Sacramento Region Charter Promotes Healthy, Sustainable Food

Sacramento Region, CA Recognizing the need for more sustainable farming, enhanced food security, and greater economic growth, Pesticide Watch joined forces with a variety of community, health, and business groups to draft a regional charter aimed at rethinking and re-envisioning food in the six-county Sacramento region. The Sacramento Regional Food Charter acts as a statement of the community’s values and beliefs regarding nutrition, food, and food systems and is meant to help shape and influence future local policies.

Pesticide Watch is currently raising public awareness and support for the charter and will continue to organize around the issue working with residents and neighborhood groups aiming for all six counties to agree to adopt the charter in the coming year.

If you or your organization would like to learn more about the Charter, please contact Maya Abool: maya@pesticidewatch.org or 916-551-1883 x 111.

Student from the GED Academy displaying the skills they make and sell as part of their school’s curriculum—the type of activities promoted in the Sacramento Regional Food Charter.

Letter to Our Members

With a new administration in the state capital, things are already changing. By the time this newsletter goes to print, we may have new directors of agencies that oversee health, pesticides and food, new state legislators as well as new city and county officials. At every level of government, it’s a time of opportunity.

In order to build greater support around healthy kids and healthy farming policies, we just released a new platform for the Brown Administration reflecting the view of hundreds of children’s health, labor and farming advocates—that we have a unique opportunity to rebuild the California economy around these priorities. We hope that this platform will set the stage for many good things to come and we appreciate your support in getting there.

Sincerely,

Paul S. Towers

California Residents Beat Bedbugs Without Using Toxic Chemicals

Ana Villalobos at the Contra Costa Bed Bugs Task Force Town Hall meeting holds up a sticky trap used by a Concord resident to identify and trap bed bugs, a safe alternative to pesticides.

Concord, CA “Even the Flintstones had bed bugs” said Luis Argüeto Jr. of the Integrated Pest Management Pest Control Company at the Contra Costa Bed Bug Town Hall Meeting. Even though it was game two of the World Series, more than 60 adults and children filled the Meadow Homes Elementary School multipurpose room to learn about the rising bed bug epidemic, how to treat them non-toxically, and their rights as tenants and landlords.

Bed bugs are small, flat, brown insects that are minor pests; they do not transmit diseases, though they are psychologically and economically destructive; and bed bug infestations have risen significantly in the last 10 years.

Last year, the Pesticide Watch Education Fund received word that many families in the Monument Corridor neighborhood in Concord were experiencing infestations, and in response helped to form the Contra Costa County Bed Bugs Task Force to better understand the problem and its needs of the community, and to work with community members to come up with safe solutions.

Unfortunately, there are many misconceptions about bed bugs, including the myth that bed bugs should be treated with toxic pesticide bombs and foggers. Bombs and foggers are an outdated form of pesticide application and many of the pesticides dispensed are increasingly linked to asthma and neurotoxicity, with profound impacts on children. “I have a terrible bed bug problem! I used six pesticide bombs in my house every two weeks to try to get rid of the problem. But they just keep coming back” said a Concord resident at the Town Hall Meeting.

Control of bed bugs requires the cooperation of residents, neighbors and landlords involved in an infestation. The good news is that lots of safe treatment techniques exist, including vacuuming up bed bugs, sticky traps, heat and steam treatments, as well laundering sheets infested with bugs. If you suspect you have bed bugs first take the above steps to eliminate bed bugs. If bed bugs persist, call your landlord or call a pest control operator and make sure they follow integrated pest management principles, including the above techniques, and don’t use harmful pesticides.

Pesticide Watch Education Fund continues to work with hotel owners, apartment associations, tenant rights groups, integrated pest management pest control operators, home health care providers and other community leaders to protect community members from bed bugs, and from toxic pesticides as well.
Stockton Residents Advance Urban Ag

Stockton, CA Fertile lands that provide produce for the entire country surround Stockton. And yet, individuals who want to farm within the city limits are not able to. Stockton is in a similar conundrum as many San Joaquin Valley jurisdictions: Its population is full of farmers; there is little access to pesticide-free produce, and yet the city does not permit urban agriculture.

Urban agriculture does not refer to small home gardens, but refers to larger plots of land used to grow crops. While there are some community gardens, people who want to grow enough for their entire family or to sell at a farmer’s market have to go outside of the city boundaries.

