

## **UN: Pesticides won't feed the world**

A new report by two United Nations human rights experts rejects the notion that pesticides are necessary to feed the world. Instead, they say, excessive use of pesticides has "catastrophic impacts on the environment, human health and society as a whole." These include an estimated 200,000 acute poisoning deaths each year, 99 percent of which occur in low-income countries; contamination of soil and water sources; loss of biodiversity and beneficial insect populations; and a range of chronic health problems including cancer, Alzheimer's and developmental disorders.

The authors criticize the pesticide industry's "systematic denial" of the hazards of toxic pesticides and say pesticides undermine "the rights to adequate food and health for present and future generations." They call for a global treaty to phase out the use of dangerous pesticides in farming and say "It's time to overturn the myth that pesticides are necessary to feed the world." ([Civil Eats](#))

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## **Organics protect kids' brains**

A new European Parliament report based on hundreds of studies finds organic food can help protect children from the brain-altering effects of some pesticides. The report found the results were clearest when it comes to minimizing exposure to pesticides and to antibiotics used in livestock production. Researchers also found that organically grown produce tends to contain less of the toxic metal cadmium, and that while there's evidence of greater nutrient content in some organic food — particularly milk and meat — as health benefits, these differences appear to be less significant than organic food's lack of hazardous chemicals. (*Civil Eats*)

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## **Monsanto ghostwrote Roundup paper?**

Employees of Monsanto ghostwrote scientific reports that U.S. regulators relied on to determine that glyphosate, the key ingredient in the Roundup weedkiller, does not cause cancer, farmers and others suing the company claimed in court filings. The documents are part of a mass litigation in federal court in San Francisco claiming Monsanto failed to warn that exposure to Roundup could cause non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, a type of cancer. Plaintiffs claim that Monsanto's toxicology manager ghostwrote parts of a scientific report in 2013 that was published under the names of several academic scientists, and his boss ghostwrote parts of another in 2000. (*Reuters*)

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## **EPA funding slashed for Puget Sound?**

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) funding for restoring Puget Sound would be almost wiped out under President Donald Trump's proposed agency budget, according to a leaked memorandum documenting the cuts obtained by the National Association of Clean Air Agencies. Under the proposal, EPA funding would be slashed by 93 percent, dropping from nearly \$28 million in the current fiscal year to \$2 million. The money, in years past, has been used to help finance a wide range of projects to help restore the Sound, such as purchasing farmland to convert to wetlands, restoring floodplains and removing fish passage blockage. (*The Seattle Times*)

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## **Ag pick dogged by ethics concerns**

Sonny Perdue, who is awaiting confirmation to be the next Secretary of Agriculture, was a target of frequent criticism that he was failing to honor his own ethics pledge during his eight years as governor of Georgia. He signed an executive order barring state employees from taking any gifts worth more than \$25 but ended up collecting \$25,000 worth of gifts himself, and he continued to own or help run his four farming-related family companies while serving as governor. Other ethics concerns were about the role of Perdue's personal lawyer — also a state legislator — in pushing a bill through the legislature that included a special provision that gave Perdue \$100,000 in tax breaks, and about Perdue's leveraging of his position to gain access to a Savannah port terminal so he could start an export business. (*The New York Times/Organic Consumers Association*)

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### **Fukushima radiation update**

Radiation from the Fukushima nuclear reactor disaster in Japan has reached North American shores, but scientists say the levels of radiation are so low they pose no risk to public health. Late last year, researchers announced that Cesium-134 was discovered in waters off the coast of Oregon and in one sockeye salmon in a British Columbia lake. Researchers from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, who have been studying the Fukushima disaster's effect on seawater, say the levels detected are far too small to make anyone sick: they're 1,000 times less than what a person would be exposed to during a routine dental x-ray. (*Earthfix*)

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### **New synthetic biology database**

The February *Sound Consumer* cover story, [GMOs 2.0](#), explained new genetic engineering techniques that redesign the genetic makeup of living organisms through constructing, adding, deleting, silencing or completely rewriting DNA and other genetic elements. Now there's a [database](#) that allows us to search if a specific ingredient, compound or product is produced using synthetic biology. (*Friends of the Earth*)

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### **Certain foods mitigate disease**

About half of all U.S. deaths from heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes are linked to poor diets, according to a new study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. And eating more — or less — of just 10 types of food can help raise or lower the risk of death from these causes, researchers from Tufts University found. Eating too much salt, red and processed meats, and sugary drinks contribute the most to risk, while there's a significant risk in eating too little of certain healthy foods: nuts and seeds, seafood, whole grains and fruits and vegetables. (*NPR's The Salt*)

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### **Improving fisheries could generate billions**

Fishing less, and better, could generate an additional \$83 billion each year for fisheries, creating a much-needed revenue stream in developing countries and improving global food security, according to a new World Bank Group report. The "Sunken Billions Revisited" study shows that reducing the global fishing effort would allow fish stocks to recover from overexploitation and lead to increases in the weight, value and price of fish caught, boosting the profitability of the fisheries sector from an

estimated \$3 billion a year to \$86 billion. With better fisheries management, the total mass of fish would nearly triple and yearly global catch would increase 13 percent. (*The World Bank*)