



Organic **Connections**

MAR-APR 2011

The magazine of Natural Vitality

Andrew Kimbrell

The GMO Reality Check

Wolfgang Puck

Living, Loving, Eating

American Forests

Preserving Our Green Legacy



**NEW
organic fruit
flavor!**

**Vitamins,
minerals,
antioxidants,
amino acids**

**Organic,
biologically
active
aloe vera**

**24
organic
veggies,
superfruits,
fruits**

GLUTEN FREE
VEGETARIAN
NON-GMO
FUNCTIONAL FOOD
FAST ABSORPTION
ORGANIC FLAVORS
ORGANIC STEVIA
ORGANIC AGAVE



The detoxification of America

You've probably heard the term *toxic asset* from media covering the financial crisis. Here's a quick refresher for those not fluent in economic-speak. An *asset* is anything that is capable of being owned or controlled to produce value and that is held to have positive economic worth. Something *toxic* is harmful, injurious, poisonous or even deadly. A *toxic asset* is an asset whose value has fallen significantly and for which there is no longer a functioning market. The asset can't be sold at a price satisfactory to the holder. If, for example, you bought a car and later it turned out to have a manufacturing defect that rendered it dangerous to drive, your car would have become a toxic asset, sellable only for parts.

Pure economics aside, wouldn't you say that your health is one of your most important assets? Certainly health is key to our abilities to be productive and to enjoy life.

What we take into our bodies has a great—if not primary—effect on our health. Toxins are fought internally and our bodies try their best to eliminate them. This gives us an extra physiological burden and takes away from energy that could be directed elsewhere. It's estimated that there are over 80,000 industrial chemicals in our environment, and many of these find their way into our food supply. America needs to detoxify!

I'm not an economist, federal regulator or congressman, but I would think that with all the talk about healthcare in this country we would do *anything* we could to help keep people healthy. It's simply counterintuitive that our crops are being drenched with *more* pesticides, herbicides and fungicides, and that biotech GMO seeds are being given the "green" light without proper scientific studies to ensure their safety (not to mention their potential to contaminate organic crops).

Why put our bodies under an increased toxic burden? If you value the asset of your health, and the health of your family, the *last* thing you would want would be for *that* asset to become toxic.

Our collective well-being and happiness is simply of much greater importance than the short-term profits of a handful of corporations. America's biggest asset is, and has always been, its people. When lawmakers and regulators realize that their primary duty is to serve the people, we will start seeing more agricultural decisions being made in the public interest.

Ken Whitman

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denoting a relation between elements of something such that they fit together harmoniously as necessary parts of a whole: *the organic unity of the integral work of art* • characterized by continuous or natural development: *companies expand as much by acquisition as by organic growth.*

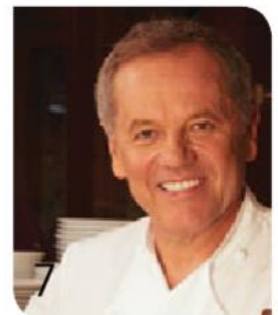
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Andrew Kimbrell

The GMO Reality Check



When GMOs (genetically modified organisms) were first promoted back in the early nineties, it sounded as if the world was about to be saved from famine. These altered crops would produce much higher yields and the hungry could finally be fed. For regions of the planet where there was little rainfall, plants could be made drought resistant. Vitamins could be introduced, making genetically modified produce more nutritious. Crops would be made resilient to pests and could grow in spite of them. And lastly—the bit of information that would ease all other worries—there would be virtually no difference between these and conventionally grown crops that came before them.

Like some experiment from a science fiction movie gone horribly wrong, we now witness the truth of GMOs. And the truth is many miles from the promises.

“What exactly have these crops done for us?” Andrew Kimbrell, founder and executive director of the Center for Food Safety, posed to *Organic Connections*. “What has this technology really given anybody? There’s not a single human being on Earth who gets up in the morning wanting to buy genetically engineered food. Somehow, in all these years, they haven’t been able to produce *one single trait* that actually *contributes* to consumers: better taste, more nutrition, lower fats—you name it; they haven’t been able to produce one.”

If anyone knows the GMO beat, it is certainly Andrew Kimbrell. He is a public interest attorney, activist and author. He has been on the front lines of public interest legal activity in technology, human health and the environment for most of his adult life. In 1997

he established the Center for Food Safety, the organization responsible for knocking down effort after effort of biotechnology giants to pollute our agriculture—and endanger our health—with GMOs. He is also a renowned speaker and has been featured in documentaries and on radio and television programs across the country, including *The Today Show*, *CBS Sunday Morning*, *Crossfire*, *Headlines on Trial* and *Good Morning America*. He has lectured at dozens of universities throughout the country and has testified before congressional and regulatory hearings.

The Failed Promise

Despite billions of dollars spent by companies attempting to deliver on the GMO promise, over 80 percent of all genetically engineered crops in the US and around the world are only designed to withstand large applications of herbicides. One major problem with these herbicide-tolerant plants is that weeds are getting resistant to the chemicals, making them very difficult to kill. Wide swaths of American farmland are now infested with these “superweeds” on which the chemicals no longer work. As a result, companies are resorting to creating crops resistant to even more toxic herbicides. But of course eventually the weeds will become resistant to these chemicals as well, a scenario that is inherently doomed to failure.

