

Huge Organic Farm under Threat; County Will Invade and Spray Roundup

Source: No More Fake News

Huge organic farm under threat: County will invade and spray Roundup if not stopped

What?? A county government is going to destroy a massive organic farm?

by Jon Rappoport

May 15, 2017

“I have a great idea. We’re the Sherman County government. We have power. Let’s claim Azure Farms can’t control their weeds. Let’s come in and invade them with Roundup and other toxic chemicals. Let’s destroy their organic farm. We know the spraying won’t wipe out the weeds—it’ll make the situation worse. But who cares? Let’s open up ourselves to massive lawsuits. I’m sure Monsanto will give us some legal help. We can set a fantastic precedent. No organic farm is safe. No organic farmer has the right to protect his land from the government. Isn’t that a terrific idea?”

Government trespass, invasion?

So far, I have seen no coverage of this issue in Oregon newspapers. Why not? Also, I find nothing on the Sherman County, Oregon, government website about a massive spraying program.

A local government is going to decimate a huge organic farm with herbicide?

Azure Farms, a 2000-acre organic farm in Oregon, states it is under threat from the local Sherman County government. Why? Because Sherman County officials are re-interpreting a law concerning the "control of noxious weeds," so it means "eradication."

These weeds can be controlled on an organic farm, but the only way they can be eliminated (according to conventional "science") is by spraying. And that means Roundup and other toxic chemicals. That would decimate the organic nature of the farm. That would decertify it as an organic farm.

Further, according to Azure, Sherman County plans to put a lien on the farm, forcing it to pay for the spraying.

The deadline for expressing opposition is May 22. A better deadline is May 17.

Here is the complete press release from Azure Farms and the ways to register your concern:

Azure Farms is a working, certified organic farm located in Moro, central Oregon, in Sherman County. It has been certified organic for about 18 years. The farm produces almost all the organic wheat, field peas, barley, Einkorn, and beef for Azure Standard.

Sherman County is changing the interpretation of its statutory code from controlling noxious weeds to eradicating noxious weeds. These weeds include Morning Glory, Canada Thistle, and Whitetop, all of which have been on the farm for many years, but that only toxic chemicals will eradicate.

Organic farming methods – at least as far as we know today – can only control noxious weeds—it is very difficult to eradicate them.

Sherman County may be issuing a Court Order on May 22, 2017 to quarantine Azure Farms and possibly to spray the whole farm with poisonous herbicides, contaminating them with Milestone, Escort and Roundup herbicides.

This will destroy all the efforts Azure Farms has made for years to produce the very cleanest and healthiest food humanly possible. About 2,000 organic acres would be impacted; that is about 1.5 times the size of the city center of Philadelphia that is about to be sprayed with noxious, toxic, polluting herbicides.

The county would then put a lien on the farm to pay for the expense of the labor and chemicals used.

Contact Sherman County Court before May 17 when the next court discussion will be held.

Contact info:

1. Via email at lhernandez@co.sherman.or.us or
2. Call Lauren at 541-565-3416.

Show Sherman County that people care about their food NOT containing toxic chemicals.

Overwhelm the Sherman County representatives with your voices!

—end of Azure Farms statement—

Darren Smith, Weekend Contributor to jonathanturley.org, has been covering this story. He reached out and obtained a devastating letter from agricultural scientist, Charles Benbrook. Benbrook has his critics within the conventional pesticide and GMO research community. Here is Smith's piece and Dr. Benbrook's letter:

Yesterday I fielded an article concerning a rather distressing mandate by an Oregon county weed control agency seeking to force the application of hazardous herbicides onto a 2,000 acre organic farm owned by Azure Farms. Sherman County Oregon

maintains this scorched earth policy is necessary to abate, or more specifically “eradicate”, weeds listed by state statute as noxious.

Now, the scientific community is responding to this overreaching government action by acting in the interests of health and responsible environmental stewardship through advocacy in the hopes that officials in Sherman County will reconsider their mandate.

Dr. Charles Benbrook is a highly credentialed research professor and expert serving on several boards of directors for agribusiness and natural resources organizations. Having read news of Sherman County’s actions, he penned an authoritative response I believe will make informative reading for those concerned by present and future implications in the forced use of herbicides under the rubric of noxious weed eradication, and the damage to organic farming generally arising from such mandates.

