



OPINION

Gorillas Vs. Man

Editor's Note: The following editorial was written by William Troxell, executive secretary of the Pennsylvania Vegetable Growers Association (PVGA), and appeared in the association's May 2001 newsletter.

I was recently handed a copy of an article from the Tribune Media Services, Inc. entitled "Eco-groups pushing organic food twist facts about modern farming." The article quotes the text on an EnviroKidz Organic Gorilla Munch cereal box. The cereal box tells children that people are "the only natural enemy gorillas have" and that "the most serious threat to free-living gorillas is the explosion of our human population." Agriculture and logging are implicated as the major threats to gorilla habitat.

The cereal box goes on to say, "EnviroKidz chooz (sic) organic food. Organic agriculture respects the land and the wild creatures who live on it." It ends by saying, "So, if you want the kind of planet where biodiversity is protected and human beings tread more softly upon the Earth, then chooz certified organic cereals from EnviroKidz. Wouldn't it be nice if all the food we ate was certified organic?" (Emphasis in original).

The article goes on to refute organic claims that organically produced foods taste better, are more nutritional, and better for the environment. The article cites blind taste tests that show people cannot tell the difference in taste between organically and conventionally grown food unless they know which is which. It also cites researchers who reluctantly admit they really cannot find significant nutritional differences between organically and conventionally produced foods.

As for claims that there are 110,000 cases of acute pesticide poisoning each year, the article cites the National Poison Control as reporting that these cases are instances where people, usually children, have eaten pesticides directly — oftentimes ones found in the home like rat poison. They are not cases of poisoning that occurred because of pesticide residues on food. It contends that pesticide residues actually on food have not been found to pose a health threat.

The article finally refutes the claim that producing all the world's food organically would provide more habitat for gorillas. It cites the Center for Global Food Issues that estimates that 10 million square miles of wildlands would have to be cleared for farmland if all food was grown organically.

Unfortunately, debates about organic versus conventional agricultural practices often become more ideological than reasonable, more rhetorical than factual, more emotional than scientific. Oftentimes I suspect the real truth lies somewhere between the two sides of the debate.

It was reported at a recent PVGA board of directors' meeting that an organic speaker at the convention made a statement to the effect that they did not apply pesticides because they did not want to poison their workers — the implication being that any grower who applies pesticides is willfully poisoning his workers. I doubt that sentiment is shared by all organic growers and I am sure that no grower has any intention of poisoning his workers.

While most PVGA members use conventional growing practices, our editorial policy for the newsletter is to be respectful of both sides of this question, since we also have PVGA members who utilize organic or sustainable growing practices.

While I personally question the feasibility of all food being grown organically (I have no valid estimates of how much more land it takes although I expect it would indeed take more land and more farm workers), I also believe we must pay attention to the environmental impact of conventional methods. Few people would now argue that banning DDT was a mistake. Moreover, the routine presence of certain pesticides (I believe atrazine is one of the major ones) in wells in major agricultural regions should be of concern. Can any farmer reasonably argue that increasing the organic matter content of a soil is not a benefit to the health of the soil and crops?

Good farmers for hundreds of years have recognized that good stewardship of their land requires them to put back into their ground what they take out. We need to recognize that the Creator has made our earth with an intricate system of organisms that benefit each other as well as hold each other in balance. While any type of agriculture disrupts the native ecosystem, we will do well to preserve what we can. However, it would be foolish to turn our backs on the technological ability that humans have been endowed with by abandoning the use of all pesticides and conventional farming methods that have provided us with such an abundant supply of food.

I hope PVGA can continue to serve growers of both persuasions and foster a degree of mutual respect. While I strongly believe in being good stewards of our environment, I also believe that if it comes to a choice between the gorillas and people, the Creator intended for people to take precedence.

William Troxell
PVGA Executive Secretary

❖ FARM CALENDAR ❖

Saturday, June 30
Kutztown German Festival,
Kutztown Fairgrounds, thru
July 8.

U.S. Forage Research Center
Open House, Madison, Wis., 1
p.m.-5 p.m.

Sunday, July 1
Mason-Dixon Horse Show, Eng-
lish and Western, Delta, (717)
456-9936.

Monday, July 2
Wolf's Corner Fair, Clarion
County, (814) 755-4222.

Tuesday, July 3
Wednesday, July 4
Lancaster Farming office closed.
National Junior Summer Swine
Spectacular, Louisville, Ky.,
thru July 7, (765) 463-3594.

Thursday, July 5
National Ag Leadership Confer-
(Turn to Page A35) /

Now Is The Time

By Leon Ressler
*Lancaster County
Extension Director*

**To Renovate
Strawberry Fields**
Conventional strawberry fields can be productive for several years if one renovates them properly. Renovation should begin as soon as possible after harvest is finished.

The first step is to apply 2-4-D (Formula 40) for broadleaf control if necessary. Wait four to seven days for the weeds to absorb the herbicide. Then mow off the strawberries as close to the ground as possible without damaging the crowns.

Next narrow the rows to 6 to 12 inches wide with a rototiller or cultivator. Allow one inch of soil to cover the crowns. Fertilize with 40-50 pounds of actual nitrogen per acre and apply phosphorus and potash according to soil test requirements.

One should also apply herbicides for summer weed control as suggested in Penn State's Commercial

Berry Production Pest Management Guide. This guide is available from your County Extension Office for \$10 and has a wealth of information for the commercial berry producer.

Sinbar or Devrinol are two pre-emergent herbicides commonly used for summer weed control. Irrigate to incorporate the fertilizer and herbicide. Late in August the strawberries will form buds for next year's fruit crop. Fertilize again at this time with 20 pounds of actual nitrogen per acre.

