

THE POTATO GROWER AND THE PUBLIC'S CONCERN  
OVER PESTICIDE ISSUES

by  
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My talk is about agricultural chemicals, why some people want them taken away from us and, hopefully, what we can do about it.

Let's begin at the beginning. We live in a beautiful . . . majestic world . . . filled with great wonders . . . and mysteries of nature. Just what mysteries have we been able to solve since man has lived on this planet?

For one thing, we've learned how to grow food. Some people think of the agricultural revolution as the period from the sickle and walking plow to tractors and combines. The fact is. . . the agricultural revolution is as dynamic today as it has ever been. In 1974, just 15 years ago, the average U.S. farm family fed 47 people. Last year, this farm family fed 80 people.

Agriculture is America's largest industry . . . assets \$1 trillion, equal to about 90 percent of the total assets of all manufacturing corporations in the United States. In the steel industry alone, more than 40,000 jobs can be attributed directly to agriculture. This is 6.5 million tons of steel (\$14 billion worth for farm machinery alone).

Our potato industry is one of agriculture's great success stories.

To many of us, agriculture is a way of life. To others, agriculture is a job. Agriculture is the nation's largest employer . . . 15 million people.

We're in a high volume business. . . where speed is efficiency . . . and without the tools . . . the job can't be done. Profit requires volume, and there wouldn't be a food industry or modern agriculture without profit. It's this volume . . . with quality . . . that puts food on the table.

This youngster (slide - little boy), by the way, is asking for a sample of Mrs. Olson's Potato Lefse from Minnesota . . . perhaps one of the greatest foods God ever made possible.

We in America should be tremendously proud of the way we've learned to live with nature . . . the way we have behaved on the planet. But the New York Times disagrees. So does CBS, NBC, ABC, PBS, The Washington Post, Time Magazine . . . in fact, so do most all the major news corporations and hundreds of other publications and media outlets.

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How did Newsweek Magazine, for example, mark man's contributions on the planet at this turn of the decade?

This is Newsweek's summary on the environment, January 1990, Headline: "We Fouled Our Nest."

Who are the people who run these news corporations . . . what do they want?

Agriculture and agricultural chemicals are clearly a major target of radical environmental groups in the 90s. And they'll get plenty of support from the media.

Agriculture employs 15 million people in all areas. But did you know, while we're all at work in the morning, "Good Morning, America" is reaching up to 7 million people . . . one program!

On the newsstands, in homes right now, is Woman's Day Magazine, Feb. 6, 1990. Circulation: 7 million. I quote:

While natural disasters have been getting a lot of press recently - the fury of Hurricane Hugo and the California earthquake were two of last year's biggest stories - man-made disasters also deserve mentioning. More and more attention, for example, is being given to the use of questionable and unsafe pesticides on the food we eat. When we ran an article in our April 18, 1989, issue titled "Are Pesticides Poisoning Our Children?", we included a reader poll. As we promised, we will be passing along the results of our poll to leaders in Congress and the Bush Administration.

Results of the poll were showing 97 percent supporting stricter limits on pesticides.

The numbers the media reaches for are why Dan Rather, the man on the screen, is paid \$3.6 million a year. It's not for the news, believe me! It's for the numbers.

Just who are these numbers people, the media managers? In their revealing new book, "The Media Elite," S. Robert Lichter, Stanley Rothman and Linda S. Lichter use data from survey interviews with 238 journalists from CBS, NBC, ABC, PBS, The New York Times, Washington Post, the Wall Street Journal, Time Magazine, Newsweek, and U.S. News and World Report. You're looking at one set of survey results.

Table 1 shows attitudes and voting records of the media elite.

In Table 2, Lichter has compared media views with views of business people . . . and the respondents are asked to rate the sources of information they find reliable.

My car mechanic has the following slogan on his bulletin board . . . "An easily understood, workable falsehood is more useful than a complex, incomprehensible truth."

Keep it simple and many people will buy it . . . even if it's wrong . . . whether it's poisoning children with apples or the dangers of aerial spraying in Horse Heaven Hills.

Did you see the testimony in Olympia by the Tri-Cities woman who heads the campaign against aerial spraying? Here's what she told the Washington legislature:

"My little baby was in the first trimester when they sprayed our house. We think everything's okay, but we have to watch for 20 years. We need your help."

What's the help? To pass HB2593, an incredibly damaging bill for Washington agriculture.

Profit, to us in the potato business, is price and tonnage. To the media, it's numbers of people.

The Interstate 5 corridor, for example, is packing people in at an incredible rate. Thirteen Washington counties grew by 13 percent or more during the 1980s. One grew by 27 percent. These numbers mean three things: more customers for potato products, more urban influence in the legislature and more urban influence on the media.

Which set of numbers mean more to Dan Rather . . . hundredweight, or number of TV sets? Media executives aren't interested in voters or gross national product. They don't run for office. They're interested in the numbers of people who own TV sets. How many sets will turn to Dan Rather tonight in Moses Lake . . . how many in Seattle . . . which influence get the attention? Urban or rural? You guessed it.

The Associated Press said this weekend, and I quote . . . " the state of Washington's highways are turning into virtual parking lots at rush hour, schools are jammed to overflowing, cities and counties aren't keeping up with the demand for services, housing is scarce and expensive, jails and prisons are overcrowded, and state services are strained." Unquote.

Ask a 17 year old Tacoma resident what it's like to grow potatoes in Pasco. Ask him or her what problems a potato grower might have these days . . . what makes a grower happy when it's planting time, what makes him nervous when it's time to dig, what makes him worry sometimes late at night?

Our Tacoma 17 year old may not know what we're about . . . but here's a sobering thought. Next year, he or she is old enough to vote . . . and on some issue that may cost you your livelihood!

