

Newsletter of the Eastbourne Clinic of Natural Medicine

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Organic Food in the New Decade

Until the middle of the last century, there were few man-made chemicals applied to the land. Technological advances in biochemistry and engineering during the first half of the twentieth century led to significant changes in agriculture, particularly mechanisation and the tractor replacing horse-drawn ploughing etc, yet not until the 1940s did artificial fertilisers make a significant impact. The Second World War saw the use and mass production of ammonium nitrate for ammunition, and abundantly cheap sources led to the spread of nitrogen fertilisers in farming. Pesticides used in the war to control disease-carrying insects among the troops were also applied later to agriculture, launching the era of chemical pest control still with us today. The industrialisation of agriculture was actively promoted in the United Kingdom by the Agriculture Act of 1947, which encouraged a new scientific approach to crops with the use of chemical fertilisers, guaranteeing prices and increasing production to levels which finally allowed the government to phase out rationing in the early 1950s.

NPK fertiliser, named from the chemical symbols for nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, has largely replaced manures, organic plant material and ground up animal bones as fertiliser on commercial farms. The result after decades of farming with NPK is that plants may look the same as generations ago, but they are depleted of secondary plant nutrients and trace elements. They become more prone to mould, fungus and insect infestation, and require substantial application of pesticides to keep them alive until they reach the market. The British Ministry of Agriculture and US Department of Agriculture have recorded serious depletion of both vitamin and mineral content of soil and food over the last sixty years, the consequences of which are insidious yet largely overlooked.

We can hardly complain of not being warned. From Sir Albert Howard and Sir Robert McCarrison in British India, Rudolf Steiner in 1920s Germany, to Dr Weston Price in the United States there have been voices in the wilderness making convincing connections between the health of the soil, human nutrition and disease over the last hundred years.

It took Rachel Carson with “Silent Spring” in 1962 to wake up the Western world to the catastrophe of environmental pollution, and it has taken some sixty years for campaigning organisations such as The Soil Association to establish organic farming as the way forward in feeding the world properly – without exhausting the earth, poisoning wild life or destroying natural resources.

Last year, the UK Food Standards Agency reported “no evidence to support the selection of organically over conventionally produced foods on the basis of nutritional superiority”, blithely ignoring many studies which come to the opposite conclusion as well as crucial environmental considerations demonstrating the huge value of lower fossil fuel inputs, improved soil fertility and greater wild life diversity.

Fortunately, the discerning consumer can readily appreciate the advantages of natural foods and dismiss the FSA as a stooge of the scientific establishment, which seems to have a vested interest in the status quo. It is rather like the Food and Drug Administration in America, which has done its best over many years to destroy natural medicine. However, the public votes with its feet: sales of organic produce continue to grow and people continue to consult alternative health care providers in huge numbers.

For those less discerning, the future is not so bright. Bad farming and debased nutrition have brought us BSE and the obesity epidemic, pollution and poor health outcomes. So long as government and the scientific and medical establishment fail to make the connection between health and the environment, people are led astray and will suffer unnecessarily.

Thanks to Luke Bell of “Inspired Times” for permission to duplicate part of his article “Organic Food Bites Back” from Issue 3 of the magazine: see www.inspiredtimesmagazine.com.