“I don’t care what people’s view on biotechnology is,” Kimbrell said. “I can’t imagine anybody who understands anything about agriculture who would not oppose plants that are designed solely to tolerate an increase in the amount of weed-killing chemicals so that crops can be massively sprayed with herbicides. Such plants don’t increase yield; they don’t increase taste. They don’t do anything except allow farmers that convenience. And therefore you have 150 million more pounds of these weedkillers sprayed every year. Then you get superweeds—they’re resisting in millions of acres right now.”

“Five to eight years hence, current herbicides will no longer work and we’ll have weeds that are resistant to *them*. So it’s a very cynical

game for chemical companies to sell an increasing number of chemicals until they can no longer sell them.”

A similar situation exists with the only other major group of genetically engineered plants, those engineered with insecticides. “Bt [*Bacillus thuringiensis*, a naturally occurring bacterium that is used as an insecticide] can kill the corn borer in corn, when the corn is genetically modified to include it,” said Kimbrell. “In cotton we’ve seen that there’s actually not enough Bt being expressed; it basically *vaccinates* the pests, because they get a little Bt but not enough to kill them. But I think we are seeing, and will see, more Bt resistance; and it’s also a non-specific pesticide, so it kills butterflies, caddisflies, bees—whatever it wants to kill. This should have been understood before it was ever allowed out there. We shouldn’t have independent reports cropping up years after a crop is approved saying that butterfly larvae are dying, that there’s decimation of caddisflies in streams, and suspicion that bee colony collapse is related to Bt.”

What happened? What went so wrong between the initial promises and the actual delivery of GMOs?

Faulty Science

“There’s a very good reason we haven’t seen these promises come about,” Kimbrell explained. “The theory behind genetic engineering, which is the understanding of what a gene is and what a gene is not, has changed dramatically over the last decade. The idea that DNA—and particularly the part of DNA that we call a gene, which is a little above 1.5 percent of DNA—somehow controls traits is now not scientifically valid. Today most major scientists realize that DNA is not an actor, but is acted *upon*. There are millions of what are called epigenetic markers—various proteins and chemicals—that control how DNA is expressed in the cell. This idea that the DNA contains a trait such as drought resistance, size or nutrition is naive—and it was wrong. That’s the reason GMOs have been limited to herbicide resistance or tolerance, because those are relatively easy

traits to develop. As a matter of fact, a number of companies have developed herbicide tolerance even without genetic engineering.

"They've tried over a thousand different 'events,' as they call them—a thousand different traits—and those are just the ones that have made the field-trial stage. We don't know how many failures they've had, but *they* estimate 99.5 or 99.6 percent failure. So genetic engineering is not really even a technology; it's a fiddling with nature, with one little piece of what makes cells and heredity, called DNA—and it's a little piece of DNA."

GMO Dangers Ignored

Many countries, including those within the European Union, require strict labeling and testing of GMOs. As a result of this labeling, GMO products simply do not sell in most of the world. Here in the United States we do not require labeling or testing of GMOs. How is it that in the US GMOs seem to have had free rein?

"Unlike our European allies, unlike Australia, Japan, much of Africa and others, we have failed in the United States, for 25 years now, to pass a single law on addressing and assessing the environmental or health consequences of GMOs," Kimbrell pointed out. "Every effort has been defeated by the biotechnology industry.

"What we have in this country is a complete regulatory failure with GMOs. We have no mandatory labeling, no mandatory testing. The USDA *to this day* has never come up with an environmental impact statement *on a single GMO plant*, though they've promised it over and over again, and court after court has demanded they do so.

"The USDA has illegally approved one GMO after the other and has been disciplined by the courts, by the General Accounting Office, and by the Inspector General.

"The problem is that the USDA has pretty much become a rogue agency and a wholly owned subsidiary of the biotechnology industry, and that's really sad. Former Iowa governor, now US Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, was the biotechnology industrial organizations' 'Governor of the Year' in 2001. He brought his current general counsel, Ramona Romero, directly from DuPont this year. The law firm that Vilsack worked for fought us on GMO cases after he wasn't governor anymore."

Another problem is a combination of outdated legislation and agency disparity when it comes to attempts to enforce it. "You have



a brand-new technology without any congressional guidance, which then goes down to the agency level," Kimbrell continued. "If you're EPA, FDA or USDA, you are trying to regulate biotechnology in agriculture under laws that were passed 15 years before anyone knew this technology existed. Here you have corn engineered to contain Bt and they try to regulate it under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act. That means they're trying to treat the *plant* as a *pesticide*—the whole plant. When they passed that law in 1972 on pesticides, they thought they were regulating chemicals; they didn't think they were regulating plants. In another example, we're now seeing GMO salmon, and the FDA is treating it as an animal drug—the *salmon*. So what happens here is that because of the failure of Congress to withstand the lobbying of the industry, the entire technology has been shoved down to the agency level. We have about seven different agencies under about twelve different laws that are trying to regulate biotechnology, with laws that were passed long before biotechnology came on line. So it's a system that's built for failure.

"Because of this inefficiency at federal level, it is forced down into the state and local levels. And we've definitely seen some very courageous counties go GMO free. We've seen states pass laws to protect farmers,

and laws to stop GMO agriculture in their states. It's actually good and valid legislation, but obviously not enough to effectively regulate the whole technology."

