



Growing More Per Acre Leaves More Land for Nature



[Commentary](#) | [News](#) | [Blog](#) | [Materials and Publications](#) | [About CGFI](#) | [Links](#) | [Home](#)

HUDSON
INSTITUTE

RSS

Search CGFI

submit

Email Updates

join

Contact

Site Map

Online Store

Donations

CGFI

P.O. Box 202
Churchville, VA
24421-0202

Phone: 540 337-6354
Fax: 540 337-8593
Email: cgfi@hughes.net

Organic Earth Friendly-The Biggest Misperception in Agriculture

Tuesday April 17, 2007

Earth Day is April 22, and you can bet there'll be claims that organic crops are somehow 'better' for planet Earth than conventional or biotech crops. But it's the biggest misperception in agriculture.

Organic farming isn't pesticide free, as consumers are led to believe. A number of synthetic substances are allowed for use in organic crop production, including isopropanol, chlorine, hydrogen peroxide, boric acid, sulfur, and streptomycin. Among the dozens of other nonorganic substances allowed as ingredients in or on processed products labeled as "organic" or "made with organic" include various acids, animal enzymes, glucono delta-lactone (whatever that is) wood resin, cellulose, glyceride, and kelp. See the entire list of chemicals and substances allowed in organic production, online at www.ams.usda.gov/NOP/NOP/standards/ListReg.html

E coli is often linked to livestock manure, a primary source of fertilizer for organic crops, although it should be pointed out that manure is used in the production of conventionally produced crops as well, and that e coli can originate from other sources besides manure. However, most producers of conventional and biotech crops use manufactured or synthetic fertilizer, and as Princeton molecular biologist Lee Silver puts it, "synthetic fertilizer does not contain bacteria of any kind—period. So synthetic fertilizer cannot cause food poisoning—no need to worry if it's been processed properly."

Organic farmers generally rely on conventional tillage for weed control, a practice universally understood to increase soil and water erosion and the loss of organic matter, which is the key to soil productivity.

Because organic crops do not yield as well as conventional or biotech crops, organic production requires more land. Alex Avery, in his must-read book *The Truth About Organic Foods*, writes that "organic farming, on a large scale, poses the single greatest threat to natural ecosystems and biodiversity in human history." Why? Because "organic only" would force us to clear-cut, graze, plow, and farm larger areas of the earth's remaining wildlife habitat due to lower yields.

Avery points out in his book that biotechnology has the power to improve just about every aspect of farming, and has already done so in many ways. Then why is there such intense organic opposition to, and misrepresentation about, biotech crops? Avery speculates that it's competition. "Biotechnology offers a more cost effective way to

achieve the lower pesticide use and more eco-friendly farming systems claimed by organic farmers and desired by consumers,” he writes. “In short, biotechnology represents a direct threat to organic agriculture’s current monopoly on eco-conscious consumers and the illusions of super safety.”

The beneficial aspects of biotech crops is illustrated in a recent peer-reviewed study by UK economist Graham Brookes, who points out that since 1996, herbicide tolerant and insect-resistant biotech crops have reduced pesticide sprayings by 500 million pounds of active ingredient, and saved on 441 million gallons of fuel through reduced field operations.

Disturbing the soil with conventional tillage releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. But no-and low-tillage cropping systems that use biotech herbicide-tolerant varieties leave more plant residue on the soil’s surface, sequestering carbon and contributing to soil and water conservation.

Brookes estimates that biotech crops planted in 2005 alone by 8.5 million farmers on 215 million acres reduced carbon dioxide emissions by 8.9 million tons, equivalent to removing nearly 4 million family cars from the road for an entire year.

“Simply put, biotech crops have changed the way people farm,” Brookes said. “Their environmental performance during the first decade of use shows the important role the technology is playing both now and in the future in helping global agriculture reduce its greenhouse gas emissions.”

If organic farmers can profit from consumers who want organic produce, more power to them. But don’t do so on false pretenses and by misrepresenting and denigrating the safety and sustainability of conventional and biotech crops. Truth is, biotechnology offers the best opportunity to enhance soil, water, and environmental quality than any farm production technology in history.

By: Doyle Lentz

Mr. Lentz, who farms near Rolla, N.D., serves on the board of Growers for Biotechnology, whose purpose is to promote and facilitate the research, development and acceptance of biotechnology in agriculture. Mr. Lentz may be contacted by email at lentz@utma.com
