

The background of the cover is a close-up photograph of a wooden basket filled with various fresh green herbs, including what appears to be mint and basil. The lighting is bright, highlighting the vibrant green colors and the texture of the leaves.

Organic Connections

NOV-DEC 2009

The magazine of Peter Gillham's Natural Vitality

"Food Fight"

Filming the Food Revolution

SEER Centre

Scotland's Remineralized Oasis

Healthcare

High Cost of the American Diet

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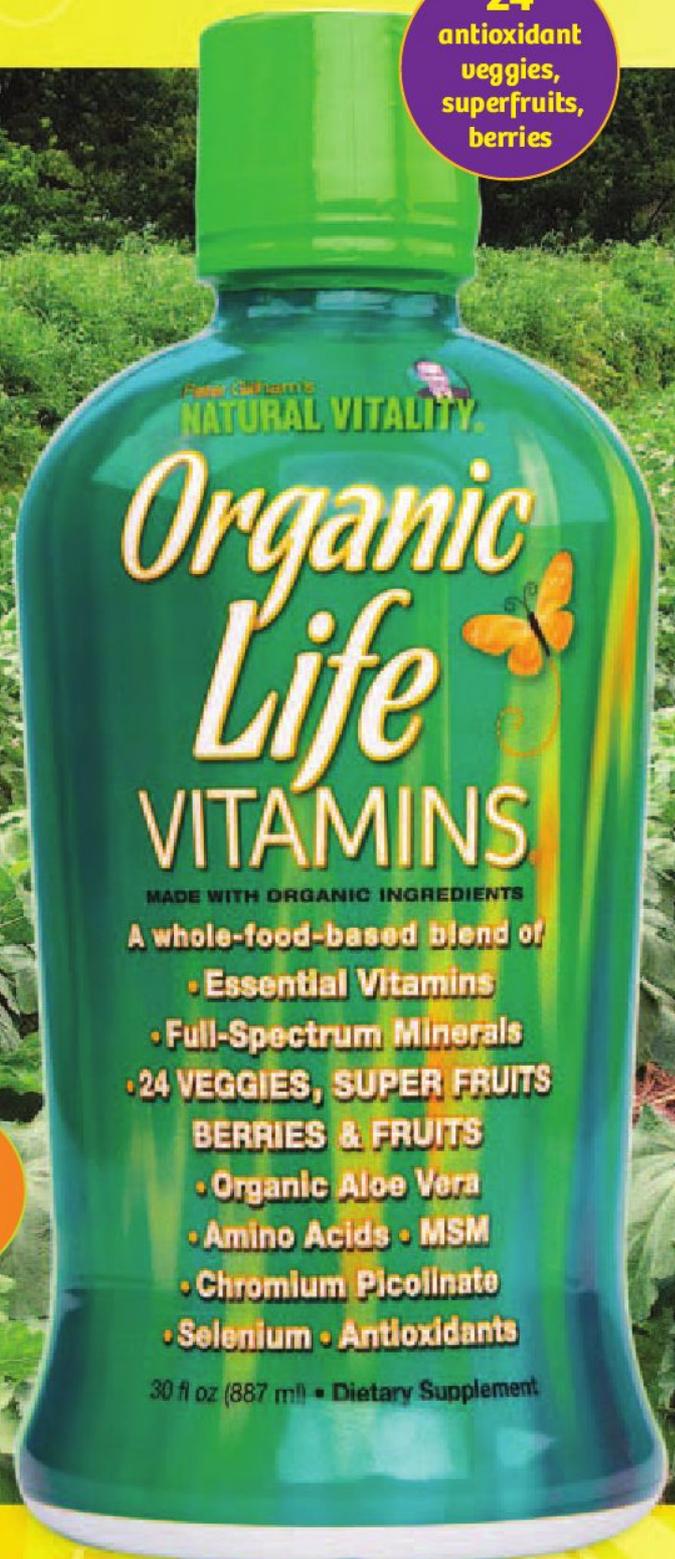


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Putting your money where your mouth is

America's love affair with cheap food has landed us in ninth place on the obesity scale out of 194 countries ranked by the World Health Organization. According to the *New York Times*, two-thirds of the US population is overweight.

Diabetes has reached epidemic proportions, with the economic cost of caring for those with the disease running one out of every five healthcare dollars spent. As of 2008, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says there are 24 million people with diabetes in the US; but another estimated 57 million are pre-diabetic. That's roughly a quarter of the American population! You can easily see that we're speeding toward a huge increase in healthcare dollars for diabetes treatment alone. The number one risk factor for type 2 diabetes is obesity.

Being overweight or obese mainly comes from taking in more calories than are expended. Along with a sedentary lifestyle, the cause is what we are eating—junk food. The *McGraw-Hill Concise Dictionary of Modern Medicine* defines junk food as "a popular term for any food low in essential nutrients and high in salt—e.g., potato chips/crisps, pretzels; refined carbohydrates—e.g., candy, soft drinks; or saturated fats—e.g., cake, chocolates."