Seeds

However, it's not just the crops the biotech companies are after; they are attempting to own the seed market as well. The biotech industry is on the verge of incorporating what is known as terminator technology into seeds—a method that causes the second generation of seeds from genetically modified crops to be sterile. This of course results in farmers having to purchase seeds for their next planting of the crop.

"For 10,000 or so years of agriculture, the whole idea has been to have seeds that were more resilient, seeds that were more adaptive, seeds that provided a more and more robust future for the farmer," said Kimbrell. "Now, we're actually breeding seeds for planned obsolescence. We're saying that we want a seed that only performs for one season, and we then force you to get another one. It's a silly way to try and do things. What is really needed now are seeds that will provide the most food and will be the most robust, the most resilient, under changing climate conditions. Instead we're looking at seeds that are actually built



not to produce over a series of seasons, because that's how the biotech industry can make money. The seed becomes a commodity versus being seen as it should be seen—as a common heritage.

"The major biotech companies currently own 50 percent of the world's commercial seeds, and we certainly don't want to get into a situation where a few chemical companies own all our commercial seeds. The anti-GMO movement has gotten strong; we've turned the tide in the United States, and of course in Europe and elsewhere even more so, with our work and all the work of our allies. But I think it would be a shame if we were to turn back GMO technology only to see these companies cry all the way to the seed bank, where they would be able to own, engineer and ultimately maybe even use terminator technology on the seeds of Earth.

"So at the Center for Food Safety, we're starting an SOS program: Save Our Seeds. It has four prongs: one is to stop the acquisition of seed companies by these chemical companies; two is to stop the patenting of seeds; three is to look at the Technology Use Agreements that imprison farmers and stop them from seed saving; and four, of course, would be an international ban on this terminator technology that would make crops sterile after one growing season.

"We need to understand that seeds really are our future. Food security is *our* security, much more than any national security. As we fight the GMO battle, I'm afraid there's another one on the horizon, and that is to save the fate and the future of these seeds that are so beautiful and that we all love so much."

How Should GMOs Be Regulated?

"I don't think GMOs should be regulated at all; I think they should be eliminated," Kimbrell stated. "I see no excuse whatsoever for anyone to support a technology whose sole aim is to increase the amount of chemicals that we're putting on our crops and our cropland, destroying the insects and life in those crops because of this massive dose of killing, of poison. It is totally antithetical,

exactly opposite, to the organic ethic. We're trying to *eliminate* chemicals, and just as we're trying to do that, biotech is pouring 150 million more pounds of them out there. We're in a direct opposition. So I think herbicide-tolerant crops should be eliminated, because I don't consider there is any room in our society for those. They are against our vision."

Fighting the Tough Fight

Stepping back, we can see that the fight against GMOs is a tough battle for us all. Someone like Andrew Kimbrell, "taking point"* in such a conflict, might be thought to cringe every day at the odds he's up against. But he doesn't. And the philosophy which motivates him can be a lesson to us all.

"Years ago, people may remember Bovine Growth Hormone, Monsanto's flagship product. Originally I litigated the case to try and halt the approval of it; the FDA under Michael Taylor, a former Monsanto attorney, had approved that animal drug. We won some preliminary motions, but we ended up losing the case at the time.

"I was very, very depressed. I called my brother, who's also my best friend, and was bemoaning this loss. My brother said, 'Sounded like you really wanted to win.' And I said, 'You bet I wanted to win!' He replied, 'You have to remember: you're not required to be successful, but you are required to be faithful.'

"You know, no one is required to be successful. I am not required to defeat Monsanto, or to single-handedly save the organic standards or create an 'Organic and Beyond' future. That's way beyond anything that any of us can do. But what we *are* required to do is be faithful, to have a vision, to understand what we want, what we see as the future of food, and how we want our relationship with nature and our relationship with food to be. And I need to try and live personally, as well as work professionally, in faithfulness to that vision.

"I've been working in Washington for 25 years. We've been in litigation against every major biotech company and many others, not to mention government agencies. I'm not stressed and I'm not burned out, because that mantra has always stayed with me. If you put the burden of success on yourself, then you're just as stressed as somebody who is trying to make a successful business deal or be a successful politician—but that's not our job. Our job is to be faithful to this vision that we share, and do everything each of us can individually

