



The Solari Report

September 13, 2018

Food Series
Navigating Organics
with
Harry Blazer
&
Ronnie Cummins

the **Food Series**



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Harry Blazer: Hello, Solari subscribers. It's Harry Blazer again. Today we have a very special guest, Ronnie Cummins, who is the co-founder and international director of the Organic Consumers Association, and you also have a Mexico affiliate, correct?

Ronnie Cummins: Yes.

Blazer: That is known as Via Organica, correct?

Cummins: Yes. That is translated to 'The Organic Way'.

Blazer: Ronnie, you know about Catherine Austin Fitts. I don't know that you know much about me. What is important is that we find out about you and your efforts because you represent a group that I respect a lot and have supported. You have a very, very valuable website, plus a lot of staff – from what I can see – who are doing a lot of good work.

Let's start off by having you tell us a little bit about yourself.



Cummins: I came out of the 1960's civil rights and anti-war movement. I grew up in Texas. I became a full-time activist in 1967, and I've basically been carrying on ever since then – the last 50 years. I've worked in all aspects of social change and the movement, but the last 20 years I have specially focused on food and farming and climate issues.

The Organic Consumers Association's focus has been to basically organize consumers to reject industrial agriculture and corporate agribusiness, and to open their minds to the alternatives – organic and grass-fed and what we now call 'regenerative food and farming'.

Over the last 15 years or so it's become clear to a lot of us that we had better get serious about looking at climate change and global warming. We learned that our food farming and land use are half of the problem, and that not only do we need to get away from fossil fuels and have solar energy and wind energy – renewable energies – as the norm, but we also have to get away from our current food and farming and land use system that is really part of the problem.

In the last 50 years, fossil fuels have put so much greenhouse gases up into the atmosphere that they've disrupted the climate. At the same time, industrial agriculture and our 'chemical-intensive and energy-intensive' food system has doubled the problem.



We need to get things back under control. The nice thing about having a climate-friendly next stage of organic regenerative-type of food and farming is that it's good for our health, too. It's good for the environment, and it's good for small farmers. The animals are treated better. When you look around the world, most poor people are actually rural people who are small farmers, and that is where you have the most social conflict and war and violence.

If we can create rural prosperity in the rural areas of the world, we can go a long way towards solving a lot of the other problems we are facing.

Blazer: I want to use you as kind of an expert on organic, if you don't mind. So what is organic? How would you describe it to the listeners?

Cummins: Organic is the way that farming has been carried out for most of the 10,000 years that humans have been farming. We've been raising animals for about 30,000 years, but we've been farming for about 10,000 years. Throughout most of that 10,000-year period, farming practices were in tune with the seasons, relatively natural, and we didn't use things like pesticides. We didn't have things like genetically-engineered food. Animals were grazed outdoors, and farms were small.

Even when I was a child, when you went to the grocery store, almost everything in the grocery store was organic, and it came from within a 100-mile radius. But at the end of World War II, unfortunately we entered into what was called the 'green revolution' which was a propaganda term, and we started using more and more chemicals. We started using hybrid seeds designed for yield rather than environmental sustainability and nutrition.



We started taking animals off of the land and concentrating them into these factory farm installations. The neighborhood grocery stores and farmers markets gave way to bigger and bigger stores, and finally the advent of the big box stores.

Meanwhile, food – which used to be fairly natural and nutritious – became more and more processed. Fast food, which was a rarity 50 years ago, became very common. We always had the evening meal when I was growing up with the whole family there. On the weekends we had extended family members over. A lot of that is gone out the window now, and half of the food dollars that Americans spend are on eating out and restaurants, and it's usually junk food.

If you look at the diet of Americans today, the overwhelming majority of the food that people eat is highly processed. It might taste good on the first few bites, but look at what it is doing to our public health. We spend \$3.5 trillion a year on healthcare in the United States – by far the largest in the world per capita – and public health experts and nutritionists point out that 40% of that \$3.5 trillion is caused by eating terrible food and eating too much sugar and salt and the chemicals that are added into the food.

We are a fast food nation. We have supersized ourselves. We have put all of the animals into factory farms. We have now genetically engineering half of the crops out there in the fields, and we basically have driven most small farmers off of the land. We have these giant agribusiness conglomerates that have taken over.