The American Heart Association recently said the number one source of added sugars in the American diet comes from soft drinks and sugar-sweetened beverages. It also said that high intake of added sugars is implicated in numerous poor health conditions, including obesity, high blood pressure and other risk factors for heart disease and stroke. The cost of cardiovascular disease and stroke in the US this year is estimated at \$475.3 billion.

In 2009, the US is expected to spend \$2.5 trillion on healthcare. That's 17.6 percent of our gross domestic product. Wow!

It has been suggested that a tax on junk food would be in order. This is not a bad idea, as it could help subsidize our healthcare costs that are soaring from eating it. But how about eliminating the federal subsidies that enable low-cost corn-based junk food, drinks sweetened with high-fructose corn syrup, and many other processed foods?

When you look at these statistics, shouldn't we all be on the same page in doing everything we can to replace the empty calories that are the hallmark of the American diet with nutritious and organic foods? Especially for our children!

Ken Whitman
PUBLISHER

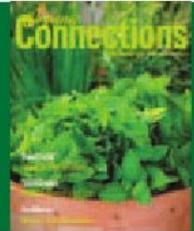
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In this issue



or•gan•ic [ôr gan'ik]

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.*

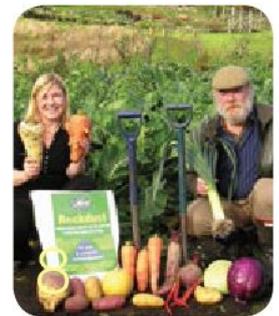
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Filmmaker Chris Taylor talks about his documentary *Food Fight*, which tracks the food revolution from its roots in Berkeley to the issues that face us today and what we can do about them.



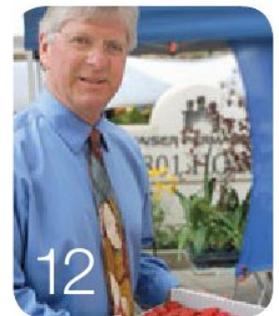
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With the use of rock dust, the farmers at Scotland's SEER Centre have created a bountiful harvest out of the rocky soil of the highlands, providing a convincing demonstration of the process of soil remineralization.



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Kaiser-Permanente's Dr. Preston Maring and other experts talk about the high healthcare cost of the American diet and discuss the prospects of a bright food future and some of the ways in which it might be achieved through education and action.



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Food Fight

Filming the Food Revolution

by Bruce Boyers

R

“Revolution never tasted so good,” states the movie poster for a new documentary by Chris Taylor entitled *Food Fight*—a film that details the revolution in locally grown, sustainable food begun in California some 40 years ago and now progressing in greater strides than ever all across the nation. The film also explores the reason that the revolution had to take place at all—an industrial food system wholeheartedly bought into by the American public, much to the detriment of our collective health.

The documentary has already created quite an impact, receiving numerous awards including the International Documentary Association Audience Award 2008, the Environmental Award from the Santa Cruz Film

sense that it’s Mediterranean cuisine, but in the fifties and sixties it was certainly something new to America. The reason I concentrated on that in the movie is because what began as a search for taste and great-tasting produce actually has now turned into a political movement. That is the interesting thing for me; it’s the switch from hedonism to politically progressive activism. That’s the story of the California food movement, which we now call local, seasonal, sustainable food.”

Why a Revolution?

One doesn’t have to look far to discover why such a revolution was needed in the first place. It’s the story of how a mega industry came about based on inexpensive low-quality food, and why it’s still with us.

The film takes us back to the end of World War II. During the war, numerous technologies such as flash freezing and dehydration had been evolved in an attempt to bring nutrition to millions of soldiers fighting in regions where the provision of fresh food was impossible. When the war was over,

of the fifties) with slogans aimed at middle-class moms: “It’s like having a maid.”

At the same time, *Food Fight* shows that another whole industry had evolved during the war for the manufacture of nitrates, used in making bombs. When aggressions ceased, methods were sought to continue this profitable venture and they were found in, of all places, farming. “Basically we had built up



Filmmaker Chris Taylor

this huge wartime capacity to make explosives and all the other things we needed for war,” Taylor explained. “That same kind of chemistry used in bombs and explosives

BASICALLY WE HAD BUILT UP THIS HUGE WARTIME CAPACITY TO MAKE EXPLOSIVES AND ALL THE OTHER THINGS WE NEEDED FOR WAR. THAT SAME KIND OF CHEMISTRY USED IN BOMBS AND EXPLOSIVES WAS WHAT WAS NEEDED TO MAKE FERTILIZERS, PESTICIDES AND HERBICIDES.

Festival, and the Audience Award for the Washington, DC International Film Festival.

