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# Farm without chemicals: feasible?

by Alan Small

Intense use of pesticides, herbicides, and chemical fertilizers is now the rage in maximizing agricultural output on farms. However, there is a move afoot to go back to the natural way of producing food for today's society.

Sustainable agriculture is the concept of using organic fertilizers, proper crop rotations, and other natural methods so less reliance can be put on chemicals, which are potentially dangerous to our environment.

The Sustainable Agriculture Association (SAA) is holding an information day on this subject on Sunday, February 15 at the Provincial Museum.

The SAA wishes to get more consumers concerned with what they're eating and to make farmers aware of what they're doing to the land.

"We'd like to get farmers aware that the soil is a living medium, and what they are doing to it," said organizer Sharon Rempel.

Along with increasing public awareness, the SAA is hoping to spread their definition of sustainable agriculture.

"The use of manures and proper crop rotations should be more emphasized than they are now," Rempel said, "and less use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers should be stressed."

Getting their definition across is important to the organization, since both the federal and provincial levels of government have no definition for sustainable agriculture. The university has been of little help as well.

"They don't do enough at all about sustainable agriculture," Rempel said.

One of the myths SAA hopes to dispel is the idea that sustainable agriculture is economically unfeasible.

For years now, experts have claimed that a farm business cannot survive if they do not use chemical fertilizers.

According to Rob Rennie, a researcher with Esso Chemicals, they are trying to develop more efficient fertilizers, and ones that won't leak into ground water from the soil.

If pesticides are not used, diseased produce will result in poorer food quality, in addition to the lower yields.

These ideas are slowly being refuted by increasing acceptance of sustainable agriculture in the United States, and now in Canada.

Many of the market gardeners around Edmonton, for example, are converting their conventional practices to a more sustainable approach. With grain or livestock operations, there is still a long way to go, however.



Rennie pointed out that while some people are opposed to putting chemicals on their fields, organic fertilizers are simply broken down into identical compounds by micro-organisms, in order to make

them useful to the crops. There is increased usage of the practices of organic farming, and graduate research is taking place in the U.S., but sustainable agriculture is only slowly catching on in

Canada. Rennie said that strictly organic methods are not efficient enough, except for small scale operations because the public is not willing to pay a "premium" price for food.

## Zalm nukes U232 treaty

**VANCOUVER (CUP)** — British Columbia environmental groups are radiating anger over the provincial government's recent decision to let a seven-year ban on uranium mining expire Feb. 28.

"The government is using the argument that there's some money to be made," said Bev Pinnegar, media co-ordinator for Greenpeace in Vancouver. "But we should consider health effects and the destruction of the environment when dealing with something like uranium mining," she said.

Environmental groups throughout the province are planning a huge protest Feb. 27 against the decision at the legislature in Victoria, said Pinnegar.

Premier Bill Vander Zalm an-

nounced the cabinet decision in December, thus ending the moratorium on uranium mining imposed in 1980. The New Democratic Party, however, is in favor of continuing the ban.

Government communications officer Jake Banky argued "the moratorium serves no useful purpose" as it hinders the growth and development of more plentiful and less controversial minerals found in conjunction with uranium. And Jack Davis, minister of energy, mines, and petroleum, said there was little likelihood of mining actually occurring because of low prices for uranium on world markets.

Greenpeace official Pinnegar, however, said a number of mining companies, including Noranda and

Cominco, are currently exploring for uranium, and the stakes are big.

In 1979, for example, a Toronto-based company, Norcen, signed a \$500 million contract with South Korea electric for 3.2 million kilograms of the powdered uranium ore known as yellowcake. The ore was to be extracted from a mine near the interior city of Kelowna.

But on the environmental side, Pinnegar said tests indicate radioactive waste products would be carried into nearby creeks and rivers.

She also pointed to the long term health hazards associated with uranium mining such as radon gas, which causes lung cancer, and radium 226, which causes bone cancer. With a half-life of 1660 years, Pinnegar said it would take 16,600 years before more exposed radium 226 would be safe to human life.

While small deposits of uranium dot the province, Pinnegar said the major commercial sites were in the Okanagan, the Omineca-Peace River country and in the far north near Atlin.

## Gateway Archives

**Sept. 22, 1964**

— Student Housing Services recommends to prospective landlords that they rent accommodations exclusively either to men or women. A list of "policies and standards" sent also suggests "Students shall not entertain students of the opposite sex in their living quarters."

**Sept. 14, 1976**

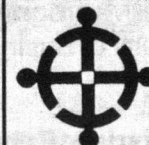
— Increasing student illiteracy has led the department of English to offer a series of in-class lectures designed to help students before they fail their first essay or their first class. Lectures will be provided at the individual professor's request.

**Sept. 14, 1976**

— The 170-foot smokestack at the university power plant nears completion. The \$733,000 stack was installed to decrease high levels of nitrogen oxides being emitted. This was the result of a provincial government order to the university.

**March 5, 1965**

— Edmonton Police morality squad raided five U of A fraternity houses last week, after the *Edmonton Journal* advised the police that the fraternities had beer machines. 600 bottles of beer and a dozen bottles of liquor were netted in the raid. At the time, there was "no niche in liquor licensing into which the fraternities could fit."



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The Volunteer Action Centre (Phone 482-6431), a United Way Agency, has urgent requests for the following volunteer assignments that are of interest to students:

**Help for the blind:** Volunteers are needed to read textbook material to a blind Braille proofreader. A French-speaking volunteer is needed to read texts and assignments in French to a University student.

**Birth Control Counselling:** Volunteers are needed to provide counselling and information about pregnancy, human sexuality and contraception. Extensive training is provided.

**Youth Shelter:** Volunteer receptionists are needed at the Youth Emergency Shelter to answer calls on a four-line telephone and take messages.

**Tutor:** Volunteer tutors needed at West Edmonton community school to help adults whose education stopped at grades four to nine with reading and mathematics.

**Newsletters:** A social group for people with mental health problems and a committee which is responsible for awards to young people both need volunteers to help produce and mail newsletters. (One is published monthly, the other quarterly.)

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