We don't measure food anymore like we used to. On my grandparents' organic farm when I was growing up in East Texas, they were concerned about nutrition and being able to provide literally everything that a family would want to eat. That changed over time. Now farms are talking about how many tons per acre of commodity crops – soybean and corn – that they can raise.

Of course, all of this is heavily subsidized by taxpayers. The factory farm system would collapse tomorrow if people knew how unhealthy it was and if the soy and corn farmers weren't being subsidized to do the wrong thing.

Blazer: So what you've described is what I would call a 'popular' definition of organic. But there is actually an official USDA organic standard, and I would like for you to talk about that – the history of that, where it came from, how it evolved, and how you would compare that standard when it started some 20 years ago with today.

Cummins: Basically, like I said before, for most of human history foods were grown naturally and organically. But then with the advent of the chemical farming era, more and more chemicals began being used and animal drugs and so on and so forth. Traditional farmers were appalled at this, and they started talking about how they had to distinguish themselves or differentiate themselves from this industrial agriculture and corporate agribusiness.



The term ‘organic’ was coined in the 1930’s, and this started catching on. At first, organic farmers and ranchers knew exactly what organic meant – you don’t use chemical fertilizers, you don’t use the pesticides, you raise the animals outside, you don’t drug up the animals, and so on. It was like a trust situation between farmers and consumers.

As the organic sector grew, it became clear that there were a lot of people who were using chemicals and pretending to be organic. So organic farmers started banding together. They set up nonprofit organizations in the early 1970’s, and they started writing up the rules. The first one was California Certified Organic Farmers, but other farmers in other states did the same. So they basically drew up the official rules of what constituted organic and what didn’t, and they began organizing to police people claiming to be organic who weren’t.

Twelve states responded to lobbying by organic farmers and consumers to actually set up systems so that it was the law to obey these state organic standards that the community had set up. So this is the way that most organic food was certified right up until the year 2002.

What happened was back in 1990, some people had the brilliant idea of, “We can grow the organic sector for much faster if we had Federal standards that were Federal law and strictly enforced.” So in 1990 Congress passed the Organic Food Production Act which basically said that there should be national organic standards that are uniform across all of the states, and that there should be Federal legislation delineating these standards, and that it would be a crime to violate these standards or to call your food organic when it wasn’t.



It took 12 years – between 1990 until 2002 – to actually get final Federal standards in place. These standards were not that different than the standards that different states and nonprofit certification and organic certification agencies had been using over the years, but it did make it a Federal law. Before organic standards became law in 2002, the government put out proposed rules in the Federal register on what they should be.

At the end of 1997, when they put out these proposed standards for organic, there was a tremendous uprising because the government, the USDA, at the behest of Monsanto and corporate agribusiness, was trying to say, “It will be okay in organic to use genetic engineering. It will be okay in organic to use toxic sewage sludge as fertilizer. It will be okay in organic to use nuclear waste to irradiate the food. All of these things are okay.”

The government was very surprised at the scale and the strength of the opposition that rose up. I was very active in that SOS (Save Organic Standards) campaign that gave rise to the Organic Consumers Association.

There was so much pressure in the first five months of 1998 by consumers and by organic farmers and by people who were just outraged that the government backed down. The USDA backed down. The big corporations started to understand that if you rammed terrible organic standards down the throats of consumers – because it was already a sizeable market of a few billion dollars a year – it’s going to harm your bottom line and your interest, and it is going to discredit big food corporations. It will discredit both Democrats and Republicans who support this, it makes the USDA look bad, and so on.



The bottom line is that in May of 1998 the government capitulated and said that they weren't going to use GMOs, sewage sludge, or radiation, and they realized that they needed to have some organic standards that were going to be fairly strict. Otherwise, they were going to just have a constant problem on their hands.

2002 came along, and the Federal government implemented standards which on the surface looked pretty good, and the organic sector started growing more and more. That caused a lot of big supermarkets to start selling organic. Amazingly, Walmart became the biggest seller of organic food over time in the United States (I believe it is Costco currently).

A lot of big companies jumped into the act – General Mills and Campbell's and Dannon yogurt and Cargill and Perdue and Hormel. Big companies started buying up organic brands and making sure that part of what they were selling was organic.

