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March 18, 2015

Soil Not Oil: Campaigning for a Carbon Stable Future

A s featured in our February issue, the UN General Assembly has declared 2015 the International Year of Soils (IYS 2015). In collaboration with national governments and the secretariat of the United Nation s Convention to Combat Desertification, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN is spearheading a global push to improv e the soil health and implement soil-related sustainable agriculture projects.

Here in the United States, a group of scientists, environmental organizations, activists and concerned citizens have formed an alliance to push local and state governments to make revolutionary changes in land management and agriculture to create healthier soils while reducing dependency on fossil fuels worldwide. They are the Soil Not Oil Coalition.

We interviewed Miguel Robles, project director of the Biosafety Alliance and organizer of the Soil Not Oil Coalition, to learn more about the Coalition's goals and about the Fall 2015 Soil Not Oil International Conference taking place in Redmond, California.

Upcoming Event

Cambridge Science Festival Panel: Restoring Ecosystems to Reverse Global Warming

CAMBRIDGE SCIENCE FESTIVAL!

Human impact has "broken" some ecosystems on the planet and significantly compromised most others. Is

BLC: Hi, Miguel! We are very pleased to have to opportunity to speak with you and learn more about the Coalition. Please tell us a little about the background of the Coalition.

Miguel: The Coalition was formed because 2015 is the International Year of Soils, and oil is one of the main problems contributing to poor soil conditions due to the widespread use of agricultural chemicals that deplete and degrade soils worldwide.

BLC: So together, you have created a letter to send to the UN that organizations and people are signing in support of this message. What is the main purpose of this letter?

Miguel: The letter is a political statement about the importance of changing the fossil fuel paradigm and acknowledging that the problem with soils is more than a result of climate change-it is directly related to our addiction to using fossil fuels in industrial agriculture. We want to launch an educational campaign with the UN to promote practical solutions to this problem. If they don't do enough outreach, the IYS won't have a large enough impact.

BLC: What type of solutions do you promote?

Miguel: When you hear about climate change in the news, it's all negative. They are not talking about remediation, about regenerative practices. They don't talk about the practical solutions that already exist. There are groups all around the world that are implementing low-tech solutions to regenerate their soils and land, in Africa, Latin America, the United States, all over. The Marin Carbon Project is one of them, as is the Rodale Institute, Instituto Terra ... We talk about activists who are doing good work. We have to rely on independent scientists and researchers who are not backed by corporate interests-all the communities worldwide that are working to diversify crops to support the ecosystems. We have so much to learn from all of these amazing people.

BLC: That's inspiring to hear, as we also believe in the power of regenerative agriculture and holistic land management to heal soils worldwide. Your 2015 fall conference, the Soil Not Oil International Conference in Richmond, California, has already amassed an impressive list of confirmed speakers, including Dr. Vandana Shiva, author of *Water Wars*, *Biopiracy*, *Stolen Harvest*, and *Soil Not Oil*. Can you tell us what the conference will cover and who should attend?

Miguel: This will be a multi-stage conference that will bring all kinds of people together such as farmers, activists, scientists, and community members to join the conversation. People from various backgrounds to propose different campaigns and projects and to see how we can all support each other. We are working to bring in people from multiple continents and if everything goes as we hope, we want to hold monthly presentations for

it possible that restoring ecological health to impacted areas could address the worst threat yet faced by human civilization: the climate crisis?

This panel discussion will focus on the latest science and field trials indicating that significant carbon drawdown is not only possible, it's essential.

RSVP

When

Wednesday, April 22, 2015, 6:30pm to 8:30pm.

Where

Cambridge Public Library: 449 Broadway, Cambridge, MA.

Fees

Free!

For more information visit bio4climate.org

Other Events

How we can reverse Global Warming: The Good News
Monday, March 30, 2015, 7p.m.-8:30p.m. Winchester Public Library, Winchester, MA.

Cambridge Science Carnival Workshop
Saturday, April 18, 2015, noon-4p.m. MIT, Cambridge, MA.

Reversing Global Warming: Urban and Suburban Carbon Farming conference
Sunday, M ay 3, 2015, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Science Center, Hall C, Harvard University.

A one-day event organized by Biodiversity for a Livable Climate and sponsored by Green Cambridge.

people to present their projects to and speak with elected officials. We want to create a tour for people to testify about the work they are doing, why the soil problem exists, and how to change it. This is for the future of the planet.

BLC: We are very excited about this conference. Our director, Adam Sacks, will be speaking at the conference, too! Why did you choose California for the location?

Miguel: We want to plan sustainable solutions in California first, then elsewhere, that focus on the long-term protection of soils. We want to push the California legislature to set the precedent for other states. Urge them to implement practical solutions to bring more moisture into the environment and reverse desertification, which is a big issue in California. We will start in California, but it is simply a mirror of the global future.

BLC: Thank you so much for taking time to speak with us, Miguel. We look forward to the conference in September!

The Soil Not Oil International Conference is being held September 4 and 5 in Richmond, California. For more information, visit the Conference page.

To show your solidarity, sign Soil Not Oil's Letter to the UN Food and Agricultural Organization.

USDA Approves GMO Apples

by Jacqueline Sussman

In the midst of an ongoing multi-state battle over labeling GMOs , the USDA has approved a variety of genetically modified apples that do not brown or bruise to be grown in the U nited States .

The "Arctic Apple" is the brainchild of a Canadian biotech company, Okanagan Specialty Fruit, and would be one of the first GMO foods marketed directly to consumers. Two varieties of the Arctic apples, Granny

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About BLC

Our mission at Biodiversity for a Livable Climate is to mobilize the biosphere to restore ecosystems and reverse climate change. Our primary project is to re-direct the mainstream climate conversation from an almost exclusive concern with atmospheric carbon to encompass the entire carbon and water cycles and the regenerative role of biology.

Learn more about our ongoing projects, upcoming events and find additional information and resources at bio4climate.org.

Smith and Golden Delicious, are expected to be ready to hit grocery store shelves in 2017 (high-quality fruit trees require a couple seasons to mature). The popular fruit joins the list of crops being genetically engineered for human consumption, which includes corn, soybeans, canola, sugar beets, cottonseed, Hawaiian papaya, zucchini and yellow squash. Between 70 and 75% of the processed food in America contain GMOs, according to current estimates, but food manufacturers are still not legally required to label GMO foods.

While the long-term human health impacts of consuming GMO foods have not yet been established, the majority of Americans-over 90 percent-want clear labeling on foods that have been genetically modified, according to the Environmental Working Group. The fight for GMO food-labeling bills continues in several states, particularly in the New England region. Vermont still has the only labeling law, but it is currently being challenged in federal court by industry groups led by the Grocery Manufacturers Association; meanwhile, other Northeast states are waiting for the green light to follow in Vermont's footsteps. So far more than 70 bills to label or prohibit GMOs have been proposed in over 30 states across the country.

The United States is the world's second largest producer of apples and for centuries the fruit has been a staple in American food traditions. The Food and Water Watch stated, "This GMO apple is simply unnecessary...The USDA has let down U.S. apple growers and the public by wasting resources on this useless and risky food." GMO labeling is already mandatory by law in 64 countries around the globe, including Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, the entire European Union, and Japan.

For more information on state labeling initiatives and bills, visit the Center for Food Safety.