“I’ve always been a fan of good food, and I love to eat,” director Chris Taylor told *Organic Connections* concerning his motivation for making the film. “I was reading about a food movement called the California Food Revolution, which basically concerns a style of cooking that celebrates ingredients and has the fewest manipulations between farm and plate. It’s really nothing new in the

companies that had invested substantial monies into the research and development of these technologies were looking for ways to continue utilizing them.

The results of this quest gave us TV dinners and an endless variety of processed foods, all marketed for our convenience. Cooking was promoted as “drudgery” instead of the creative, healthy activity it is. The new packaged dinners and ready-to-eat meals were sold (by cigarette-smoking, martini-drinking ad men

was what was needed to make fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides. So we had a huge industrial capacity to make these after World War II, and that’s exactly how our agricultural sector evolved, to take advantage of this capability.”

These chemicals made it possible for farmers to grow unheard-of numbers of crops, as nitrates promote very fast crop growth. Suddenly food companies were faced with the problem of how to sell all this food. The

FOOD FIGHT

REVOLUTION NEVER TASTED SO GOOD!
A DOCUMENTARY BY CHRIS TAYLOR



marketing people found the methods in snack food, junk food and a whole host of high-carbohydrate, non-nutritious comestibles.

Modern supermarkets are designed so that the shopper must navigate through the packaged high-carb snack foods, sodas and the like in order to make it to the proteins, fruits and vegetables. *Food Fight* also points out that the spending per capita for food is way down, while our spending on healthcare is way up. Coincidence?

The Revolution

With the twang of psychedelic guitars, *Food Fight* begins the exploration of the real-food revolution with footage of the college anti-war demonstrations of the sixties and a beautiful young bohemian-attired woman named Alice Waters cooking for and serving the demonstrators.

“This movement really started in Berkeley,” said Taylor. “It was Alice Waters and her restaurant, Chez Panisse.”

For Alice Waters, it was essentially a matter of getting back to the land and serving real taste. As part of the “revolution” taking place, people were starting farms and growing their own food, rebelling against the companies that were providing chemical weapons such as Agent Orange for the Vietnam War and simultaneously supplying fertilizers and pesticides for our food production.

Alice Waters took her love of cooking from the protest lines to an idea for a new restaurant, a place that would embody her



Wolfgang Puck

values of real food shared at the table as a celebration. The film contains vintage footage of patrons dancing and singing, and sharing in some incredible meals.

Word of Chez Panisse spread far and wide, and chefs who in the future would be creating their own well-deserved reputations

apprenticed there. Mark Peel, executive chef at the famous Campanile restaurant in Los Angeles, was a pastry apprentice at Chez



Chef Suzanne Goin

Panisse from 1980 to 1981. Paul Bertolli, renowned author and for many years executive chef of the esteemed Oliveto restaurant in Oakland, California, was a chef at Chez Panisse from 1982 to 1992. Suzanne Goin, chef and restaurateur for four of Los Angeles’ best restaurants—Lucques, Tavern, A.O.C. and The Hungry Cat—was a Chez Panisse line cook from 1990 to 1992. Dan Barber, now the owner and head chef of the famed Blue Hill restaurants in New York State, apprenticed there in 1993.

Wolfgang Puck

As Chez Panisse was ruling from the north, another future luminary in the culinary world, a young, talented Austrian by the name of Wolfgang Puck, was creating a reputation for himself in the south—specifically at his new restaurant, called Spago, on the Sunset Strip.

Like Waters, Puck went in search of great ingredients and couldn’t find them in conventional places. And, like Waters, he finally found them at a farmers’ market—in this case, the weekly market in Santa Monica, from which nearly all of L.A.’s great chefs now obtain many of their finest items.

A primary difference between Alice Waters and Wolfgang Puck was that Puck was serving patrons right smack in the middle of Hollywood. These were the sort of patrons that were followed everywhere by cameras, and it wasn’t long before Puck’s cooking became nationwide news as a result.

Thanks to the media, cookbooks and word of mouth, the revolution in locally and sustainably grown food spread all across the country and has now extended throughout the world. Financed by consistent orders and cash flow from high-end restaurants, many farmers have been able to

diversify their produce and create a synergy with chefs for ever better and more exotic ingredients. The ultimate winner has been the food consumer who shops at the farmers’ markets and is able to purchase this great-tasting locally grown produce.

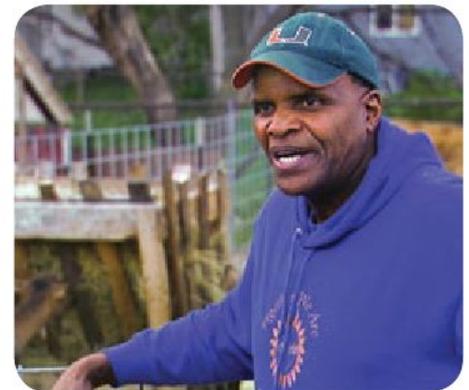
For Everyone

One complaint that could be levied against this movement, however, is that most average citizens cannot afford this food and certainly cannot afford regular meals at places like Chez Panisse and Spago. How, then, can we get real sustainable food into the mainstream?