Charles Benbrook has a PhD in agricultural economics from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and an undergraduate degree from Harvard University. He currently is a Visiting Professor at Newcastle University in the UK...

He was a Research Professor at Washington State University from 2012-2015, and served as the Chief Scientist of The Organic Center from 2006-2012. He was the Executive Director of the Board on Agriculture in the National Academy of Sciences from 1984-1990. He was the staff director of the Subcommittee on Department [USDA] Operations, Research, and Foreign Agriculture of the House Committee on Agriculture (1981-1983). He worked as an agricultural and natural resources policy expert in the Council for Environmental Quality in the last 1.5 years of the Carter Administration. He began Benbrook Consulting Services (BCS) in 1990, and continues to carry out projects with a wide range of clients via BCS

He coauthors an informative website Hygeia-Analytics.com.

I reached out to Dr. Benbrook and received permission to reprint his letter in the hope that with more attention, including that from the scientific community, we can arrive at a reasonable solution to the county's concerns. Here is Dr. Benbrook's letter:...

Tom McCoy
Joe Dabulskis
Sherman County Commissioners
Lauren Hernandez
Administrative Assistant
Sherman County, Oregon
Rod Asher
Sherman Country Weed District Supervisor
Moro, Oregon
Alexis Taylor
Director
Oregon Department of Agriculture

Dear Ms. Hernandez et al:

I live in Wallowa County. I learned today of the recent, dramatic change in the Sherman County noxious weed control program and the plan to forcibly spray a 2,000-acre organic farm in the county.

Over a long career, I have studied herbicide use and efficacy, public and private weed control efforts, the linkages between herbicide use and the emergence and spread of resistant weeds, and the public health and environmental impacts of herbicide use and other weed management strategies.

I served for six years, along with fellow Oregonian Barry Bushue, past-president of the Oregon Farm Bureau, on the USDA's AC 21 Agricultural Biotechnology Advisory Committee. Issues arising from herbicide use were a frequent topic of discussion during our Committee's deliberations.

I have published multiple scientific papers in peer-reviewed journals on glyphosate, its human health risks, and the impact of genetically engineered crops on overall herbicide use and the spread of resistant weeds. In a separate email, I will forward you copies of my published research relevant to the use of herbicides, and glyphosate in particular.

The notion that Sherman County can eradicate noxious weeds by blanket herbicide spraying is deeply misguided. I cannot imagine a single, reputable university weed scientist in the State supporting the idea that an herbicide-based noxious weed eradication program would work (i.e., eradicate the target weeds) in Oregon, or any other state. To hear another opinion from one of the State's most widely known and respected weed scientists, I urge the County to consult with Dr. Carol Mallory-Smith, Oregon State University.

I also doubt any corporate official working for Monsanto, the manufacturer of glyphosate (Roundup), would agree or endorse the notion that any long-established weed in Sherman County, noxious or otherwise, could be eradicated via blanket spraying with Roundup, or for that matter any combination of herbicides.

Before proceeding with any county-mandated herbicide use justified by the goal of eradication, I urge the County to seek concurrence from the herbicide manufacturer that they believe use of their product will likely eradicate your named, target, noxious weeds.

Given that almost no one with experience in weed management believes that any long-established weed, noxious or otherwise, can be eradicated with herbicides, one wonders why the County has adopted such a draconian change in its noxious weed control program. I can think of two plausible motivations – a desire by companies and individuals involved in noxious weed control activities, via selling or applying herbicides, to increase business volume and profits; or, an effort to reduce

or eliminate acreage in the Country that is certified organic.

Weeds are classified as noxious when they prone to spread, are difficult to control, and pose a public health or economic threat to citizens, public lands, and/or farming and ranching operations. Ironically, by far the fastest growing and mostly economically damaging noxious weeds in the U.S. are both noxious and spreading because they have developed resistance to commonly applied herbicides, and especially glyphosate.

There is near-universal agreement in the weed science community nationwide, and surely as well in the PNW, that over-reliance on glyphosate (Roundup) over the last two decades has created multiple, new noxious weeds posing serious economic, environmental, and public health threats.

In fact, over 120 million acres of cultivated cropland in the U.S. is now infested with one or more glyphosate-resistant weed (for details, see <http://cehn-healthykids.org/herbicide-use/resistant-weeds/>).