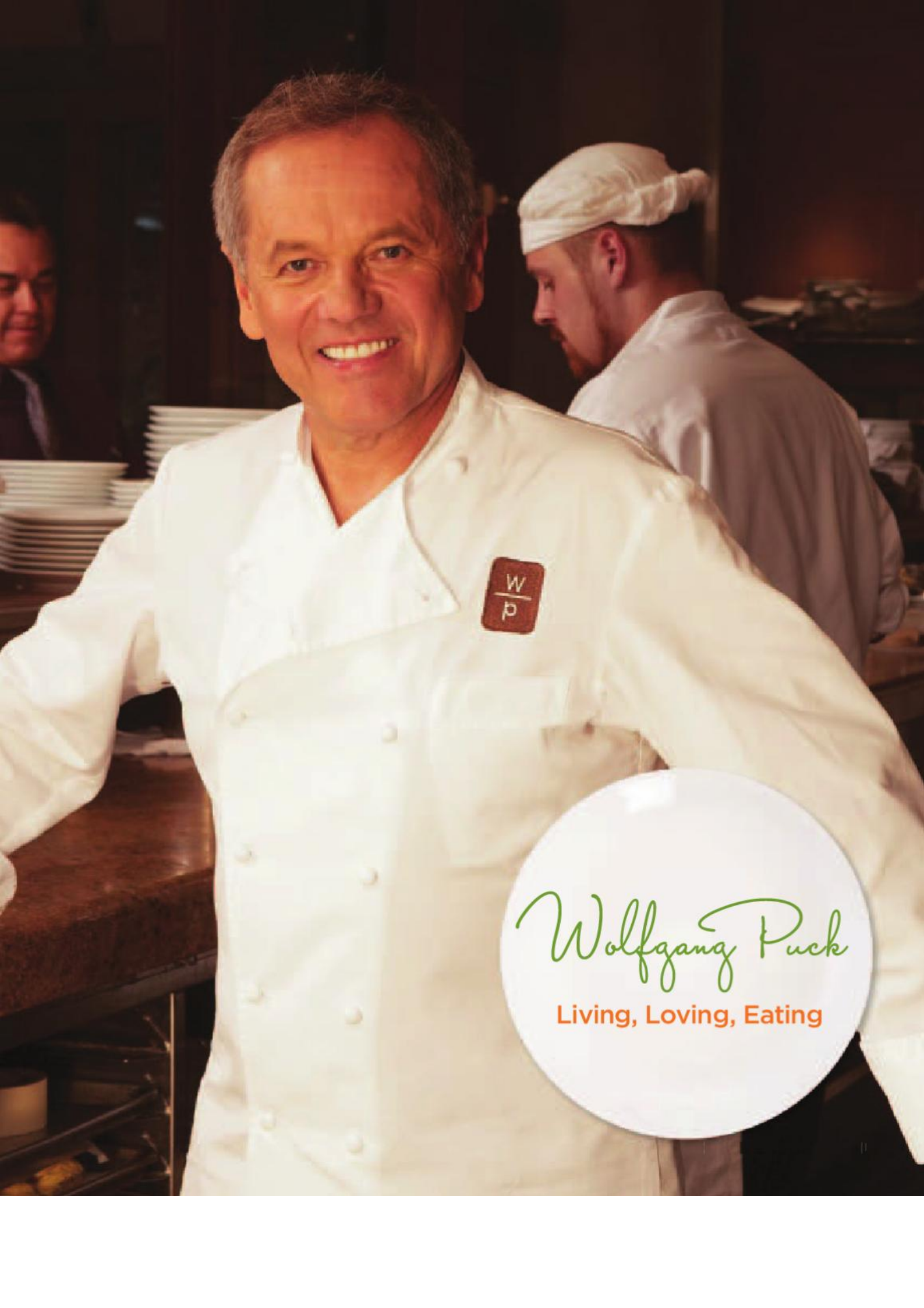
do, within reason and professionally, to make that happen—just to be faithful. If you do that, then be at peace. Act faithfully to that and let the rest take care of itself.

"Another thing that people often ask me is, 'Why do you fight? Were you born to fight?' Actually, no. I was a musician and concert pianist, and I taught music for years before I became a lawyer. I've always loved Lincoln's adage that I was born a lover but I was forced to become a fighter. And I think that the best fighters are basically lovers, because when they see that that which they love is being attacked, then they fight. They don't fight for the purpose of just taking on a corporation or just for the joy of the battle. For those of us who have a true sense of wonder and love for the natural world, and a vision of a new relationship with it, *that's* what we love. And when we see the kind of horrific technological manipulation represented by biotechnology; when we see what it does to the bodies of salmon or the bodies of animals, or when we understand that they've somehow turned a corn plant into a poison for butterflies and caddisflies and potentially for bees; when we realize that they've actually changed the heredity of corn and soy so they can withstand ever more and more chemicals; when we see all that, it's an assault on something that we love. So we respond, not for the sake of attack, but because things that we value and love are being attacked. Anybody would feel that way with their child or pet or anything they care about.

"So the great thing about the work *you* do, and the work a lot of us do, is if we can get people to fall in love with the organic vision and with the farm communities, and fall in love with this new relationship with food, they'll fight for it. We're not passive consumers; we're creators, and that creative process is very exciting. And when we see that attacked, yes, we'll defend it and we'll defend it vigorously. But we don't do it out of a sense of simple aggression; we do it because we're defending something we love. So beware of the lover, because when you attack that which a person loves, you're going to have a pretty vigorous fight on your hands. And that is, I think, what all of us do."

For the latest update on the Center for Food Safety and their many activities, visit www.truefoodnow.org.

* **take point:** *Military* to assume the first and most exposed position in a combat formation, that is, the lead soldier/unit advancing through hostile or unsecured territory. (Wikipedia.org)



Wolfgang Puck

Living, Loving, Eating

We've all heard of Wolfgang Puck.

His name appears on nearly 20 fine-dining and more than 80 fast-casual restaurants, world-class catering services, and culinary merchandise, including kitchenware, cookbooks and premium packaged foods.

He has been featured on numerous television shows, demonstrating, lecturing and being interviewed on his legendary culinary skills.

