

Sewage Sludge On Farm Fields

Is it a benefit to our food chain OR a toxic legacy?

Everything that goes down the drain or toilet of a municipal system ends up at the sewage treatment plant. This includes industrial, medical and household waste. The result is a 'chemical soup' that contains toxins and carcinogens.

Our provincial government encourages farmers to spread the sludge from the bottom of the sewage lagoons onto their fields. No tests are conducted to determine the chemical composition of the waste and only selected pathogens and eleven metals are tested. If the pathogens and metals are at 'acceptable' levels, the farmer is told the sludge is nutrient rich and safe to grow food.

A growing body of scientific evidence shows that this is a false assumption and that there are long term consequences for all of us and the environment.

In a Case for Caution Revisited: Health and Environmental Impacts of Application of Sewage Sludges to Agricultural Land Harrison and McBride clearly state,

"Agricultural soils are a unique and valuable resource. Protecting agricultural soils requires anticipating and avoiding potential harms since once contaminated with persistent pollutants, the damage will remain for the foreseeable future. Once contaminated, stopping the application of pollutants such as metals and many organic chemicals that are in sewage biosolids will not correct the problem. The contamination will remain for decades or centuries. It is thus critical to prevent this essentially permanent degradation."

Ellen Z. Harrison, retired Director, and Murray McBride, Director, Cornell Waste Management Institute, Dept. of Crop and Soil Sciences, Rice Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. September 2008 (updated March 2009).

Can contaminated soils grow safe, healthy food?

**Concerned,
tell your provincial politicians immediately!**