In order to address the growing demand for self-reliance and for non-toxic foods, a small group of Stockton residents are discussing how to change Stockton zoning to allow for urban agriculture. "There is no agricultural zoning in this city, even though we are surrounded by farms," explains Eric Firpo of Stockton Harvest. With help from Pesticide Watch Education Fund’s The California Food Project, Firpo has begun a local business to provide local organic food to Stockton residents. When he learned there were no plots of land slated for agriculture, he gathered a group of residents to pressure the city for a zoning change.

"Now that people are struggling economically, it’s even more important to allow people to grow their own food whenever they can. It saves money, and it’s creative, self-sufficient, independent living," explains Firpo.

Urban gardens are providing Stockton residents with pesticide-free food, like this chard grown by Eric Firpo.

Spotlight: Maya Abood, New Pesticide Watch Organizer

Stockton, CA Pesticide Watch is pleased to welcome Maya Abood to staff, our newest community organizer for the Central Valley and Sacramento Region.

Maya graduated with a degree in Urban and Environmental Policy from Occidental College and spent the majority of her four years engaged in both international and local fights for social and environmental justice. She studied Natural Resource Management in the Amazon of Brazil and worked with a variety of local groups to push for equitable land reform and sustainable farming and mining practices. Travelling to an indigenous community in the Philippines, Maya worked with a group of international scholars to advance indigenous rights and promote sustainable farming.

Prior to joining Pesticide Watch, Maya worked with The Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE) and The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) on a variety of housing campaigns. Maya worked to empower residents facing foreclosure to take action against the banks and stay in their homes. As a result of a year-long organizing effort, Maya and her colleagues successfully forced several banks in Los Angeles to sign-on to President Obama’s Modification Plan, which forced lenders to cooperate with residents before starting the foreclosure process, a major win resulting in fewer foreclosures.

Originally from Stockton, Maya is excited to bring her organizing and policy experience back to her hometown and start

California Businesses Take a Stand for Safe Strawberries

San Francisco, CA A strawberry that’s safe to eat might be harder to find this year. Pesticide Watch Education Fund is playing a prominent role in protecting California from a cancer-causing chemical that might be used by the start of the new year. In 2010, Pesticide Watch Education Fund worked with a powerful coalition of scientists, including six Nobel Laureate chemists, farmers and businesses, to prevent the approval of methyl iodide in California. This cancer-causing pesticide would largely be used on strawberries, one of California’s prized specialty crops, and could be used on thousands of acres of agriculture across the state.

In order to promote sustainable farming without methyl iodide, as well as persuade incoming Governor Jerry Brown to prevent its use, Pesticide Watch is partnering with Pesticide Action Network and the Center for Environmental Health to urge businesses across the state to take a stand for safe strawberries. By signing the Safe Strawberries pledge, companies are alerting the strawberry industry that they do not want to purchase strawberries that have been grown with cancer-causing methyl iodide.

Pesticide Watch Education Fund has reached out to many local and national grocery store chains and restaurants asking them to become leaders in the push for safe strawberries. To date, several grocery stores have signed the pledge, with the Sacramento Natural Foods Cooperative among the first. “We believe that promoting safe alternatives to dangerous pesticide use is a critical piece to strengthening the long-term viability of California’s food economy and providing green jobs for California residents,” said Paul Cutrer, General Manager of the Cooperative.

You can support this campaign by choosing to shop at grocery stores that have signed the pledge against methyl iodide. Check www.pesticidewatch.org for a list of companies who are joining in the fight for sustainable agriculture which is safe for workers, communities, consumers and our environment.

Fast Food Meets Its Foes

Sacramento, CA McDonald’s, which has become the subject of controversy because of its high fat, high sugar menu and pesticide-intensive farming, has ironically proposed a new location directly across from the UC Davis Medical Center. But residents are hardly “lovin’ it.”

With the help of Pesticide Watch Education Fund’s California Food Project, residents in Sacramento’s Oak Park neighborhood have banded together to stop the infamous golden arches from going up their neighborhood. The group of community members call themselves “Healthy Development for Oak Park” and they have made it their mission to not only stop the fast-food giant’s plans, but to also incentivize other options that will promote healthier living and a greater sense of community.

According to group members, McDonald’s does not constitute healthy development because the fast-food chain does not promote a unique sense of place and identity, encourages social isolation, increases trash and environmental pollution, takes money out of the community and hinders access to healthy food. But for group members, stopping this McDonald’s is just one piece in a collective strategy for better development and healthy organic food.

Plant the seeds of a healthy California

You can be remembered as someone who fought for healthier farms, families and homes by making a bequest to Pesticide Watch.

For information, call 1-800-841-7299, or email plannedgiving@pesticidewatch.org