His original fame stems from his role as a chef and restaurateur, beginning back in 1982 with his first restaurant, Spago. Since its founding, Spago has been a dining home to an endless parade of celebrities—and anyone else who appreciates the finest in culinary experience. It has won many awards from the restaurant industry and is consistently recognized as one of the top eateries in the US. From the Spago stage, Wolfgang became (and is still) the official caterer to the Academy Awards® Governors Ball.

In creating his cuisine, a chef of Wolfgang's status is always seeking the finest in ingredients. Early on in his career, that trail led him to the weekly farmers' market in Santa Monica, California, where he would sample and purchase the tastiest locally grown produce. The flavor of sustainably produced ingredients—including meats—made it into dishes served at Spago. And he never looked back.

"Obviously people who like to eat well know we have great vegetables," Wolfgang told *Organic Connections*. "You can see the color; you can taste it; you know what is good. After a while people get the taste for such ingredients. Then they go to another restaurant and come back and say, 'Well, it's not the same. How come your chicken is so tasty here and when I have it somewhere else it's not the same?'"

"The difference is very obvious. If you go to a regular grocery store and you buy corn there, for example, generally you will get some starchy corn. My sons, who are small, 4 and 5, won't eat it. But if we go to the farmers' market and buy corn, they will eat it raw right there and then steamed

every night. So, even the young kids know the difference."

Eat, Love, Live

In 2007, Wolfgang widened his appreciation for sustainably grown produce and meats, expressing it in a philosophy he calls WELL (Wolfgang's Eat, Love, Live). He believes firmly enough in this philosophy that it is now policy for his restaurants.

The basis of WELL is a full understanding of where food comes from—and that it is responsibly grown and (in the case of animals) humanely treated. "What we have to do is go *look* at what farmers really do," Wolfgang said. "As an example, I went up to Idaho to meet the guy who raises our quails. I wanted to actually see what they do. That's really the most important thing. It's easy when the farmers' market comes to town with their vegetables; but if somebody raises animals in, say, Northern California on a small farm in a small town, it's different. I actually went and saw them because I didn't want to just buy some stuff and put my name on it when I didn't know where it came from."

In addition to the praise of flavor, Wolfgang has had enthusiastic feedback from customers on other points of the policy. "Everybody, I think, has been very positive about it, because some people are really concerned as regards, for instance, the caged animals—from chickens to veal to pigs," he said. "There is a whole movement for that. In some states they already have legislated that you cannot cage small animals the way they have been doing in the past."

As we enumerated the nine points of the WELL program, we asked Wolfgang to comment on each one.

1

Only use and serve eggs from cage-free hens not confined to inhumane battery cages.

"If you could see chickens in cages, which cannot even turn around, which cannot do anything, you would become a vegetarian. You wouldn't eat any eggs; you wouldn't eat any chicken."

2

Only serve all-natural or organic crate-free pork. Crates prevent pigs from engaging in natural behaviors as basic as turning around.

"It's a similar thing. You go to this mass factory farm where everything is about quantity and not quality. In the reverse, you have farmers today who raise pork here in this country Japanese style, the Berkshire pork and things like that, which taste so amazing. So, for me, first of all is they treat the animals right, and then the next thing is the flavor and taste, which are so different we won't even consider any other way. One of our mottos is, 'We want to know how you treat what we eat,' and I think that's an important part."

3

Only serve all-natural or organic crate-free veal. Crates prevent calves from turning around or even extending their limbs.

"Well, we started that already a long time ago because people were so used to having veal completely white, and we think that the non-white one has more flavor."

4

Only serve certified sustainable seafood from a renewable fishing supply.

"There is enough seafood out there that, if you are careful, you don't have to buy something which is on the endangered species list, and items like bluefin tuna are endangered. But they even have farm-raised bluefin now in Spain and in Greece, so you can get it from there if that is what you really want, or what we want."

5

Eliminate foie gras from our menus. Force-feeding swells ducks' livers up to ten times their normal size.

"That took a lot for me because I really like it. Unfortunately we haven't found anyone yet to do it in a more humane way; but I'm sure sooner or later somebody will come along and produce it



Bartlett pear salad

without having to force-feed the ducks to that point.”

6

Only serve all-natural or organic chicken and turkey from farms that are compliant with progressive animal welfare standards.

“We use chickens or we use ducks that come from a farm. So the same thing—we really know from where the animals come.”

7

Continue to feature and expand certified organic menu selections.

“We use organic stuff whenever we can. If we need bananas, it’s difficult to find organic bananas; but from coffee to a lot of other products—all the fruits, the vegetables—we get them from the farmers’ market. And we are really lucky here in California because we have all these farmers who grow crops year-round, so it makes it easy to get things.”

8

Continue to offer and expand vegetarian selections on all menus.

“We always are very flexible. First of all, we cook everything to order, so that makes it simple. And then if somebody is a vegetarian, I feel it’s our challenge to make just as exciting a menu for them as we offer for people ordering from the regular menu. As a matter of fact, in our steakhouse, CUT, we have a vegan menu.”



tomato tasting



pumpkin soup

9

Send a letter to suppliers regarding methods of poultry slaughter that involve less suffering.

“Obviously every animal has to be killed before we eat it, but mainly it is the way the animals were raised and sometimes how they are slaughtered. But we buy things from farmers who are in compliance, or from slaughterhouses where they are compliant, with our philosophy.”

