

Advancing a Green New Deal

Why are we calling for urgent action to protect public health and the environment? Is a “green new deal” the vehicle we need to meet the urgent challenges in front of us, for young people and future generations? We face urgent health and environmental challenges and bold action is required. It is foundational that we as a society link the critical need to address environmental crises with programs that stimulate and support economic progress. We know that in the long-term we will only achieve economic security and sustainability with clear environmental standards. Green means protective of the environment, addressing issues critical to sustainability—clean air and water, managing carbon through regenerative soil management, and eliminating fossil fuel-dependent fertilizers and pesticides. It also means a healthy food supply that protects consumers and those who work on farms.

From an economic perspective, *U.S. Organic Hotspots and Their Benefit to Local Economies* (2016), by Penn State agricultural economist Edward Jaenicke, PhD, finds that organic hotspots—counties with high levels of organic agricultural activity whose neighboring counties also have high organic activity—boost median household incomes by an average of \$2,000 and reduce poverty levels by an average of 1.3 percent. The research adds to scientific findings that organic can and must feed the nation and the world while dramatically reducing secondary health and environmental costs.

From an environmental perspective, our concerns related to chemical-intensive land and building management practices go to the production, use, and disposal of fossil-fuel based toxic pesticides and fertilizers, not simply the residues on finished food products. As a society, we must choose to support production practices that protect and enhance ecosystems essential to human survival—addressing biodiversity and global climate change.

Experience Demands Action

Over nearly four decades, Beyond Pesticides has been raising scientific concerns about the public health effects of pesticides and seeking to eliminate their use by shifting to organic, environmentally compatible practices. We have successfully worked to ban some of the most toxic pesticides: starting with remaining DDT uses, chlordane and other organochlorine pesticides in the DDT family, 2,4,5-T and phenoxy herbicides, chlorpyrifos (residential uses) and other organophosphates, and carbofuran and other carbamates. They have been replaced by ongoing dependency on other highly toxic pesticides: synthetic pyrethroids, glyphosate, and neonicotinoids, which we now seek to remove from the market. Because of this pattern, Beyond Pesticides’ success in developing and advancing organic standards as a transformational shift to a paradigm that rejects toxic chemicals has taken on more and more urgency and must be central to a Green New Deal.

Documenting the Need for Transformation

Our comprehensive analysis, *Thinking Holistically When Making Land Management Decisions* (2018), documents the failure of the current laws and regulatory review to consider complex ecological impacts of pesticides. These effects are not captured in current ecological risk assessments, even though interactions among pesticides and their cumulative impacts are devastating to ecological balance and health. In this issue’s special report, we document the irrefutable link of pesticide use to adverse effects that occur in ways not evaluated by regulators, such as the transgenerational effects that show adverse impacts over multiple generations. The report, *Good Health Harmed by a Cascade of Complex Pesticide Effects*, discusses elevated vulnerabilities to human diseases that are not evaluated under current regulatory reviews. Both these pieces serve as the underlying justification for embracing a Green New Deal that gives highest national priority to an integrated approach under the banner of a sustainable future.

Green as Intricately Linked to Organic

For the most part, consumer demand, organic farmers, and market forces have gotten the organic sector to where it is. While compliance with federal organic standards are only mandated for those who choose to certify their practices and label their food products as USDA Organic in commerce, the adverse impacts of chemical-intensive conventional agriculture and landscape management, along with all the serious deficiencies in the regulatory process, demand federal policy to effect an expedited transition away from toxic pesticide use. Slow chemical-by-chemical change must be replaced by a systems change that incorporates soil management and other cultural practices that support biological systems, natural cycling of nutrients, soil and aquatic food webs, and resiliency.

As we work out the details of the Green New Deal proposal, we will advance the idea that a green future must incorporate organic standards, principles, and values, if the law is to be successful in supporting life in all its complexities. Beyond Pesticides supports organic agriculture as effecting good land stewardship and working to strengthen organic farming systems with its nurturing of biodiversity and holistic, regenerative management practices.

Organic practices maintain and enhance ecological balance that makes chemical fertilizers and synthetic pesticides unnecessary. These practices are integral to a green future and a Green New Deal. We look forward to working with you and your elected members of Congress to make this a reality!

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