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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The Organic Solution to Climate Change

Supporting organic farming may be one of the most powerful actions we can take in the fight against global warming.

According to the Rodale Institute, "Organically managed soils can store more than 1,000 pounds of carbon per acre, while non-organic systems can cause carbon loss. For consumers, this means that the simple act of buying organic products can help to reduce global climate change."

Findings from The Rodale Institute's Farming Systems Trial® (FST), which began in 1981 as the longest running agronomic experiment designed to compare organic and conventional cropping systems, show that organic/regenerative agriculture systems reduce carbon dioxide, a major greenhouse gas. This data positions organic farming as a major player in efforts to slow climate change from increases in runaway greenhouse gases.

Besides being a significant underutilized carbon sink, organic systems use about one-third less fossil fuel energy than that used in the conventional corn/soybean crop¬ping systems. According to studies of the FST in collaboration with David Pimentel, Ph.D. of Cornell University, this translates to less greenhouse gases emissions as farmers shift to organic production. The ability of organic agriculture to be both a significant carbon sink and to be less dependent on fossil fuel inputs has long-term implications for global agriculture and its role in air quality policies and programs.

The presence of sequestered carbon in FST organic field trials is an indicator of healthy soil that has an abundance of carbonaceous matter, in particular the organic material humus. It is humus that enables healthy soils to retain water during periods of drought. Each pound or kilogram of dry soil organic matter can absorb 20 times its weight in water. It is humus that retains mobile nutrients found in soils, such as phosphates and nitrates, which would otherwise be lost as runoff to streams and aquifers.

These trials illustrate that economic benefit as well as environmental protection can and should work together hand in hand. The economic benefits are realized by farmers and landowners who see reduced costs for fertilizer, energy and fuels requirement, irrigation needs, and increased crop yields and quality at the same time. It is also economically beneficial to the agricultural business economy, and an environmental benefit to all of us, that specific soil management and tillage practices can help to sequester or retain carbon in the soil, carbon that would otherwise be lost to the atmosphere as a component of the growing greenhouse gas menace.

Organic farming can reduce the output of carbon dioxide by 37-50%, reduce costs for the farmer, and increase our planet's ability to positively absorb and utilize greenhouse gases. These methods maximize benefits for the individual farmer as well as for society as a whole. It is a winning strategy with multiple benefits and low comparative risk. These proven approaches mitigate current environmental damages and promote a cleaner and safer world for future generations.

Each and every one of us needs to ask, "How can I contribute to easing the burden of our collective planetary debt?"

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Pesticide-Free Policies for Town Fields and Parks

Due to concerns of children being exposed to pesticides on town's fields and parks, many communities have recently adopted pest management policies that prohibit the use of toxic pesticides on town-owned property. Some of the most recent towns to adopt such programs include: New Paltz, New York; Rockport, Maine; Camden, Maine; Voorhees, New Jersey; and Greenwich, Connecticut.

In addition, this spring the General Services Administration has begun implementing an organic lawn pest management program, using organic fertilizer on the grounds of all its federal buildings in the National Capital Region. Over four acres of Washington, DC's National Mall has been maintained organically by SafeLawns.org over the past year.

For more information on the growing organic lawn care movement, please contact Beyond Pesticides. To find a service provider that practices least- or non-toxic methods, visit Beyond Pesticides' *Safety Source for Pest Management* at www.beyondpesticides.org.

School Pesticide Monitor is published by Beyond Pesticides and is a free service to those interested in school pesticide issues.
If you are interested in receiving the *School Pesticide Monitor* via email, contact us at info@beyondpesticides.org.

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U.S. House Passes New Bill to Help Schools Go Green

The U.S. House of Representatives has passed legislation that will provide nearly $7 billion in grants to help K-12 schools go green. Entitled, "21st Century Green High-Performing Public School Facilities Act" (H.R. 3021), the bill, sponsored by Rep. Ben Chandler (D-KY), will help schools to become more energy efficient and healthier. There is a special emphasis on low-income schools where children are most at risk from unhealthy facilities and on schools that still suffer from the aftermath of hurricane Katrina.

The legislation, passed by the House on June 4, will allow the Secretary of Education to distribute funds to K-12 school districts according to a need-based formula, to make them more energy efficient, healthy, and high performing. Funding can also be used for asbestos removal services, energy efficiency improvements, lead abatements, and technology upgrades.

The bill will also help school districts, which are struggling to make essential improvements, to create better school facilities and save significant amounts of energy and help to reduce greenhouse gases. Thirty-nine percent of greenhouse gas emissions come from buildings, and each green and energy efficient school will lead to annual emission reductions of 585,000 pounds of carbon dioxide (CO2) – the principal greenhouse gas.

A green school costs less than two percent more than conventional schools - or about $3 per square foot – but provides financial benefits that are 20 times as large, typically utilizing 33 percent less energy and 32 percent less water than a traditionally designed school – enough savings to hire two additional full-time teachers.

Close to 60 million students spend up to 40 hours a week in facilities that are often unhealthy and a hindrance to their ability to learn. Many school environments are a cause of asthma and other respiratory illnesses. Improving the environment where children spend the majority of their time can significantly improve the health of students and increase student morale and confidence.

Green and healthy schools also need to protect children from the risks posed by pesticides through the adoption of pest management policies and programs to create healthier learning environments. Pesticide exposure can adversely affect a child's neurological, respiratory, immune, and endocrine system and have been shown to cause or exacerbate asthma symptoms. Beyond Pesticides believes that central to this effort to protect children's health should be activities aimed at public education on pesticide hazards and efficacy of alternatives, and the continued development of model communities that serve as examples.

The bill has since been referred to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

The Organic Solution to Climate Change

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In terms of the food system, it can start with consumers consciously eating local organic, producing their own food wherever possible, and even reducing feedlot beef consumption. Combining organic and local is the strongest tandem concept for improving the food system, people's health, and the health of the air, water, and soil.

People have been speaking with their dollars in the organic marketplace for more than 25 years as the organic food industry has grown to a nearly $20 billion industry. While significant numbers of consumers in the marketplace have shown their commitment to organic, we now need government attention to help with the national conversion to organic systems.The organic solution is real. Now we must elevate this niche market, moving it from the exception to the rule with national and international goals for total conversion.

Schools can be part of the organic solution by serving organic foods and establishing organic landscaping methods.