In implementing these WELL principles, Wolfgang believes in reaching out to growers and producers who, whether certified organic or not, are producing in sustainable ways. “I believe that if we want the local



tasting of dim sum

PEOPLE NEED TO GET **BETTER FOOD** THAT IS REALLY **A SOURCE OF LIFE**, WHICH WILL MAKE THEIR LIVES BETTER AND WILL TASTE BETTER AND IS MORE ENJOYABLE. HOW CAN SOMEBODY BE AGAINST THAT? I TRULY BELIEVE THAT **EATING RIGHT WILL HELP US TO LIVE LONGER AND BETTER LIVES.**

community interested in us, we have to be interested in them first," he said.

"That's true of our customers, and of the farmers and growers who do things in an honest and right way. There are people who have sustainable agriculture and use as much organic as possible. Some of them make great things and don't use any pesticides or chemicals, but they just can't afford to wait five years or whatever to get the certification. At the end of the day I am very happy to support people who can actually grow things right and people who raise animals humanely, so we are really on that bus."

Through this philosophy, Wolfgang is also sending a message to the public at large to help them become educated in the importance of eating healthy, nutritious food. "I think education of the public is important because I believe that a lot of the

health problems we have out there are due to poor nutrition," he said. "People need to get better food that is really a source of life, which will make their lives better and will taste better and is more enjoyable. How can somebody be against that? I truly believe that eating right will help us to live longer and better lives."

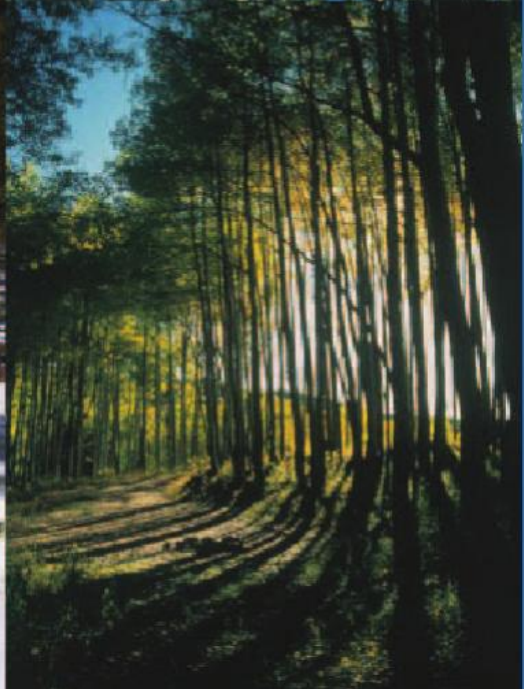
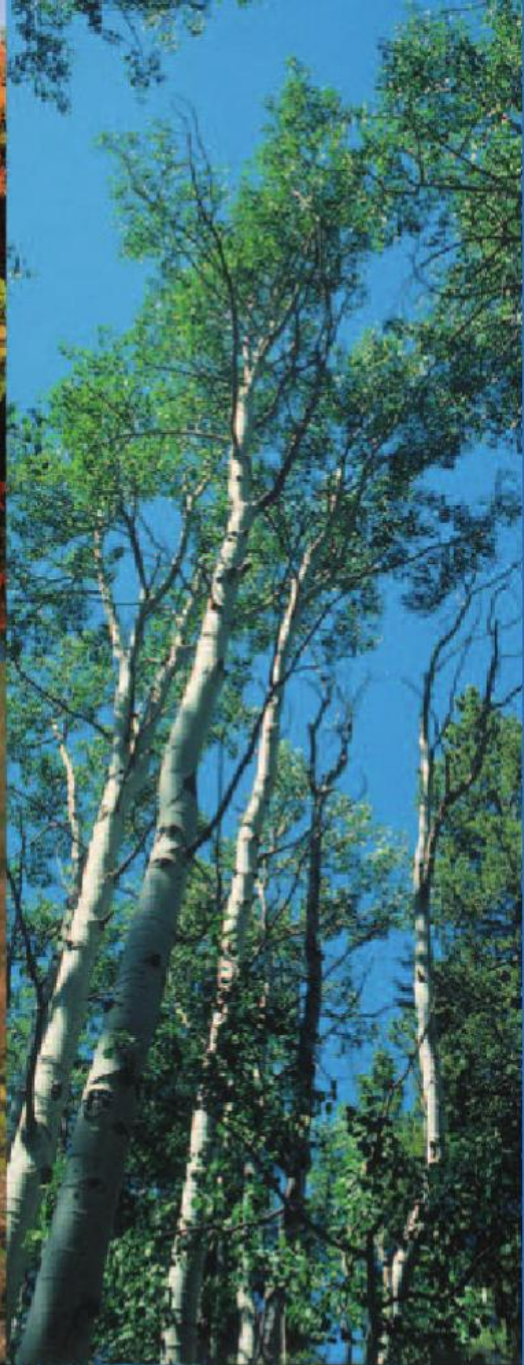
Wolfgang concluded by demonstrating how the WELL philosophy dovetails with another philosophy of his: cooking from the heart and with love.

"I grew up in a cooking family; my mother was a chef. You could look at her when she cooked something and see how much love she put in it. Food obviously tastes better when you feel the love and you feel the passion for something. It might be a simple vegetable plate or some roasted potatoes or whatever it is. I remember my mother digging the first potatoes out of the soil in

late summer and boiling them. We used to eat them with some cucumber salad—just potatoes with a bit of butter and sour cream and a little sauce on them. It seems like the most simple thing, but we always were so excited about it because it was fresh, right out of the ground, and it tasted great."

