Agriculture Today

Where are we now? How are we doing today with agriculture? Are our inputs less than 10 years ago? Are we getting higher yields today? Do we have less disease today? Are we using less fertilizer and chemicals? Have we increased the fertility of our soils? These are all rhetorical questions; we already know the answers. Our soils are in decline, our foods are nutrient poor, and we continue to make the same mistakes that got us to this point. Now is the time to make a change that will work.

We made an attempt with to get it right with organic. So, how is that working? Have you tested the produce? Is it better than "conventionally" grown? Are you sure, or did you just say it must be better with less chemicals? You just guessed and labeled those conventional farmers as bad guys who don't know any better. If you do the test, then you can talk. If you don't do the test, you have no say.

Dr. A. F. Beddoe, in his book, "Nourishment Home Grown", states, and I quote, "The organic movement has presumed it is addressing the nutrition of the soil and plant by using only clean and natural substances and avoiding the toxic chemicals. Yet, the soil chemistry particulars that nature demands for nutrition are not being addressed. This is why this writer maintains that the most toxic foods are not the ones grown inorganically, but rather the ones grown without the total required calcium."

I do agree that organic farmers grow cleaner foods and some may be more nutrient-dense, but the large group that is just there to take advantage of better prices at the market have marked the whole system as suspect, and many of the growers are using the same kinds of chemicals that are used in conventional agriculture. Maybe it's time to restore what has been lost or is missing with SOIL REGENERATION, a program that's time has come.

We have tried the chemical approach, we have tried the organic approach and we have tried the biodynamic approach. Let's take another look and maybe we can cooperate and create a better program. The soil system was described to me years ago as a Biological, Chemical, Electrical SYSTEM that requires all of the components to be there in the correct ratios to each other and in the correct form. That certainly sounds simple enough, so let's just put all of the parts together and there we have it… or maybe we don't.

Let's take a better look. Carrie Reams encouraged us to See All That We Look At. I say that we see well, we don't understand very well and then we have what I call an arrogant understanding. If we look at something with an open mind without prior judgement of how it should be, then we can allow it to be how it is. If we look at the same processes with a preconceived judgment, then we will see whatever our preconceived concept is. The paradigm of how we think about agriculture and who is responsible for the end results of our efforts has got to change. If we don't take responsibility for the foods we eat, who will? Who do we leave it to? We need to ask these questions, we need to be more involved in the labeling and packaging of our foods.

I know there are a lot of people that have their heads in the sand around this issue. They are so far removed from their food that if there was any kind of interruption in our normal food supply, they would be in huge trouble and completely dependent on someone else to sustain their lives. Inner city people are starting to wake up to this fact and there are more urban gardens today with a lot more people involved in the processes. Thanks to the information superhighway, word gets out quickly and can bring about change at an exponential rate. If we look at the food production system that we have today, you will see that our demands are being met, but at what expense?

How is it that we can ship food a thousand miles, plus or minus, and still have it fresh and affordable? This information is telling us that not only should we look at how we grow our foods today, but why we grow them. What is the purpose or end results of our efforts? Due to the increased use of nitrogen based fertilizers and other chemical inputs, the quality of our soil and produce has declined, and when quality declines, quantity is of no importance. We are growing quantity, but the question is, can we grow quality?

Next we must explore quality. How do you test for quality? Brix is a test for crude sugar and is and has for many years has been a standard test for much of our food production. I say, let's look at a bit more information… pH of the produce will help us build a better picture of its quality and EC (electrical conductivity) will add information to the picture. We need to ascertain where and what the Brix reading is telling us. High Brix with high EC and low pH may not be as healthy as we would suspect. That high Brix could be there because of excess nitrogen use. There are many other tests that could be used as indicators to determine quality; color, shape, size, density, TASTE and shelf life are all indicators of quality. Healthy produce does not rot. Healthy produce will dehydrate. We have all had experience with produce that won't keep. If we are gardeners, we have had insect and disease problems in our gardens, so we then have some sense of the problems.

Arden Anderson wrote in his book, "The Anatomy of Life and Energy in Agriculture", the sequential nutrient deficiencies that lead to insects and diseases in plants. As I read this there is a definite pattern of deficiencies in our soil; Ca, P or P, Ca are involved in most all the insect problems or pathology. I notice in the soil I test in the lab that most are very low in humate content and this has declined steadily with the increased use of chemical fertilizers, and even when growers have changed to non chemical fertility, their soil's humate content continued to decline. We have determined that the problem is the use of nitrate nitrogen, have stopped using any type of nitrogen fertilizers and are seeing an increase in our soil's humate content.

Grow in Peace
Maury Streiff