

Letter from Washington

Four More Years

Beyond Pesticides continues its grassroots action agenda

I thought I would be writing a very different letter from Washington after November 2, 2004. I was hopeful, sometimes praying, that our nation would change its course and be led by a federal government that puts the health and safety of its people, young and older, and protection of the environment before the interests of corporate polluters. Nevertheless, our critical efforts to effect local and marketplace change will continue, with an even greater urgency. Beyond Pesticides will continue to cover and engage the Bush administration – which has a track record of failure to protect human life and wildlife from pesticides. We will continue to bring attention to breaking science that has shown, and been ignored by the administration, that our pesticide-dependent practices in agricultural, school and structural pest management are hurting the environment and its inhabitants. We will continue, through these pages, and our *Daily News* webpage, to support readers and members in the regulatory, legislative, and local decision making process.

For the most part, *Pesticides and You* readers and members believe that we as a nation must respond more seriously to the pesticide threat. The use of non-toxic practices and organic products is growing exponentially. The immediate challenge is to effect change around us in our communities, the food production system, and consumer products and services, ensuring safe living environments for our children and families.

Change would certainly be helped by national leadership that: (i) seeks to protect children's health; (ii) decries human testing of pesticides; (iii) believes in the citizen's right to sue corporations that produce and/or use pesticides that cause property and health damage, and rejects preemption of those rights; (iv) exercises full disclosure and right-to-know; (v) advocates for environmental justice and farmworker protection; (vi) meets its statutory duty to regulate endocrine disruptors; (vii) wants to use science, instead of politics, to run the EPA; (viii) supports organic farming and pest management; (ix) shuns closed-door private meetings with the regulated industry; (x) wants to see an end to arsenic or dioxin-laden wood preservatives like chromated copper arsenate (CCA), pentachlorophenol and creosote; (xi) understands the connection between protecting the ozone and limiting methyl bromide use; (xii) stops registering inadequately tested genetically engineered plants; (xiii) joins the world community in ratifying without caveat the Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) treaty to phase out deadly chemicals worldwide; and, (xiv) advocates for the precautionary principle which encourages non- and least-toxic approaches in the face of known or unknown hazards. Regardless, grassroots change must and can happen and may even be expedited in our communities and the marketplace in the face of an anti-public health, anti-environmental government.

The media has failed us

Unfortunately, the U.S. media does not feel compelled to rout out the lies and failures of government and polluters. Over the last

four years, we have seen a media eager to report the positions of government officials as if their mere utterance established them as truths. When the government said falsely that there were “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq, the media reported it. Months later both *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* effectively apologized for their uncritical reporting. In the pesticide arena, the media is similarly negligent. If EPA and the pesticide lobby (producers and users) exclaim the usefulness and safety of a pesticide, the media disseminates it as a truth. If EPA or the pesticide lobby tell people to protect themselves by following pesticide product label directions, then the media reports it without explanation, even if the pesticide is a carcinogen and harmful to children. Environmentalists may be quoted to provide a counterbalance, but the stories are portrayed in the context of “he said, she said,” leaving the public confused and uneducated. What if the media said, “EPA today again tried to deceive the public with information that belies the facts. While it claims that children are protected, the facts show otherwise.” Would school boards and administrators not feel compelled to act after reading or viewing those stories? Would people understand that their individual actions are absolutely critical to their protection? Would local elected officials and public institutions have a duty to intervene? And so, the vast majority of people remain ignorant on issues that directly affect their health and safety. We hear from many victims after their poisoning, shocked about their misplaced trust in government.

Aggressive grassroots action is key

The *New York Times* reported on November 7, 2004 that “it was aggressive grassroots efforts in new population centers ... that Republicans say turned out record numbers.” Beyond Pesticides knows that grassroots education and action effects change. We are strategic in our school safety campaign, and change is rolling across the nation. Without top governmental leadership, it is absolutely critical that we are aggressive with our grassroots education and organizing. We know our progress will continue. Just as we created demand for the organic market

over 20 years ago, we will stimulate new markets and new opportunities to effect a national shift away from toxic pesticide-dependent pest management.

So, let's get to work. Success is all we have to look forward to! *Hasta la victoria!*

—Jay Feldman is executive director of Beyond Pesticides.