The bias against agricultural chemicals has an effect. Table 3 is a list of 30 possible causes of death. In a study done for Scientific American, three groups of people were asked to rank these as causes of death. In the actual insurance figures, for the study, pesticides and several other items contributed zero causes of death.

However, the three groups in the study perceived pesticides to be much more dangerous. Table 4 shows how the three groups ranked pesticides as a cause of death.

Agriculture's image is under attack every day. Let me discuss a brochure that was sent to mailboxes in our town addressed to "resident." It's for a program of the Church of Scientology.

Here's some of what it says. "What Blocks Mental Alertness? Recent research has found that the blocks to personal betterment may be coming from an unexpected quarter . . . our drug and chemical society."

"More than 3000 chemicals are deliberately added to foods one commonly finds in the supermarket."

"Thousands of tons of pesticides are directly applied to the environment every year."

Where, pray tell, is all this mis-information taking us . . . ?

Two sunny little girls smiling in a potato field are daughters of potato growers. And if this isn't health, goodness and the future of America, I don't know what is. If it isn't, God help us!

All of us owe these children and our children a commitment to the truth of our business. No one is going to tell the world the story of the miracle of modern agriculture unless we do it. No one is going to fight the enemies of agriculture unless we do it.

Yes, there are very encouraging new philosophies coming on. This morning we've talked about predator potential, cultural practices to minimize yield loss, resistance and wise pesticide selection.

But the canons pointed at agriculture already are in place. Our enemies do not want to wait on this battle for agricultural chemicals. And like U.S. Grant at Shilo Church, we are going to have to fight this battle on the field our enemy has selected . . . whether we like it or not.

Agriculture doesn't have the numbers the media is interested in. But we do produce America's food, and we're an industry with enough influence to make America listen.

Let's not take a defensive position. We're not in the nerve gas business. We're in the food business . . . highly efficient, intricate, scientifically based and regulated by government almost every step of the way.

Let's stick together. And let's tell our story relentlessly and courteously to all who will listen. The bias against agriculture (and a number of other industries also, I might add) by the media elite is a national scandal. And for the rest of the news media . . . all the way down to our local papers, radio and TV . . . the bias and unprofessionalism are, at best, a national tragedy.

Problems exist; however, the press represents a critical link between us and our customers. In the public relations business, newsmen are called gatekeepers. If you want to get your story through the gate, reporters and editors are important to you.

Newsman may get our story wrong . . . but if we're persistent, courteous, play the percentages . . . some of the truth will get through.

Above all, let's hold onto this attitude: that we all have the same goal — scientists, environmentalists, growers, media. The goal? "An abundant, affordable and wholesome food supply."

In the end, the truth will win the day . . . but the victory will come sooner if we get started now.

"Truth, crushed to earth, shall rise again;  
The eternal years of God are hers;  
But Error, wounded, writhes in pain,  
And dies among his worshippers."

Table 1. Media Elite Attitudes &amp; Voting Records.

	Agree
<i>Economics</i>	
Big corporations should be publicly owned	13%
People with more ability should earn more	86
Private enterprise is fair to workers	70
Less regulation of business is good for U.S.	63
Government should reduce income gap	68
Government should guarantee jobs	48
<i>Political Alienation</i>	
Structure of society causes alienation	49
Institutions need overhaul	28
All political systems are repressive	28
<i>Social-Cultural</i>	
Environmental problems are overstated	19
Strong affirmative action for blacks	80
Government should not regulate sex	97
Woman has right to decide on abortion	90
Homosexuality is wrong	25
Homosexuals shouldn't teach in public schools	15
Adultery is wrong	47
<i>Foreign Policy</i>	
U.S. exploits Third World, causes poverty	56
U.S. use of resources immoral	57
Goal of foreign policy is to protect U.S. businesses	50
CIA should sometimes undermine hostile governments	45

(Source: The Media Elite, S. Robert Lichter, Stanley Rothman and Linda S. Lichter. Used by permission.)

Table 2. Types of Source Cited as Reliable.

Whose News?		
	Media	Business
<i>Welfare Reform</i>		
Liberals	75%	17%
Federal Regulatory Agencies	51	25
Federal Officials	38	25
Conservatives	22	22
State and Local Agencies	16	30
<i>Consumer Protection</i>		
Ralph Nader/Nader Groups	63	33
Federal Regulatory Agencies	46	28
Consumers Union	44	30
Other Activist Groups	41	26
State and Local Agencies	36	40
Business Groups	22	49
<i>Pollution and Environment</i>		
Environmental Activists	69	25
Activist Federal Agencies	68	56
Business Groups	27	34
Liberal Activists and Officials	24	8
Other Federal Agencies	19	11
<i>Nuclear Energy</i>		
Anti-Nuclear	55	—
Technical Magazines	40	—
Federal Regulatory Agencies	39	—
Other Government	37	—
Pro-Nuclear	32	—
<i>Note: Excludes nonpartisan media sources and categories mentioned by fewer than 15 percent of all subjects.</i>		

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Table 3.

## CAUSE OF DEATH

Smoking, alcoholic beverages, motor vehicles, handguns, electric power, motorcycles, swimming, surgery, X rays, railroads, general aviation, large construction, bicycles, hunting, home appliances, firefighting, police work, contraceptives, commercial aviation, nuclear power, mountain climbing, power mowers, scholastic football, skiing, vaccinations, food coloring, food preservatives, pesticides, prescription antibiotics and spray cans.

Table 4.

HOW GROUPS RANKED PESTICIDES  
AS A CAUSE OF DEATH

Business and  
Professional  
Club Members ..... 15th

League of  
Women Voters ..... 9th

College Students ..... 4th