But over time what happened was that corporate agribusiness got stronger in the Organic Trade Association and then the organic industry, and they basically prevailed on the government to let them cut corners, break the rules, and so on. So you had developing even as long as a dozen years ago these factory farms milking thousands of cows three times a day – they weren't even going out to pasture – and they were calling themselves 'organic'. You had these giant concentrated chicken operations with hundreds of thousands of chickens producing most of the eggs that had the 'organic' label.

Granted, these animals – were the most part – were being fed organic feed. In some way, there was symbolic access to the outdoors and so on and so forth, but basically they were gaming the system.



The other thing that started happening was that as these big companies like WhiteWave and Dean Foods got into organics, they started importing cheap organic ingredients from overseas, from places like China. Often these ingredients or these products were not really organic, but the corruption in the system in those countries allowed them to say that they were. Then the corruption in this country allowed them to come in.

Over the last five or six years, the whole controversy around, “Can you trust organic?” has become a bigger and bigger issue. There have been exposes in the mass media and in the alternative media and so on.

When people ask me today, “Can you really trust USDA organic?” my answer is, “Yes, for most things you can still trust the label. For fruits, vegetables, and whole foods, typically if they are organic and produced in the USA, they really are organic.”

But when it comes to beef, what we encourage people to do is to find 100% grass-fed beef, which is better than organic standards. If you can find something certified by someone like the American Grassfed Association, you can trust that it is true.

What more and more consumers have done is they are starting to buy locally. Of course, buying local and organic or regional and organic is the best way to go. By buying locally, people are getting to actually meet the farmers and ranchers who produce their food and are often tending these farms. You can typically trust local organic farmers who are open and transparent with their customers.



So, yes, you can still trust organic, but consumers need to be more vigilant and do their homework. We have to realize that the government – both the Democrats and the Republicans have been guilty of this – are heavily under the influence of corporate agribusiness, chemical companies, pharmaceutical companies, big international grain trading companies like Cargill, and they don't really have the interest of the small, organic farmer or the organic consumer in mind.

The other thing is that as we develop these standards over the years, back in 1990 to 2002, most of us didn't know that much about the climate crisis. We didn't understand that agriculture was a major contributor to greenhouse gases. So the standards that were set up, if we were doing this all over again, for sure for organic beef or lamb to be called organic, it would have to be 100% grass-fed. We didn't know back then that the traditional way of raising herbivores, where their diet was 100% grass with no grain, was much better for the animal, healthier as food, and much better for the environment.

We also didn't understand that paying lip service in organic to healthy soil is one thing, but you really have to stay focused on the soil. You can't just grow the same organic crop every year in a monoculture fashion with a giant farm of organic lettuce. Yes, you can buy organic lettuce out there – Earthbound lettuce, for example, is the biggest organic company (largest grower of organic produce) – but if you do a nutritional analysis on that lettuce, it's got less pesticide residues than the chemical lettuce out there on the market, but it's barely more nutritious.



In other words, things like crop rotation and keeping the land covered at all times, avoiding tillage or heaving plowing, adding compost to the land, and growing an diversity of crops on the same farm, combining animals and food crops instead of hauling in compost from a factory farm to grow ‘organic’ vegetables – all these things that we know now that we call ‘regenerative’ which we call ‘the next stage of organic – we didn’t really know then.

If we had a decent government that was responsive to the people, that was really looking at public health and the climate and so on, obviously they would change organic standards to make them more climate-friendly and in line with what we know now. But we don’t have such a government, and we may get a government like that in the future, but we certainly don’t have one now. So we are having to take things into our own hands as consumers and as organic farmers.

One of the things that we have done in the last couple of years is we have developed higher standards for organic – things like the ‘Regenerative Organic’ certification and the project called ‘the Real Organic Project’. Basically what is happening now is that farms and ranches are starting to get certified to these higher standards, and when they are in the marketplace they will have not only the USDA organic label, but they will have a second label as well, just like you have probably seen organic coffee that has a Fair Trade certification label on it as well. More and more foods are going to have a ‘Regenerative’ label as well.