To Pull Over When Using A Cell Phone While Driving

The cell phone has become a very useful tool on the farm as it has for urban folks. Most people understand that drinking alcohol before driving is a very foolish and dangerous action since it seriously increases your risk of an accident.

Many people however are not aware that using a cell phone while driving also greatly increases your chance for a serious collision. That has been documented by several studies, says John Shutske, Farm Safety and Health Specialist with the University of Minnesota Extension Service.

"The potential for a serious collision is four times greater when driving and using a cell phone," says Shutske. "That makes your risk nearly as high as driving with a blood alcohol level above the legal limit."

Farmers and others driving on rural roads are in just as much danger as urban drivers, Shutske points out. "Cell phones are becoming incredibly popular in nearly all areas, including rural America," he says.

"Several farmers have told me they simply could not get by without a wireless phone. It has become a routine part of their business for things such as ordering supplies,

checking prices, coordinating work schedules, and keeping in touch with family during busy crunch seasons."

Avoid using a wireless phone any time you're driving, says Shutske. Most cell phone calls last five minutes or less. You're better off stopping in a safe location before you place your call.

If you feel you have to make a call while driving, Shutske recommends the following strategies to lessen the danger:

Program commonly called numbers into your phone. Having to dial seven or ten numbers can be extremely distracting and can lead to a crash. Most phones now allow you to "speed dial" by pressing only one or two keys.

Don't make calls that require a lot of thought, concentration, or emotion while you're driving. Much of the risk in talking on a cell phone while driving comes from simply being preoccupied with the thought process involved in talking on the phone.

Don't try to write down important information while driving and talking. That's an almost certain recipe for disaster, especially on a narrow rural road.

Because of the safety and liability concerns associated with using a cell phone while driving, most phone manufacturers and wireless service providers now include safety information with their phones. Take a few minutes to review that information and think about how it applies to your driving situation.

Quote of The Week
"My attitude has always been: if it's worth the playing, it's worth paying the price to win."

Paul "Bear" Bryant
Legendary Alabama
football coach

(Bryant's record of 323 wins is the all time high for college football. Joe Paterno is likely to break that record this fall.)

THE BIBLE SPEAKS

BY LAWRENCE W. ALTHOUSE

WHO NEEDS JUDGMENT?

Background Scripture:
Amos 1 through 2.
Devotional Reading:
Hebrews 10:20-30.

Someone once told me that he liked everything about Christianity except judgment. "I would think," he said, "that if you are a Christian, you don't need it."

They may not say it so blatantly, but many must share his point of view. Mention "judgment" and they immediately think of their neighbor, their boss, or their enemies.

The Prophet Amos was aware of that, so he begins with the condemnation of Israel's neighbors. "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment" (1:3). Note that this phrase means that Damascus has done enough and more than enough to merit God's judgment.

In the case of Damascus, "more than enough" is a reference to Syria's crimes against Gilead. Damascus will pay, as will Syria's rulers Hazael and Benhadad. (The writer doesn't tell us if the Israelites shouted "Hooray!" or stifled their glee at this good bad news.)

The prophet goes on to pronounce the judgment of God upon Gaza, Tyre, Edom, the Ammonites, and Moab. The sins of Israel's enemies have been more than enough to warrant God's judgment. I can imagine the anticipation of those who listened to the prophecy — would he also pronounce judgment upon their brother nation, Judah?

They were not disappointed, for Amos begins again: "Thus says the Lord: 'For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment'" (2:4).

They, too, have done more than enough to deserve God's judgment: they have rejected the law of God, not kept his statutes, and been led astray by their own lies.

"So, I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem" (2:5).

Just Desserts?

Now, if Amos had quit at that point, it would be a very happy message the prophet was delivering. But if prophecy was for Israel's enemies, neighbors and kin, it was also for Israel. And, if you notice, see that the prophecy against Israel was three times as long in print as the others. I'm certain that there were certain of his hearers who protested, "But we haven't done anything to deserve this!"

Amos, however, says they also have done more than enough to attract God's judgment. That "more than enough" can be distilled into three complaints. The first of these is their treatment of the poor and defenseless. They "sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes — they that trample the head of the poor into the way of the afflicted" (2:6,7a). Is it by

chance that Amos lists their treatment of the poor first? I think not, because throughout the Bible, treatment of the poor seems to be at the top of every list. And it is just as relevant today, for the growing hostility to the poor in our country and elsewhere is surely more than enough to incur the judgment of God.

The second charge is that of sexual and ritual debauchery. I say "sexual and ritual debauchery" because Amos is speaking of a special context for the sexual sins: temple prostitution as an integral part of the worship of the Canaanite religion. To emphasize the depravity, Amos says a man and his father use the same prostitute.

Temple prostitution alone would have been more than enough to justify God's judgment, but this father and son have gone beyond that. Have they no shame? Is this not a judgment on us, too?

The last charge is related to the first. It was law that a garment taken as pledge for a loan or a debt must be returned to the debtor before sundown. But some Israelites were obviously keeping these garments as collateral. I'm sure this judgment angered the Israelites. After all, business is business! I'm in this business for profit, not benevolence.

Israel was condemned because people thought little of cheating and abusing others in the name of "good business." Don't we all?

Who needs judgment? One guess should be sufficient.

Lancaster Farming

An Award-Winning Farm Newspaper

- Keystone Awards 1993, 1995
- PACD Media Award 1996
- Recognized for photo excellence throughout the years by the Northeast Farm Communicators
- PennAg Industries 1992
- Berks Ag-Business Council 2000

Lancaster Farming

Established 1955
Published Every Saturday
Ephrata Review Building
1 E. Main St.
Ephrata, PA 17522

—by—

Lancaster Farming, Inc.
A Steinman Enterprise
William J. Burgess General Manager
Andy Andrews, Editor

Copyright 2001 by Lancaster Farming