Food Fight provides several answers—and shows us true pioneering work in this regard.

Growing Power

Will Allen is a man whom Chris Taylor calls “a real American hero.” As founder of an organization named Growing Power, Allen began his story with teens from inner-city neighborhoods who needed a place to work and himself as a farmer with some land. In



Growing Power’s Will Allen

1993, he designed a program that offered teens an opportunity to work at his store and renovate greenhouses to grow food for their community. What started as a simple partnership to change the landscape of the north side of Milwaukee has now received worldwide media attention and has imparted the message “It can be done.”

Today Growing Power serves as a living museum and idea factory for the young, the elderly, farmers, producers and other professionals ranging from USDA personnel to urban planners. Training includes every aspect of growing and producing sustainable crops, all the way from soil and crop management up to and including project management.

Extending outward from its Milwaukee origins, Growing Power has expanded to numerous localities including Chicago, where can be found a large urban farm run by Will Allen's daughter, Erika.

Food Fight profiles the way in which Growing Power is located in what Allen calls a "food desert," a part of the city devoid of traditional grocery stores (let alone organic ones) but lined with fast-food, liquor and convenience stores selling mostly soda and highly processed food items.

"Will Allen is really a unique individual," said Taylor. "He is not only a pioneer of the kind of farming that could help change our cities back into secure habitable environments, but he is also exporting knowledge,



Alice Waters

Agriculture. In May of this year, he received a \$400,000 grant from the Kellogg Foundation.

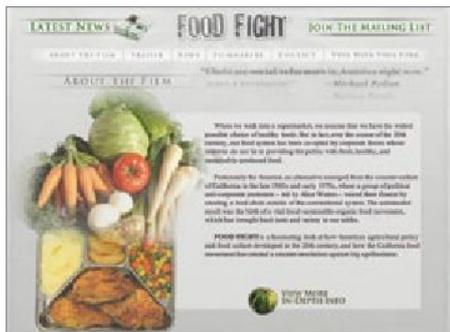
Alice Waters

Food Fight also profiles what may be our greatest hope for answering in a meaningful way the billions of advertising dollars directed at our children from the processed-food industry and fast-food chains: Alice Waters' Edible Schoolyard program. This program—which has already been proven in several public schools across the country—aims to educate children from the beginning about raising and cooking sustainable, healthy food. Crops are grown right on the school grounds by

It's a phenomenal project. Students are learning firsthand about well-grown organic, healthy food.

"Something that is really important here is the lack of food information that we have in our society; nobody is telling or teaching our kids about food except these food programs. And the result is the only information we get as a culture about food is coming from commercials. It's coming from McDonald's. It's coming from Swanson. It's coming from everybody who has a vested interest in *making money and not making healthy food*. So obviously the Edible Schoolyard programs are really becoming popular across the country, and are a huge important force in relearning the agricultural wisdom that we seem to have thrown out in the last two generations. If you throw that out, it's forgotten, and that's a very sad thing for our culture."

So, yes, it's important that you see this documentary and show it to all your friends. But it's also an opportunity to forward this highly beneficial revolution. Visit the *Food Fight* website at www.foodfightthedoc.com (section "Vote with Your Fork") for some good resources.



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wisdom and technology that he's developed all across America and all across the world. So Will and Erika Allen are really American heroes. Will is literally breaking new ground and encouraging others to replicate his model. You can't calculate how strong a contribution that is."

Will Allen's work is now being widely recognized. In November 2008, he was the recipient of the MacArthur Foundation Fellowship award—a \$500,000 no-strings grant. In January he was consulted by Barack Obama's transition team and invited to participate in a conference call with Obama advisers gathering food policy information for the new administration's Department of

the students themselves and cooked in the schools' kitchens.

"One has to admit that you can find Alice Waters at just about every turn of the path on the journey to widely produced healthy, sustainable food," Taylor remarked. "She has been a very successful leader in harnessing the various energies and political power and money needed to run a pilot program like Edible Schoolyard. In the nineties, when it began, there was really nothing like this going on and nobody could figure out what it was going to be. She managed to pull together the very disparate community bodies—public and private corporations alike—to make the Edible Schoolyard project work.



Food Fight is also now available on DVD at www.foodfightthedoc.com.



SEER Centre

Scotland's Remineralized Oasis

If you were to choose a place to plant your dream vegetable garden, it would probably not be in the foothills of the Grampian Mountains in Strathardle, Perthshire, Scotland. The upland site is infertile, acidic

and exposed to severe weather. Around 85 percent of Scotland is classified by the European Union as a “less-favoured area” for farming, and this region, plagued by lifeless, silty soil and boulders, falls right into that category.

