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Craig Sams

Craig Sams is a pioneer in the UK organic and wholefood sector

The dangers of persistent pesticides

From the BBC Archive on Facebook (check it out) I have just released a video from 1971 where I show a *Nationwide* reporter the shelves of Cecil's Grain Shop with never-before-seen 'exotic' products like brown rice and miso and seaweed. The reporter asked me: "What do people find wrong with foods that they buy in the supermarket?" My response was: "People are just beginning to become aware, for example, of the effects of things like DDT". That was 46 years ago. DDT was banned and replaced by Roundup – the world's most widely used herbicide – has been identified by the World Health Organization as a 'probable carcinogen'. Monsanto is fighting back and referring to research from its own laboratories (or funded by them) that proves that Roundup is perfectly safe. If only I could have worked my own home – I'd be Dr Sams at Oxon.

"If I was running the NHS then the first thing I would do would be to ban the causes of disease and top of that list would be poisons"

- Tiny residues are not safe – pesticides act like hormones, particularly oestrogen – the feminizing hormone. But the body has trouble wiping them off our receptors, which it can do with natural hormones. So a little goes a long way.
- They are not 'degradable' – the breakdown products of pesticides can be 100 times more toxic than the original chemical.
- You can't trust the regulators – they have an abysmal record of caring about public health
- They're not 'feeding the world' – farming with pesticides leads to soil degradation and the loss of 39 football fields of farmland every minute. We can't afford to waste more land just for marginally cheaper food.

In 1971, we thought that organic food should be DDT-free. Nothing has changed. It is incredible to me that people still complain that a loaf of organic bread costs a few pennies more than a loaf of non-organic bread.

Ban the causes

If I was running the NHS, then the first thing I would do would be to ban the causes of disease, and top of that list would be poisons. If they can kill an insect, how on earth can we kid ourselves that they won't kill larger life forms such as *homo sapiens*?

I live in coastal East Sussex. We have seen an explosion of biodiversity recently. The obvious indicator is the predators at the top of the food chain: there are kites and buzzards all over the place, and there are more aquatic birds in the marshes than ever recorded. Why? Because we've stopped killing nature. We're lucky that the farmland around here is pretty challenging – small fields, marshy, hilly terrain. That means that farmers go for environmental grants and stop spraying. The result: an abundance of biodiversity everywhere. If we can make life healthier for the egrets, buzzards and water voles, shouldn't we do it for humans too? Is there anything more flipping obvious than that?

All pesticides should be phased out. If cigarette packs have scary warnings about lung disease, why shouldn't food that is grown with pesticides carry warnings about liver disease, kidney disease and cancer?

Tricky business

Investing in wheat is a tricky business. The grains ripen unevenly and some of them aren't even fully mature by harvest time. So farmers nowadays spray Roundup herbicide on the crop – this kills the wheat in a few days. The wheat plants, knowing they are dying, accelerate the ripening process, pumping all their energy into making the next generation of wheat before they die. This extra percentage of yield warrants the spraying of the nation's future bread and biscuit supply with a probable carcinogen. The sad thing is, the farmers are more likely to end up with Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma than their customers.

Recently I met with Andre Leu, author of *The Myth of Safe Pesticides*. He is also president of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), a position from which he is stepping down in October to take a lead role at Regeneration International. Leu's book nails pesticides in the following possible way: "Pesticides are not rigorously tested – 88,000 new chemical compounds have been introduced since 1945, and only a couple hundred have been tested. Plus none are tested in combination with each other, ie the cocktail effect'.

European Organic Congress to launch roadmap



THE 11th European Organic Congress, organized by IFOAM EU, will look at how stakeholders and policymakers can work together to reach the European Organic Vision 2030, and launch a roadmap to make it happen.

Over the last two years, IFOAM EU has worked with the organic movement and like-minded groups to devise strategies for developing organics in Europe.

The Congress will look at different initiatives in place throughout Europe that demonstrate how policymakers and stakeholders already work together to inspire others.

Part of this conversation will also look at how such initiatives can flourish in the context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the EU Climate Commitments, which are expected to strongly influence the EU's agri-food policy agenda in the coming years – from the Common Agricultural Policy to the development of food policies at national and regional level.

The Congress has a theme of 'Transforming food & farming – making it happen' and will take place on 5-7 September 2017 in Tallinn, Estonia. Visit: <http://organic-congress-ifoameu.org>

Aldi launches organic wines

DISCOUNT supermarket Aldi has launched a range of what it is calling 'green' wines, made up of four organic, two carbon-neutral, and two 'no added sulphur' wines. The organic offer includes a prosecco, a red and two still whites, all priced under £7.99.

Aldi is anticipating that the wines 'will appeal to the wholefoods generation – millennial shoppers who are increasingly concerned with the environmental impact of the produce that they are buying and consuming'.

"We know that our shoppers are increasingly interested in the provenance of their food and drink. With this in mind, our wine buying team has worked alongside our world-class suppliers to curate a collection of wines which answer our shoppers various 'green' demands," says Tony Baines, Aldi's joint MD of corporate buying. "We're delighted to prove



that high quality, eco-friendly products needn't be a luxury, accompanied by a high price tag."

Sales of organic beers, wines and spirits rose by 14.3% last year to nearly £6 million, according to the Soil Association. Speaking to *The Guardian*, Finn Cottle of Soil Association Certification said: "Organic wines are seeing something of a renaissance ... organic still wine – red, white and rosé – is a runaway success story. English organic wine-makers are seeing booming sales too."

