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JOHN'S CORNER:

NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS

by John Ferguson

Good news from JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Association Internal Medicine) has found a significant reduction in the risk of cancer among consumers whom eat organic food. The higher the consumption of organic foods the greater the reduction in risk. For non-Hodgkin's lymphoma the risk decreased by 86 percent at the highest level of consumption or organic food and a 76 percent lower risk of all lymphomas.

A question that comes up several times per year is the possibility of soil contamination in urban areas. Common contaminates in urban soils include pesticides, petroleum products (anti-freeze, used oil, etc.), radon, asbestos, lead, chromated copper arsenate (treated wood), creosote, heavy metals from artificial fertilizers, fibers from roofing materials, etc. Humans are exposed to soil contaminates by ingesting soil, breathing volatiles and dust, absorbing them through our skin, and eating food grown in contaminated soil. With more and more school and church gardens, local gardens on vacant property, old commercial and industrial site being converted into park land, old dump sites, etc. we need to be aware of potential problems. To learn more, the Soil Science Society of America has a couple papers on the contamination issue on their website:

<https://www.soils.org/discover-soils/soils-in-the-city>

<https://www.soils.org/discover-soils/soils-in-the-city/soil-contaminants>



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A recent paper in the Journal Nature was on land use and conventional food production not meeting people's needs. Agriculture destroys forests and biodiversity, squanders water and release one fourth of all our greenhouse gasses worldwide. Over 800 million people remain undernourished and 2 billion are deficient in micronutrients and obesity on the rise. The reason to go organic continue to increase.

I remember as a kid my grandmother would have me plant radishes as they are very easy to grow. This helped develop my love of gardening and why I enjoy eating radishes today (as a kid I could not wait till they were large enough to eat). The May issue of Life Extension had an article on the health benefits of radishes. Radishes contain phytochemicals called isothiocyanates which have potent anti-cancer properties. Studies have shown that higher consumption of radishes is associated with a lower incidence of lung and colorectal cancers. Other studies have shown the sulforaphane in radishes have been found to inhibit prostate, colon, breast and ovarian cancers. Radishes have also been shown to be effective at healing gastric ulcers. As a kid I would scatter seeds from radishes and turnips in the corner of my dads St. Augustine lawn each fall. I would harvest the radishes and turnips all winter as the grass was dormant. In the spring I observed the grass would green up quickly and start growing much earlier than the neighbors. I now know why, as radishes are used commercially as a very effective cover crop to loosen heavy compacted soils and add organic matter.

Every day I read about the connection between plants, nature and our health. A recent study published in the Journal Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment found that strawberries growing next to hedge rows adjacent to forests had better pollination, and the weight and



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quality of the strawberries increased. This an example of the benefits of “companion planting”.

The consumer group Center for Media and Democracy has many informative papers on issues that society is facing: <https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=SourceWatch>

In the link below, is an article on the dangers of sewage sludge also known as biosolids on health and the environment.

https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Sewage_sludge

Many new research papers have been recently published on the effect sewage sludge has on soil life, contamination by radioactive elements from chemotherapy, etc. When I have finished reading them, I will give an update.

A study by researchers from the European Union Joint Research Centre estimated the global [cost of soil erosion by water at \\$8 billion](#) annually, reports *Forbes*. The erosion causes reduced crop yields and increased water usage, calculated in this study using two models, RUSLE and MAGNET. The study concluded that, as a result of soil erosion, food production is reduced by 33.7 million tons of food worldwide. ATTRA Sustainable Agriculture May 23, 2019. This is another reason that if we are going to feed the world we must switch to sustainable agricultural practices (organic).

The birth rate in the United States fell to a 32-year-low in 2018, according to a new report released Wednesday by the CDC. While more than 3.78 million babies were born in 2018,



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according to the [figures released from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), it's a 2 percent drop in birth rates from 2017 and the lowest number in 32 years. According to the CDC's report, fertility rates also fell in the U.S. to a record low of 1.728 births per woman - which means there aren't enough babies being born to replace current population levels. The rate has fallen in recent years and 2018 was again "below replacement." A generation can only replace itself if birth rates are at 2,100 births per 1,000 women, health officials said. "The rate has generally been below replacement since 1971 and consistently below replacement for the last decade," the report added. We have known for decades that toxic agricultural chemicals cause declines in men's sperm counts, miscarriages, and other birth related deaths not to mention exposure to many of the chemicals (from neuro-toxin pesticides to fluoride) have been shown to cause a dumbing down of the population.