Yet it was exactly here that Cameron and Moira Thomson settled and decided to become self-sufficient by creating their own garden, growing their very own fruits and vegetables. “Our dream was to grow and use our own food, and to live as much from the local environment as possible and as little from the shops as possible,” Moira Thomson told *Organic Connections*. “So we

dedicated our lives to that—but it was hard work with such poor soils.”

In 1984, the couple happened to be listening to the radio one day and heard the review of a book entitled *The Survival of Civilization* by John Hamaker and Donald Weaver. The book describes the function of ice ages as that of glaciers crushing rock, releasing nourishing minerals into the earth, and the fact that, at present, minerals are nearly gone from the soil. Armed with this new information about soils, the Thomsons had the answers they had been seeking.

“We read this book and we thought, *This is it; now we'll be able to grow the proper*



crops that will sustain us,” said Thomson. “It just made such sense to us it seemed right. So we started to use quarry dusts in our gardens and have never looked back.”

and trace elements that are missing in most of today’s soils.”

The beneficial effects of glaciers are replicated when rock dust is used. Sprinkled

the atmosphere, locking it into soils and into mineral-rich plants. “In addition to growing wonderful food to feed the world, you can also take carbon out of

NOT ONLY DOES IT PUT MINERALS BACK IN THE SOIL, IT CONSEQUENTLY GROWS GIANT VEGETABLES—GIANT LOVELY VEGETABLES THAT ARE FULL OF MINERALS AND TRACE ELEMENTS THAT ARE MISSING IN MOST OF TODAY’S SOILS.

The dust Thomson is referring to is obtained from the nearby Collace Quarry, operated by Tayside Contracts. They suddenly saw their gardens come alive—quite literally. “We’re totally hooked. It definitely works,” Thomson remarked. “Not only does it put minerals back in the soil, it consequently grows giant vegetables—giant lovely vegetables that are full of minerals

on top of the land, rock dust is digested by earthworms and thereby combined with organic matter containing nitrogen, carbon, minerals and thousands of microorganisms, ultimately becoming organic mineral-rich plant food. The process is known as remineralization.

Remineralization also causes absorption of a higher amount of carbon from

the atmosphere and help stabilize climate change,” Thomson said.

The Thomsons are certainly not alone in their discoveries. Some of the world’s top chefs, including Alice Waters and Dan Barber, have discovered in their search for the ultimate in tasty ingredients the enormous benefits of remineralized farming. Waters’ Chez Panisse and Barber’s Blue

Hill restaurants each feature remineralized produce.

As pointed out by Moira Thomson, there is the issue of nutrition as well. Dr. Arden Andersen, both a soil consultant and a medical doctor, has found that the nutrient content of foods today compared to half a century ago ranges from 15 to 75 percent less—due to depletion of nutrients in the soil. Restoration of the soil nutrients brings back the full nutritional benefits to fruits and vegetables.

Telling the World

The Thomsons were so impressed with their results they decided to make it their life's mission to export their findings to the farmers who could really use the information. After 13 years of pioneering work, they established the SEER Centre in 1997, a charitable organization committed to regeneration of soils to benefit the grower and the environment. SEER is an acronym for Sustainable Ecological Earth Regeneration. Armed with two shovels and a wheelbarrow, along with the rock dust and Dundee Council's award-winning locally made compost, they had their magic formula for soil creation. Beginning with 220 tons of these resources, they created two deep terraces of "Rocksoil" in which to grow their vegetables, and thus began the building out of the remarkable showplace



that the Centre would become.

By July 1997, the Thomsons' five children were biting into the first of the Centre's remineralized crops, and by 2000 the young remineralized trees were beginning

to grow profusely, providing shelter and wildlife habitats around the perimeter.

And the word did spread. First it was local media, then national media, then international media. The esteemed BBC aired television news items and specials focusing on the SEER Centre and the work of Cameron and Moira Thomson.

"It was a publicity campaign from the start, trying to attract attention to what we were doing," Moira Thomson related. "It started locally, and eventually it widened out and became more national, and we've had quite a bit of international interest too. A leading Swedish daily newspaper came over in 2006 and did a big spread—a cover story. This was after they had learned of the release of a book called *We Want Real Food* by Graham Harvey, in which he addresses the decline of minerals in modern foods. We've since gone to Sweden to launch our



The Results

A good measure of the results of remineralization at the SEER Centre comes in the

SO ON HALF OF A SOIL TERRACE WE WENT WITH NO ROCK

DUST AND ON THE OTHER HALF WE PUT ROCK DUST. WE

HAD BIGGER PLANTS AND BIGGER CROPS ON

THE ROCK-DUSTED SIDE, BIGGER POTATOES. WE RECKON WE

QUADRUPLED THE YIELD IN COMPARISON WITH THE

ORIGINAL SOIL, BECAUSE NOT ONLY DID WE HAVE BIGGER

POTATOES BUT WE HAD MORE OF THEM.

