

89

Support Organic Farming

For millions of farmers across the developing world, the Green Revolution no longer brings higher yields and good fortunes. It has become instead a source of pesticide poisoning, depleted soils, falling yields, crippling debt and suicide.

Over the years, the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides has undermined soil fertility and its ability to retain water. It has also destroyed the natural biodiversity of the land. As pest damage increases and yields fall, farmers' costs increase and their incomes shrink, while powerful agro-food corporations make good profits from food distribution and sales.

- "Can Organic Farming Feed Us All?" *World Watch Magazine*, May 2006
- Farming Solutions: www.farmingsolutions.org
- Morarka Foundation, India: www.morarkango.com
- Navdanya, India: www.navdanya.org
- Nayakrishi Centers, Bangladesh: www.membres.lycos.fr/ubinig/naya/centers.html
- Organic Food and Farming, Myth and Reality: www.soilassociation.org
- Pesticide Action Network International: www.pan-international.org
- The Real Green Revolution: www.greenpeace.org
- Sekem, Egypt: www.sekem.com
- *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* by Vandana Shiva, South Island Press, 2000
- Vandana Shiva: www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vandana_Shiva

There is no other way out. How much can a person run? Punjab is very tired now, with no stamina left. Organic is the only way out.¹

— Harjant Singh, Punjabi organic farmer since 2002

For some the only way out of the crushing burden of debt has been suicide, hanging from a tree or swallowing pesticides. Since 1997, in India more than 25,000 farmers in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Punjab have taken their own lives.

The suicides are just one sign of the failure of the Green Revolution. The evidence of links between pesticides and cancer is a second sign. The argument that chemical farming prevents plants from being exposed to pests and fungi, causing them not to develop the very phytonutrients and anti-oxidants that protect us against cancer, is a third very persuasive sign.

These facts create a powerful argument for developing nations to make a rapid transition back to fully organic farming.

Can Organic Farming Feed the World? There is a belief among some that organic farming simply cannot feed the world. This is not true.

In 2006 the Worldwatch Institute reported on a survey of 200 studies that examined the yields when farmers went organic. The news is very encouraging: in the developing world, yields almost doubled (a 93% improvement), with increases being the highest and most consistent in the poor, remote areas where hunger is the most severe.²

When a team from the University of Michigan asked what would happen if the whole world were to go organic, they found that the available calories increased by 75% to 4,381 calories per person a day, 90% more than we need to be healthy.

In Brazil the use of green manure and cover crops has increased yields of maize by between 20% and 250%.³ In Peru the restoration of traditional Inca terracing has seen increases of up to 150% for a range of upland crops.⁴

Farmers in China doubled their rice yields by planting a mixed crop of rice, rather than just one variety.⁵ In Nepal farmers who are using local seed to plant their rice earlier without flooding the fields are increasing their yields by 28% to 100% with much less use of chemicals.⁶

In Ethiopia, when 12,500 farm households adopted sustainable farming methods, yields rose by 60%, and nutrition levels by 70%.⁷ In Cuba, where 65% of the rice and 50% of the fresh produce is grown organically, thousands of organic farms and urban gardens flourish, and a complete system of organic support, research and development has been established.⁸

In Chiapas, Mexico, where the Mayan peasants produce 2 tonnes of corn per acre, when the women and small farmers grow beans, squashes, vegetables and fruit trees on the same patch of land, their overall yields increase to 20 tonnes per acre.⁹

And in Egypt where the Sekem group of companies employs 2,000 people to grow organic rice, cotton, vegetables and herbs, the use of pesticides in cotton fields has fallen by 90%, while yields have increased by 30%.¹⁰

What Should Governments Do?

- Establish organic training programs, extension agencies, R & D centers and integrated



CAROLYN HERRIOT

Organic salad greens provide excellent nutrition around the world.

pest management training, as Jamaica, Cambodia and Ethiopia are doing.

- Require organic training for all agricultural extension agency workers and withdraw support from chemical training.
- Using a selective tax on chemical pesticides and fertilizers, establish transition financing for organic farmers in the early years when yields are lower.
- Control the large agro-trading companies that use packaging standards and pseudo hygiene standards to push small farmers out of the market.
- Ban the use of pesticides that are banned elsewhere.
- Defend the farmers' rights to say no to GM food and to protect local seed varieties.
- Support community seed banks, such as the Nayakrishi centers in Bangladesh.
- Fight the false claims on patents and intellectual property rights for native plants.