

School Pesticide Monitor

A Bi-monthly Bulletin on Pesticides and Alternatives

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Beyond Pesticides / National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides
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Students Lobby for Pesticide Reform

Miranda Brar is fed up with pesticides in her Orangeville, Ontario community. The twelve-year old recently began experiencing soreness in her limbs, dizziness and head congestion; symptoms her doctor says may be caused by pesticide exposure. This brave student and her peers decided to take action on the poisons invading their lives. "We want something done about this because we're getting sick," Miranda said.

The Toronto Star reports that Miranda and four of her schoolmates met with Orangeville Mayor Drew Brown demanding a ban on pesticide use in the town. The students discussed the adverse impacts of pesticides on their lives, telling poignant stories about family members and pets suffering from exposure to the poisons. They laid out scientific reports arguing their case and pre-

sented a petition with 300 student signatures calling for pesticide reform.

"It's an issue we're looking into very seriously," Mayor Brown told the students. "We may not be moving as fast as you wish we would, but we are moving forward." He added that he's expecting recommendations from the town's environmental advisory committee within the next few months.

Mayor Brown said he doesn't use pesticides in his own home and hasn't for "a long time," according to *The Toronto Star*. "I'm in favor of banning their use. I believe we're heading toward being pesticide-free."

Miranda was optimistic after the meeting. "After he told us what he thought (about pesticides), I was relieved," she said. Mayor

Brown had invited the group of students to form a delegation to speak at an upcoming council meeting, as well as to the environmental advisory committee.

The students' brave efforts offer an empowering notion: community members have the capacity to work toward positive change. Those seeking reform might take guidance from the actions of Miranda and her classmates: The group researched the pesticide issue thoroughly; they armed themselves with appropriate reports and studies regarding their case; they reached out to a number of other community members and approached officials with a petition.

For more information regarding community organizing for pesticide reform in communities and schools, please contact Beyond Pesticides or see www.beyondpesticides.org.

Organic Food on the Rise in Schools

Schools are increasingly serving their students organic food, responding to research and demands that organic food is safer and healthier for the environment and human health.

Why Go Organic?

More and more research is surfacing that shows organic food is safer and more nutritious than conventional food. A study published in the March 2003 issue of the peer-reviewed journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* examined effects of food eaten by pre-school children in Seattle, WA. Researchers stated the findings point out that "consumption of organic produce appears to provide a relatively simple way for parents to reduce their children's exposure to organophosphate (OP) pesticides." More than increased safety, research shows



heightened nutritional value in organic food. The *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry* published a study on February 26, 2003 that reported greater nutritional attributes in organically grown food, suggesting that this may result

from the lack of insecticides and herbicides used. In addition, a study commissioned by the Organic Retailers and Growers Association of Australia (ORGAA), and published in their 1999 newsletter, shows that organic produce has up to ten times more mineral content than conventional produce. (Contact *Beyond Pesticides* for full citations).

Students Organize for Organic

Several years ago at Yale University, a student environmental group approached the University's dining halls to demand use of locally grown, organic food as part of the student's meal choice. As a result, for the past two years, Yale's Berkeley Dining Hall has been serving all organic food, and students love it. In fact, (continued on next page)

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the dining hall was unable to meet the demands of the number of students wishing to eat there. As a result, organic dishes are being served at other campus dining halls as of this year.

“There’s definitely a noticeable difference and the food is a lot fresher,” stated student Willey Cass.

Lucas Drier, Project Coordinator of Yale Sustainable Food Project, said, “This is serving an important educational mission... [Our goal is] that students will become aware of the relationships between food and agriculture and the problems these relationships are having today.”

School Districts Taking Action

Seattle schools are acting to provide their student body with a healthy diet during the school day. In September, the Seattle School Board voted unanimously on a set of nutrition-related policies, including that school meal programs offer “fresh, local, organic, non-genetically-modified, non-irradiated, unprocessed food, whenever feasible.”

Berkeley (CA) Unified School District established a food policy in 1999 that ensures that all food served by the district is “organic to the maximum extent possible.” Food is purchased from local farmers and school gardens as a first priority. In addition, teachers and food service staff receive regular training on basic nutrition, nutrition education, and benefits of organic and sustainable agriculture.

What to Do in Your School

Work to bring organic food into your school, to develop a school garden, or to get involved in a local farm-to-school program. Programs like these will not only provide fresh, healthy and safe food to the student body, but it will also educate children on sustainable agriculture, nutrition and other important subject areas.

As a concerned parent, you can approach

school officials, the PTA and other parents with information on the benefits of organic. Contact Beyond Pesticides for copies of the studies mentioned in this article and more information regarding organic food, children’s health, and pesticides.

As a school administrator, introduce the idea of organic foods to your school. For information on Berkeley Unified and Seattle’s school food policies, contact Beyond Pesticides.

ChemLawn/U.S. Youth Soccer Update

Action is taking place across the country in response to the partnership between TruGreen ChemLawn and US Youth Soccer. In 2003, the chemical lawn service company signed on as a sponsor of US Youth Soccer, treating the children’s playing fields with hazardous chemicals, and marketing their toxic products through children by pledging a “percentage of every purchase made by members and supporters of US Youth Soccer back to US Youth Soccer.”

TruGreen Chemlawn incorporates a mix of hazardous pesticides in their lawn care program. As children are uniquely vulnerable to pesticide exposure, and since their bodies are often in direct contact with grass on soccer fields, the partnership was a red flag to many. There was an outcry from parents, activists and environmentalists alike. Most recently, the group Stop Commercial Exploitation of Children has sent a letter to officials at US Youth Soccer, with support from Beyond Pesticides, Kids Can Make a Difference, California Safe Schools, Children’s Health Environmental Coalition, Natural Landscapes Project and a myriad of other organizations concerned for children’s welfare. You can make a difference in a matter of minutes by visiting <http://www.workingforchange.com/activism/action.cfm?itemid=17820> and signing onto the email that will be sent to US Youth Soccer. Please act soon, as the email must be sent by December 2004. Contact Beyond Pesticides with any questions or for more information.