

BEE Protective with Organic Systems

At Beyond Pesticides we are building our programs around clear, concise, verifiable organic standards that nurture biological systems and are focused the survival of the planet and all its inhabitants. That is why our successes at the Spring 2013 National Organic Standards Board meeting, with the help of tens of thousands of public comments, including those who support and work with Beyond Pesticides, is an important watershed moment that must be seen as elevating our campaign to grow organic with integrity. Thank you to all those who responded to our call for public involvement in the decisions that govern organic. To bring organic into the mainstream as a meaningful vehicle for nurturing and protecting life, we will have to multiply by many times the level of public involvement.

Growing Organic with Strong Standards

There are those who feel that the only way to grow organic is to allow chemical inputs that have questionable or adverse effects on biodiversity. It is our view that organic will not overtake conventional chemical-intensive practices if we weaken standards. So, when a medical doctor associated with the Infectious Diseases Society of America, a world renowned clinician and researcher, took the time to travel to the NOSB meeting and tell the Board that use of antibiotics, even small amounts, in agriculture, let alone organic agriculture is a serious public health threat, it was an important moment. He raised urgent public health issues that link bacterial resistance to antibiotic use in agriculture and brought the kind of information to the decision making process that will help to make organic the leader it must be in protecting life. The Board voted to stop the use of tetracycline in the only organic production allowed –apple and pears. It would not have happened without your involvement.

Accountability

I am often told by people that government has taken over organic or that we cannot trust the USDA organic label. We are at a critical juncture where this statement may become a self-fulfilling prophecy if we do not escalate what we did at the Spring 2013 NOSB meeting –where 15 people from the environmental, consumer, grower, retail, and organic certifier community sat around a table and listened to public comments from organic stakeholders. While certainly there are USDA organic decisions with which I disagree, the core value embedded in the statute and the underlying legal framework and decision making process is sound. If we choose to leave the process to those who believe that organic will grow with toxic chemicals that defy the soil building, preventive oriented, anti-GMO, anti-sewage sludge (bio-solids), anti-irradiation, anti-synthetic fertilizer approach of the *Organic Foods Production Act*, then we will see organic fade, and with it the opportunity to transform polluting land management practices.

We do need to be rigorous in our oversight of government and industry. So, when USDA ignores a decision by a 2012 NOSB decision to take carrageenan out of organic infant formula (we supported taking it out of all organic food) because of its link to cancer associated with

a toxic component, we must stand up and remind the Department of the letter, core values, and principles of the law (as we are doing just as this issue of *Pesticides and You* goes to press) –and do it loudly. It is our law and our future.

BEE Protective

The fate of honey bees, other pollinators, and beneficial organisms generally is a case in point. We are dedicating this issue of *PAY* to our collective need to protect pollinators, with a focus on honey bees. The extraordinary decline in honey bee populations is a testament to the failure of the Environmental Protection Agency and other government agencies to curtail hazardous pesticides through risk mitigation measures. We do not begin to test for the effects of multiple mixtures of toxic pesticides, and their combination with other toxic chemicals, on the ability of life forms to exist. We allow widespread toxic chemical use that is not proven to be needed, given effective alternative organic practices. When the system is shown to fail through major environmental catastrophes or public disclosure of really clear adverse impacts like cancer, the regulatory system responds with restrictive action. And for those species we identify as threatened or on the brink of extinction, government intervenes. But for the slow decline, the subtle effects on learning, the impacts that are associated with multiple exposures, regulators are hamstrung by uncertainty or drawn out delays that seem to ignore the need for urgent action.

We must stop the use of toxic chemicals that are hurting bees. We know that systemic pesticides that enter the plants vascular system and ends up contaminating pollen, nectar, and xylem sap (guttation) droplets are particularly problematic. That's why the European Union in April, under a precautionary law, set a two-year ban on neonicotinoids. But the truth is that our dependency on toxic chemicals in our agricultural and land management systems is killing bees and the life in the soil necessary to support all life. We can use the *BEE Protective Habitat Guide* in this issue to do our part in creating habitat for bees at the same time that we engage our local communities to do the same in their land management practices (parks, playing fields, medium strips, school yards, and parks). Please use our *Keeping Organic Strong* webpage to become a supporter of organic integrity standards and encourage everyone you know to do the same.

The Future

We have a legal structure in place. We have active consumers. We have dedicated farmers. We have increasing numbers of businesses in support. We need an activated public to keep the pieces moving in the right direction.



Now, more than ever, use this issue of *Pesticides and You* and collaborate with Beyond Pesticides.

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