For more on Wolfgang Puck and his WELL philosophy, visit www.wolfgangpuck.com/green.





American Forests

Preserving Our Green Legacy

by Bruce Boyers



For me, trees have always been a source of rare and exquisite beauty. I spent the first six years of my childhood in the mountain community of Idyllwild, California—and some of the towering, gnarled, sweet-smelling pines that surrounded my youth had such forceful personalities that I all but named them. I certainly never forgot them; when returning as an adult, it was almost instinctual to seek them out and say hello, and to practically cry if I found one had been cut down.

When I grew older, I of course discovered that it wasn't just aesthetic value trees bring to us, but much more. Forests greatly assist in purifying water. They are a prime source of the very oxygen that we breathe—and an absorbing agent for excess carbon dioxide in our atmosphere. They stabilize soil and provide habitats for endless species of plant and animal life.

The Need for Protection

As our modern industrial age came upon us in the last century, trees became a cornerstone of our economy. Unfortunately, it wasn't in a way that allowed them to live; their wood became furniture, building material and even paper. Toward the end of the twentieth century mainstream society finally began to stand up and take notice that, as vast forests disappeared to feed hungry commercial machines, so disappeared the quality of our air, water, wildlife and climate.

One organization, however, appropriately named American Forests, had actually been on the job since the previous century and this is no new issue or fight to them. It was all the way back in 1875 that a group of concerned citizens, led by physician and horticulturist

John Aston Warder, met in the Grand Pacific Hotel in Chicago to “protect the existing forests of the country from unnecessary waste.” From that meeting the American Forestry Association—today known as American Forests—came into being.

It was a very different time. There were no national or state forests, no forestry schools or professional foresters, and little policy to oversee these vital natural resources. As towns and cities sprang to life all across America, forests were being laid to waste in order to build them. But Warder's goal of an organization to protect forests probably went beyond his dreams; American Forests participated in some of the most pivotal events of the conservation movement.

In 1891, after years of advocacy by American Forests, Congress passed legislation giving the president power to set aside forest reserves. In 1905 American Forests supported the creation of national parks, including the purchase of Calaveras Grove of Big Trees in California and conveyance of Yosemite. In 1917 they strongly supported the creation of Grand Canyon National Park, and in the 1920s Appalachian National Park. They fought hard on every hand to get legislation passed to protect wildlife and habitats, and strongly opposed every bill in Congress that failed to protect parks from irrigation, reservoirs, power projects or other industrial uses.

Today American Forests continues in this tradition but has now extended its scope planetwide, working hard to reforest areas in need, and rehabilitating and protecting the forests that remain.

The Personal Commitment

Those that lead and work with American Forests today fully understand the legacy they have inherited. Scott Steen, who just recently came aboard as CEO, told *Organic Connections*, “In my mind American Forests has been, for 135 years, one of the principal voices and advocates for the environmental and societal benefits of forests and trees. We have a remarkable history, a remarkable legacy,



which includes being thought leaders and pioneers in helping to set up the Forest Service and the Park System and so many milestones in forest policy.

“I own about 75 acres of forest and I have always loved the forest and trees; and this is an organization that just does remarkable work. As someone who has spent their whole career in nonprofit management, the chance to lead American Forests gave me a great opportunity to take what I do well and what the board wanted done at this organization and align these with what I really believe in.”

Global ReLeaf

Today one of American Forests' prime focuses is the planting of trees, through its Global ReLeaf Forestation Project. Since the project's formation in 1990, Global ReLeaf has planted 35 million trees, covering every state in the nation and more than 20 countries around the world.

“We planted about 5 million trees last year, and our goal is to plant nearly 6 million this year,” said Steen. “We have a target to plant a hundred million trees by 2020. We pick our

projects carefully and are looking for places where we can make a real difference. More than just putting trees in the ground, our focus is to protect and restore forest ecosystems. We did a project in India that was around a community, to bring clean water. We have restored habitat for the endangered Kirtland's Warbler in Michigan."

Education

For many years, American Forests has also engaged in educational programs in schools. The Treasures Environmental Education Program introduces children ages 3–10 to

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cartoon characters who have individual messages that focus on the function, benefits and importance of trees. Another program called A Tree for Every Child helps teach students, grades 3–5, about forest communities and trees in the context of environmental change.

A computer program known as CITYgreen allows older students to create virtual growing programs within their communities and see the benefits that these programs, if put into practice, would produce. "CITYgreen actually measures canopy cover within urban areas, and it is a great teaching tool," Steen noted. "It allows communities to look at canopy cover within their urban areas and to set goals for how much cover they would like to achieve. In high schools, it's a way to really use technology to engage students around the importance of the trees in all communities."

In the near future, Steen would like to see American Forests' educational efforts also directed more at adults. "Where we have focused very largely is K through 6," he said. "While that is important, I think we have enormous room to expand into broader public education. I would like to see us become the principal voice for this issue. On a global scale, you hear The Nature Conservancy and other organizations talking about it, but we in fact have an important role to play in educating the American public on the environmental benefits of forests and trees. I think for us that means not only expanding our presence online and using social media much more effectively, but also bringing people to the forest, bringing the forest to the people, and finding

ways to really get the message out to communities and engage individuals and groups throughout the country. What we're trying to do is to build a movement—to engage people who care about trees and forests, to educate them, and then make *them* teachers."