'Rockdust' product and organized a supplier over there. Swedish TV News has also featured our achievements."

Today the SEER Centre is open at different stages of the growing season, offering tours, courses and working holidays. Cameron and Moira will even travel to give talks and demonstrations of their discoveries. The SEER Centre Trust owns a trading subsidiary, Rockdust Limited, which sells their very own brand of minerals, called Rockdust, all over the UK and beyond. Sales information links can be accessed directly from the Centre website. They make and sell two different rock-dust/compost mixes as well: "Rocksoil"—their growing medium, which is in the SEER Centre terraces—and "Rockmix," the top dressing used at SEER Centre, an organic chemical-free fertilizer. Proceeds all go to support the Centre and its activities.

example Moira Thomson gives of their growing of potatoes.

"We have also done trials here at SEER Centre with soil, simply because we want our visitors to see the remineralized, rich compost soils alongside the poor soil that is naturally here," Thomson said. "You can grow potatoes in the native soil, but they're not high yielding.

"So on half of a soil terrace we went with no rock dust and on the other half we put rock dust. We had bigger plants and bigger crops on the rock-dusted side, bigger potatoes. We reckon we quadrupled the yield in comparison with the original soil, because not only did we have bigger potatoes but we had more of them."

The Thomsons have found a successful formula in their Rocksoil blend. Compost is mixed with rock dust in specific quantities and it lasts for years. For the first 12 years

they simply planted into the Rocksoil mixture and added no more rock dust, taking bumper crops year after year. Even though it didn't seem to need it, they've recently added more rock dust, just because they recommend it be added every 5 to 10 years.

In another experiment, the Thomsons discovered the potency of the rock dust by itself, even without compost-enriched soil. Within a greenhouse, they divided up two areas separated by a cement and brick path, with a deep rubble infill to prohibit the passage of worms between the trial areas. One side contained compost and rock dust, while the other contained poor soil and rock dust. Both sides grew equally giant tomatoes!

Into the Future

The SEER Centre is now up to 11 thriving terraces and a large bed where they grow a full range of produce as well as bushes, hedges and fruit trees. "We grow as many different things as possible to make a whole biodiverse ecosystem," Thomson explained, "and we try to show as many different plants as possible so different kinds of growers can see how their particular specialty would grow with rock dust."

The success of their venture can be seen simply by its contrast with the surrounding landscape. "It's very much an 'oasis in the glen,' as we call it," said Thomson. "It's lush growth surrounded by hedges, which we've created since we came here. The rest of the landscape is very barren and bleak—Scottish hillsides with lots of sheep on them."

The SEER Centre is connected with Remineralize the Earth (RTE), an organization that helps facilitate projects such as SEER Centre the world over. "Remineralize the Earth has been closely aligned with the Thomsons since the 1980s," said Joanna Campe, RTE's executive director. "Cameron and Moira are pioneers of turning barren lands into incredibly fertile soils with the addition of rock dust; and with a minimum of garden maintenance they are demonstrating the potential of remineralization to SEER Centre visitors on a daily basis as well as through the enthusiastic media coverage they receive from the BBC and others. Seeing these dramatic results from the Thomsons and various growers elsewhere has sustained my mission for the last 25 years to remineralize and regenerate soils everywhere."



With the help of volunteers and contributions from around the planet, the SEER Centre continues its remarkable work. To find out more, and to learn how you can help, visit the SEER Centre website at www.seercentre.org.uk.



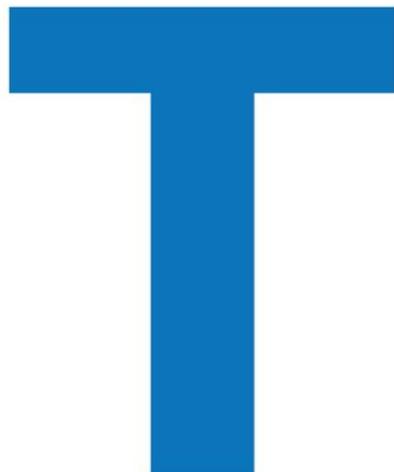
CAMERON AND MOIRA ARE PIONEERS OF TURNING BARREN LANDS INTO INCREDIBLY FERTILE SOILS WITH THE ADDITION OF ROCK DUST; AND WITH A MINIMUM OF GARDEN MAINTENANCE THEY ARE DEMONSTRATING THE POTENTIAL OF REMINERALIZATION TO SEER CENTRE VISITORS ON A DAILY BASIS AS WELL AS THROUGH THE ENTHUSIASTIC MEDIA COVERAGE THEY RECEIVE FROM THE BBC AND OTHERS.



