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**COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURE:
IS IT SAFE?**

By: Hesh Goldstein

As people settled into established societies many centuries ago, they began looking for ways to protect their crops. Sulfur was used as an insecticide long before 500 BC. Toxic formulations of lead, arsenic and mercury were applied to crops in the 1400s. In the 1600s, nicotine compounds were extracted from tobacco leaves and used as insecticides. By the mid 1800s, the heads of chrysanthemum flowers were used to obtain pyrethrum, and rotenone was extracted from the derris plant.

While these first generation pesticides were derived from plants, the second generation pesticides such as DDT were formulated in laboratories. From this sprung up a major chemical industry.

Since the 1950s, the use of petroleum derived pesticides and fertilizers, coupled with a host of governmental policies and kick backs, vaulted the U.S. into the biggest farming community in the world with fewer farmers than ever before feeding more people than ever before in the history of food production.

This farming success has not happened without enormous costs and environmental tradeoffs. Pesticide proponents argue that the benefits far outweigh the harm, pointing out that the new generation pesticides are used at very low application rates compared to the older outdated products.

One problem is that insects breed rapidly and quickly develop resistance to insecticides. Also, broad spectrum pesticides kill natural predators that keep pests in check, and use of synthetic pesticides- which include insecticides, rodenticides, fungicides, herbicides, and others, have increased more than 33 fold in the last 50 years. In addition, crop losses from insect damage alone have doubled in the same period.

For more than 40 years, ranchers and growers have been feeding low levels of penicillin, tetracycline, and other antibiotics to poultry, cattle, and pigs to speed growth and cut costs. This use accounts to about 70-80% of all antibiotics sold in the U.S. The problem with this is that the use of antibiotics to promote animal growth increases the prevalence of bacteria that are resistant to the antibiotics' effects and jeopardizes human health.

Every day the environmental and health ramifications of commercial farming become more apparent. The EPA has identified agriculture as the greatest source of water pollution. Pesticides and nitrates from fertilizers have been detected in the groundwater of most states. In fact, pollutants from agriculture can be detected in both the north and south poles and in the deepest reaches of the oceans. Commercially grown foods we eat contain detectable levels of pesticides and antibiotics. And, recent studies have implicated pesticides as possible culprits of Parkinson's disease, as well as increased aggression in children.

For reasons such as these and others, people have been turning away from this intensive, high chemical input agriculture and have been turning more and more to a plant based diet, free of dairy products, which contain enormous amounts of antibiotics, with a foundation of organically grown agriculture.

In addition, organically grown produce tastes better. If you don't believe that, do a simple taste for yourself. Take two cucumbers, one commercially grown and one organically grown, and cut a piece off of each. Now, take a bite of each. In between bites rinse your mouth with water to get rid of the taste. What you will find is a definite taste difference with one having chemical overtones and one not.

We have all been brainwashed through advertising and conditioning to eat a certain way. With so many years under our belt, we have become accustomed and, sad to say, acceptant of this taste. We also are hesitant to change. But, making a change to eating organically grown plant based food, getting away from the Standard American Diet of flesh and blood, eliminating dairy products, which has proven links to breast and prostate cancer, and switching from refined foods having nothing but empty calories and no nutrition to whole foods, which is loaded with fiber and nutrition will better your health. Unnecessary pounds will disappear, your energy level will increase, problems with arthritis, blood pressure, cholesterol and constipation will most likely disappear and your overall wellbeing will improve.

Don't believe me? So, call my bluff! Give yourself 30 days to prove me wrong. Like Spurlock did with McDonalds, you do with this. If at the end of 30 days you don't see and feel a difference, go back to your old way of eating. Come on, take a walk on the wild side. After all, what's 90 meals out of your life?

Stay tuned!