Policy

Another area in which American Forests has always been heavily involved is in legislating policy. Instead of dealing only on a national congressional level, however, it has chosen to also bring this closer to home. Gerry Gray, Senior Vice President for Conservation

Programs, explained: "The work that American Forests has been doing for the past almost two decades now is to forge a niche that we call *community-based forestry*. When we say community-based forestry, it's really about integrating the social and economic concerns of human communities and the forest landscape. A lot of our work has been in rural areas, and there you're often talking about smaller communities where the forest is a significant resource base—for recreation, water, or different kinds of forest products. But we're trying to forge greater understanding of the relationships between human communities and forests, so that forests are being cared for and jobs are being provided to people in the communities—but not just traditional logging jobs; they're jobs where you're perhaps monitoring the health of the watershed or wildlife habitat, or you're doing restoration work in burned-over areas, or getting some of these forests back into an ecologically healthy condition. It's about recognizing the interdependence between forests and communities and not just having the human community exploiting the forest.

"It's a set of dynamics that has come out of international forest discussions. In parts of Southeast Asia people are trying to understand how forests can be sustained and provide benefits to local populations. There, it's perhaps more indigenous communities; whereas here, we're talking about the specific contexts in different parts of the US. But it takes you to the basic question, how do people in a community think about the forest and the way the forest sustains them?"



And then, what do they need to do to sustain the forest? It's taken us into the realm of talking about ecosystem services or thinking more clearly about how forests provide clean water and enhance the air quality *in addition to* providing traditional forest products. It's a discussion that I'm not sure has emerged sufficiently into the forest literature, but we've been working on this for a couple of decades now and we're trying to carve out that niche—building understanding of how the forests supply this vast array of services to communities. We want to recognize, value and support those services through government policies, as well as encourage markets to develop where they are appropriate."

The Question of Wildfires

Policy is an area in which another vital factor—that of forest fires—enters in; and due to recent scientific discovery, the approach to wildfires is changing. In fact, one of the purposes mentioned on the American Forests website is to "learn to work with wildfires instead of against them."

"Back in the 1920s and '30s when wildfire policy was coming into place, people were looking at fire broadly as a destructive force," Gray said. "We went to war as a nation on wildfires, and the Forest Service was very effective at becoming a firefighting agency. Of course, there were great concerns about people's lives and property being destroyed, so Congress provided lots of resources whenever we had significant wildfires. It wasn't until about the time I got here in 1988 that people began asking, 'Aren't our forests taking on a different set of structures and composition?' We had very heavy biomass loading on these forests: lots of small-diameter trees and huge numbers of trees per acre. The composition of the forest was changing because of the ways trees compete for space, moisture and sunlight. The forests were taking on a different look and structure than they would have if fire had

been allowed to play its historic role. The most dramatic examples of fire's role were in the West's dry inland forests. People talk about the ponderosa pines, where you had fire coming through every 10 to 15 years, and the bigger trees developed a thick bark and were spaced such that the fires could come through and burn out the undergrowth. The frequent and low-intensity fires would take out a lot of the new growth but leave the large trees well spaced.

"So by excluding fires over decades, we ended up creating ecologically unbalanced forests, and wound up with situations where we began seeing both increased wildfires and increased stress on forests. In drought conditions, we would get much drier situations

in the forests than in the past because there was so much more biomass on the site competing for the moisture. We also saw a lot of the bug infestations and forest health issues, and when the wildfires hit they would become much larger, more intense and more destructive than they had been historically."

With population having encroached into

A large part of our challenge is creating deeper understanding of the role that forests play.

forests the way it has now, the solutions to the problem have become complex and the subject of much policy debate. "You now get different interests addressing those questions

philosophically from different points of view," Gray continued. "But by and large even folks in the environmental community, who often have a level of distrust for human intervention into these systems, have recognized that there are already significant numbers of people on the landscape, particularly in the areas known as the 'wildland-urban interface.'

They have realized that there needs to be manual cutting, or thinning, in those areas, and there's a lot of collaboration to reduce the fuel loads or the hazardous fuels in the forests. Policy agreement is usually struck where people agree to take out the smaller trees and leave the larger, more vigorous trees on the site, encouraging some of the more natural or earlier forest structures."

The Needed Changes

Steen and Gray concluded with statements of what needs to occur now to help protect our trees and forests into the future.

"In Congress today, you see huge amounts of money going toward wildfire suppression and you also see reduced staffing levels and reduced manpower in the federal agencies due to overall budget constraints," said Gray. "If Congress is putting too much funding into fighting wildfires, you have fewer resources to put into the other issues, such as restoring, maintaining and sustaining healthy ecosystems. So we need to get the priorities right with respect to the Forest Service, the institutional policies, and how Congress allocates resources."

"A large part of our challenge is creating deeper understanding of the role that forests play," Steen added. "I also think that, given the economy and the urgent situations that we face as a society, sometimes the important but longer-term issues take a back seat to the 'urgent.' We really have to point out the interconnections we have with forests, and also convince people that midterm and longer-term thinking are critical for our society."

For more information about American Forests and its activities, visit www.americanforests.org.



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