For more information on Remineralize the Earth and its many projects, visit www.remineralize.org.

Healthcare

The High Cost of the American Diet



The headlines have lately been filled with news of the Obama administration's proposed healthcare plan. Strongly worded opinions, both pro and con, are being volleyed from each side of the political fence. But one aspect of healthcare not being adequately addressed in the plan—as well as not mentioned in most of the pro or con arguments—is the basic American diet. How healthy can a person be when consuming chemical-laden and nutrient-deficient food with an emphasis on carbohydrates, bad fat, salt and sugar? How many healthcare billions are being spent to address health issues that have their roots in poor diet? It's a hard number to come by, but according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, three-quarters of healthcare spending goes to treat “preventable chronic diseases.” Treatment for obesity alone runs a tab of \$147 billion, and that doesn't figure in diabetes (\$116 billion) or cardiovascular disease.

It's an issue that has been increasingly attracting attention from many quarters. One very important sector that has begun to vocalize their concerns is the medical community.

While many physicians may have only recently jumped on the sustainable-food bandwagon, Dr. Preston Maring, Associate Physician-in-Chief for the Kaiser Permanente East Bay Medical Center in Oakland, California, has been patiently working throughout the last seven years to help bring a healthy diet to society at large.

Dr. Maring fully understands the impact of non-nutritious food on the cost of healthcare. “I think if you look at the healthcare

of the nation, it is sort of a pyramid,” Dr. Maring told *Organic Connections*. “At the base of the pyramid you have primary care, and at the top of the pyramid you've got the complicated care. Our healthcare system struggles to find enough money to pay for all of the care throughout that pyramid, but there doesn't seem to be enough money to cover it all. I believe that if good food were solidly under the base of the pyramid as a foundation, and if our people were able to eat healthier food throughout their lives, there would be enough money to pay for healthcare, because we would reduce the disease burden of those at the base of the pyramid who otherwise wouldn't get as sick and require as much complicated care at the top.”

For food quality to be attracting attention from the medical community, something must be very wrong—and it is. As the quality of our diets has deteriorated over the last 50 years, certain diseases have become rampant. “Directly related to food, you hear a lot of talk about obesity-related problems in terms of diabetes, coronary artery disease and high blood pressure, and those happen in both men and women,” Dr. Maring said. “Those are the general categories of ailments; there are also many specific diet-related disorders.”

“Conventional” Food

The health risks of our food system are not simply the result of lower nutritional values. We also have many chemical compounds used in food production today that have become part of our bodily environment.

Dr. David Wallinga, Food and Health Program Director of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, sat down recently with *Organic Connections* to discuss this.

“Given that we've created a society with around 80,000 industrial chemicals, there's a lot to talk about with regard to food-borne pollutants,” Wallinga said. “Many of those chemicals end up in the food chain one way or another, through drinking water or because they are intentionally put into food packaging or because they are pollutants

that accumulate up the food chain. Being at the top of the food chain, we often get the most exposure to these pollutants.”

Dr. Wallinga is a medical doctor who has, for the last nine years, been involved in examining the health impact of consumed food and how it is grown and produced.

“Most of the ‘conventional’ produce that we eat now is contaminated with residues of at least one and often many different



Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

pesticides,” he continued. “There are also many issues with meat and poultry. We did a study years ago showing that perhaps as much as 70 percent of the chickens grown in this country are routinely given a form of arsenic in their feed—not because they need it but just because it makes them grow faster. That's a practice that was never approved as safe in Europe.

“Antibiotics are used heavily in the raising of farm animals. Anytime bacteria are exposed to antibiotics, it tends to make them more resistant to these drugs, which is true whether the antibiotics are used in hospitals, in communities or on farms. The problem is that the bacteria don't really respect the boundaries between those places, so they travel from farms to people to hospitals. And so the scientific consensus now is that with the overuse and misuse of antibiotics in the farm setting, we're helping to create drug-resistant superbugs that affect humans.”

Do We Need More Technology?

“There seems to be a big focus on how we need more technology to help fix some of the problems in agriculture, and I don't think that's true,” Rebecca Spector, West Coast Director of the Center for Food Safety, told *Organic Connections*. “We don't need genetically engineered crops. We don't need food irradiation to get rid of *E. coli*. We need to clean up our farms and clean



up the way our food is processed to get rid of *E. coli*. We want to fix the real problem; we don't want to look to band-aid solutions, such as irradiation, to try and fix some of the problems in our food system."



CENTER FOR FOOD SAFETY

The Center for Food Safety (CFS) is a national non-profit environmental organization with a goal to ensure that the US has a healthy and safe food supply.

A Better Food Future

With all that has gone on with our food system in the last 50 years, all three of these experts believe there is indeed a bright future ahead and see numerous ways to bring it about.

