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The demonstrated superiority of biology over chemistry in agriculture offers the promise of a well-nourished future for human beings

April 24, 2011 - 04:36 PM, by: Jim Scott
Eliot Coleman *Grist* USA April 21, 2011

Eliot Coleman has over 30 years experience in all aspects of organic farming, including field vegetables, greenhouse vegetables, rotational grazing of cattle and sheep, and range poultry. Right, Coleman's Four Season Farm: Start with biodiversity and well-nourished soil, add some appropriate technology, then harvest lots of healthy food. Photo: Barbara Damrosch. Visit this page for its embedded links.



Organic farming is often falsely represented as being unscientific. However, despite the popular assumption that it sprang full born from the delusions of 60s hippies, it has a more extensive, and scientifically respectable, provenance. If you look back at the first flush of notoriety in the 1940s, the names most often mentioned, Sir Albert Howard and J. I. Rodale, rather than being the initiators, were actually just popularizers of a groundswell of ideas that had begun to develop some 50 years earlier in the 1890s.

A growing coterie of farmers, landlords, scientists, and rural philosophers in both England and Germany had begun questioning the wisdom of the chemically based agriculture that had grown so prominent from its tiny beginning in the 1840s. Advances in biological sciences during the late 19th century, such as those that explained the workings of nitrogen fixation, mycorrhizal association, and soil microbial life supported their case. Those new sciences set the stage for a deeper understanding of natural processes, and offered inspiration as to how a modern biologically based agriculture might be formulated.

These new agriculturists were convinced that the thinking behind industrial agriculture was based upon the mistaken premise that nature is inadequate and needs to be replaced with human systems. They contended that by virtue of that mistake, industrial agriculture has to continually devise new crutches to solve the problems it creates (increasing the quantities of chemicals, stronger pesticides, fungicides, miticides, nematicides, soil sterilization, etc.) It wouldn't be the first time in the history of science that a theory based on a false premise appeared to be momentarily valid. Temporary functioning is not proof of concept. ...

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Isaac Harkness *Natural News* USA April 22, 2011

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People nowadays are feeling like their lives are spinning out of control. They worry about being able to provide the necessities for their families as food and fuel prices soar and out of control inflation looms on the horizon. Many are almost totally disconnected from nature and that which sustains them. There is a rapidly growing and revolutionary worldwide movement of citizens taking steps that lead them out of dependence on the system and to a life of healthy re-connection and nourishment. This is the permaculture movement. ...

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Rising temperatures, erratic weather, population growth, and scarce water resources - along with growing civil unrest and skyrocketing food prices - are putting unprecedented stress on people and the planet. For over 40 years, Earth Day has served as a call to action, mobilizing individuals and organizations around the world to address these challenges. This year, Worldwatch Institute's Nourishing the Planet project (www.NourishingthePlanet.org) highlights agriculture - often blamed as a driver of environmental problems - as an emerging solution.

Agriculture is a source of food and income for the world's poor and a primary engine for economic growth. It also offers untapped potential for mitigating climate change and protecting biodiversity, and for lifting millions of people out of poverty.

Nourishing the Planet, a two-year evaluation of innovations in agriculture, offers 15 sustainable solutions that are working on the ground to alleviate global hunger while also protecting soil, water, and other vital natural resources. "Agriculture encompasses such a large chunk of the planet that creating healthy economies, mitigating climate change, and improving livelihoods will require a longstanding commitment to the world's farmers," says Danielle Nierenberg, Nourishing the Planet co-project director. ...