The majority of glyphosate-resistant weeds are in the Southeast and Midwest, where routine, year-after-year planting of Roundup Ready crops has led to heavy and continuous selection pressure on weed populations, pressure that over three-to-six years typically leads to the evolution of genetically resistant weed phenotypes, that can then take off, spreading across tens of millions of acres in just a few years.

Ask any farmer in Georgia, or Iowa, or Arkansas whether they would call "noxious" the glyphosate-resistant kochia, Palmer amaranth, Johnson grass, maretail, or any of a dozen other glyphosate-resistant weeds in their fields.

It is virtually certain that an herbicide-based attempt to eradicate noxious weeds in Sherman County would fail. It would also be extremely costly, and would pose hard-to-predict collateral damage on non-target plants from drift, and on

human health and the environment. But even worse, it would also, almost certainly, accelerate the emergence and spread of a host of weeds resistant to the herbicides used in the program.

This would, in turn, leave the county, and the county's farmers with not just their existing suite of noxious weeds to deal with, but a new generation of them resistant to glyphosate, or whatever other herbicides are widely used.

Sherman County's proposal, while perhaps well meaning, will simply push the herbicide use-resistant weed treadmill into high gear. Just as farmers in other parts of the county have learned over the last 20 years, excessive reliance on glyphosate, or herbicides over-all, accomplishes only one thing reliably – it accelerates the emergence and spread of resistant weeds, requiring applications of more, and often more toxic herbicides, and so on before some one, or something breaks this vicious cycle.

I urge you to take into account two other consequences if the County pursues this deeply flawed strategy. Certified organic food products grown and processed in Oregon, and distributed by Oregon-based companies like Azure and the Organically Grown Company, are highly regarded throughout the U.S. for exceptional quality, consistency, and value.

Plus, export demand is growing rapidly across several Pacific Rim nations for high-value, certified organic foods and wine from Oregon. Triggering a high-profile fight over government-mandated herbicide spraying on certified organic fields in Sherman County will come as a shock to many people, who are under the impression that all Oregonians, farmers and consumers alike, are committed to a vibrant, growing, and profitable organic food industry.

Does Sherman County really want to erode this halo benefiting the marketing of not just organic products, but all food and

beverages from Oregon?

Second, if Sherman County is serious about weed eradication, it will have to mandate widespread spraying countywide, and not just on organic farms, and not just for one year. The public reaction will be swift, strong, and build in ferocity. It will likely lead to civil actions of the sort that can trigger substantial, unforeseen costs and consequences. I am surely not the only citizen of the State that recalls the tragic events last year in Malheur County.

Plus, I guarantee you that the County, the herbicide applicators, and the manufacturers of the herbicides applied, under force of law on organic or other farms, will face a torrent of litigation seeking compensatory damages for loss of reputation, health risks, and the loss of premium markets and prices.

I have followed litigation of this sort for decades, and have served as an expert witness in several herbicide-related cases. While it is obviously premature to start contemplating the precise legal theories and statutes that will form the crux of future litigation, the County should develop a realistic estimate of the legal costs likely to arise in the wake of this strategy, if acted upon, so that the County Commissioners can alert the public upfront regarding how they will raise the funds needed to deal with the costs of near-inevitable litigation.

—end of Dr. Benbrook's letter—

Yesterday, Sunday, I emailed the Sherman County government asking them whether they really intend to pursue this lunatic program. If and when I receive an answer, I'll post it.

I also emailed Azure Farms, asking why they believe there is no coverage of this issue in Oregon newspapers. If I get an answer, I'll post that, too.

Ordinarily, local papers will print a stories about contentious issues, however one-sided they may be. In this case, I find nothing.

Is it possible the threat of herbicide spraying has been overstated? Why would Azure issue a release claiming the spraying is imminent if it weren't true? Why would Azure risk getting into a wrangle with the County government if the threat weren't real? Why isn't there any mention of the spraying program on the Sherman County website? Does the County actually think they can keep their intentions under wraps?

"I have a great idea. Let's claim Azure Farms can't control their weeds. Let's come in and invade them with Roundup and other toxic chemicals. Let's destroy their organic farm. We know the spraying won't wipe out the weeds—it'll make the situation worse. But who cares? Let's open up ourselves to massive lawsuits. I'm sure Monsanto will give us some legal help. We can set a fantastic precedent. No organic farm is safe. No organic farmer has the right to protect his land from the government. Isn't that a terrific idea?"