"I definitely think one of the key parts of the solution is that we need to focus on education," Rebecca Spector remarked. "We need to help people make the distinction between real food and processed food so that they understand what actually makes healthy food, and to show them how to prepare real meals and incorporate cooking and family mealtimes back into their busy lives."

CFS has a program through which they are not only educating people on the choice of sustainable food but also increasing their awareness of food processes and what can be done about the harmful ones. "We have a membership of about 85,000, and we send them regular information on new food technologies that are being proposed, opportunities to comment on food legislation, and opportunities to write to both federal and state agencies," said Spector. "We're really trying to empower people to express their concern about these issues."

Dr. David Wallinga sees a good amount of positive change occurring in agricultural methods. "The one thing that you can't really get away from is that agriculture is inherently ecological. To pretend that in the long term you can grow food without really thinking about its impact on soil erosion or on the quality of ground water and its pollution with heavy metals is just folly. I think that the people in public health and medicine and other health sciences are waking up to this fact. For example, the American Medical Association recently passed a new policy concerning sustainable food. It's pretty good. It talks about finding ways to produce food

without squandering antibiotics, as well as ways that contribute less to climate change.

"They're not the only organization; both the American Dietetic Association and the American Public Health Association have something very similar."

With a view much like Rebecca Spector's, Dr. Preston Maring sees the problem as primarily an educational one. He first considered it a problem of getting out nutritional, sustainably grown food so that people would know it was there—a problem he began solving by opening a farmers' market right next to the very medical center where he worked. The program has become an integral part of Kaiser Permanente's operation, and there are now 37 farmers' markets at Kaiser locations around the country. The food is purchased by staff, visitors and patients and taken back to neighborhoods and kitchens throughout their communities.

Dr. Maring also believes in simply teaching people to cook. "I think the first priority is to

at a local family restaurant," Dr. Maring said.

It even comes down to competing with fast food. Not long ago, Dr. Maring was talking to a group of 30 or so high school students at his local farmers' market and asked them how much they spent, for example, on a bag of potato chips. One student was able to answer immediately: \$1.29. Based on the actual potato content of the chips, Dr. Maring calculated the cost of potatoes for the bag to be about \$16 a pound, and he took the students over to one of the stands where he found red potatoes for \$1.50 per pound. He then advised the students on how to roast potatoes. Pointing out the \$10 to \$12 price for a pizza, he next talked them through how to make a pizza for half that cost—with wholesome ingredients.

Dr. Maring concluded with a story that truly brought home the point. Recently he spent the day at the Kaiser Permanente Center in Watts, Los Angeles—one of the most economically depressed neighborhoods in the nation. "While I was there, a little boy

WE WANT TO FIX THE REAL PROBLEM; WE DON'T WANT TO LOOK TO BAND-AID SOLUTIONS, SUCH AS IRRADIATION, TO TRY AND FIX SOME OF THE PROBLEMS IN OUR FOOD SYSTEM.

just help and encourage people to get started cooking fresh foods, even if they're grown using conventional agriculture," he said. "You then encourage people to eat sustainably grown local produce. I'm getting more and more convinced, as time goes by and I talk to people in various groups, that probably the best thing we could do for public health is to teach people how to sharpen a chef's knife and how to use it, and have a couple of cutting boards and salad spinners. That could transform the whole experience for people of preparing good food at home."

In conducting this education, Dr. Maring takes time to demonstrate the economy of making your own meals—such things as replacing a three- or four-dollar jar of salad dressing with 25 cents' worth of garlic, red wine vinegar, olive oil, Dijon mustard and chopped parsley; the remainder of the money can then be spent on some good fresh fruit or fresh vegetables. "A little bit of simple instruction about how to mince garlic, how to dice onions, how to pan-sauté some foods, and it would be easy to show people how to put together a meal for 4 to 15 bucks instead of spending 30 or 40 or 50 out

came up to me and asked, 'Sir, what's healthier, white or green asparagus?' I said, 'You know, I think they are both really healthy, and it's just important every day to eat multiple different colors.' Then I said, 'Listen, I'm going to do a cooking demo; would you help me?' He said, 'Sure.' This boy was probably 10 and had never used a chef's knife before. I taught him how to mince garlic and how to mince a shallot, how to make a vinaigrette and how to chop some parsley. He made a red wine vinaigrette and put it on a little tiny salad he'd prepared and served it to the various people coming to the market. He was thrilled, and at the end he said, 'Thank you very much. You've opened a new door for me. It's a day I'll never forget.'

In the end, it's our healthcare system and our country, and while a growing number of us are shopping for fresh, local and organic food, the majority of Americans who end up in our healthcare system are not. Thus there is always a need for constant outreach and education.

For more about Dr. Maring and his recipes, visit www.organicconnectmag.com and access Connections: Health: Dr. Maring.

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