report says we need "new initiatives that more effectively enlist individual and collective action for transformative change." Continuing, "transformative change can expect opposition from those with interest vested in the status quo but such opposition can be overcome for the broader public good." To that end, we support effective action that leads to rigorous use of the democratic decision-making process. With this, communities stop toxic pesticide use, recognizing the hazards and uncertainties, and adopt organic practices compatible with nature and the complex biological systems that support life.

Let us know how we can support your community.

Jay Feldman,
executive director of
Beyond Pesticides