Again, like I said before, consumers have to do a little more homework than we wish they had to do, but you can still find more and more organic food that is produced locally in all 50 states.



There are 179 countries now around the world where people are growing organic food and certifying and so on.

It doesn't need to be certified, by the way. If an organic farmer is selling into the local market, like the farm that I managed down in Mexico, and you're not putting your products out wholesale on the national market, it's important that you are truthful and that you are organic, but we tell farmers that you don't have to go to the extra expense and work of getting certified organic if you are selling locally and you really are organic.

What you have around the world developing are a bunch of community-controlled organic certification systems or producer-guider systems (PGA systems). These are committees, just like we have in north central Mexico and all across Mexico, where farmers and consumers and retailers get together and basically develop organic rules, develop procedures for checking on farmers, and developing rules for how you discipline people who are going to lie about this. This works really well.

There are 750 million farmers in the world, and only 2.5 million of them are certified organic under national organic certification systems. But really there are probably 50 to 100 million farmers and ranchers around the world who are producing in an organic manner and supplying high quality food to their families, their communities, and their regions. We don't care whether people are certified or not; we just want them to go organic and to go even beyond organic to regenerative.



If we do that and we link up with all of the other movements across the world – the climate movement, the environmental movement, the social justice movement, the movement to protect forests, the movement to protect the oceans, the groups trying to stop forced migration, and the peace groups – what we will see is that food and farming, which is the biggest industry in the whole world, bigger even than the Military-Industrial Complex, is key. It is key to all of our issues.

For example, I work a lot now in Mexico and Central America on the issue of migration. We say from forced migration to regeneration, when you look at the people who are forced migrants, who are by the millions leaving Africa and leaving certain countries in Asia, and leaving countries in Latin America and Central America, and moving north, why are these people moving? Most of them don't wake up one day and say, "Oh, I think I'll reject my family and my home and everything I've ever known and go to a foreign country where I don't even speak the language and where I'm going to be treated as a second class citizen and get on welfare." That's not what is going on.

What is going on is that people are being forced to leave their areas by: Number one, Poverty, and number two, violence and drug gangs and the fake drug war and idiotic foreign policy by the US and Europe where we go into a country like Libya where we don't like the dictator Gaddafi, and we say, "We are going to overthrow him." Then we proceed to overthrow the dictator, and then we get someone even worse.

We've done that in Iraq and Syria and Afghanistan and all over the globe, and it is a total disaster. People have no choice, and in many cases they are migrating.



So what is the solution to migration? Should we just open the borders and say, “We’ll take a couple of hundred million more people. Anyone who wants to come, come on!”

The ethical thing to do is: If people are seeking asylum whose lives are in danger, who really do need to escape, yes. Everyone deserves asylum. But we don’t want to have a condition to where people have to leave their homeland.

Down in Mexico and Central America where I’ve worked on and off for the last 40 years, the terrible thing about forced migration is that it drains the country of a lot of the most creative and adventurous young people. These people have left, and they have gone to the big cities or the US or Canada, and they left their communities without the kind of leadership that they would have had.

If you asked migrants in the US, “Would you like to be able to go home?” the overwhelming majority of them would say, “Yes!”

If you ask most young people and adults who are still in their home countries, “Would you like to be able to stay in your community? Maybe you can go visit the US or you can go visit Europe on a tourist visa,” but people are leaving because of poverty, violence, and war.

If we want to solve the immigration crisis, we’re not going to do it building a multi-billion dollar wall. That is for sure. The only way to solve it is to work together as a global community to create prosperity in rural areas and all areas. That’s a position where it would be pretty hard to find someone who doesn’t agree with that –



whether they voted for Trump or Hillary or someone like me who voted for the Green Party or someone who didn't vote at all. We all agree that if migrants in the US would like to go home, and if migrants thinking of moving up here – whether it's legal or not – would rather not, let's deal with that. Dealing with that is really dealing with agriculture. That is the fundamental issue. It's dealing with the drug war, and dealing with the violence.

It is so ridiculous at this point that we have a movement in the United States for drug legalization that is not working real closely with the migrant justice movement. We have a drug legalization movement and a migrant justice movement that aren't really working with the international organic movement and the climate movement. It's like all of our issues are interconnected. We have a crisis of the system. We literally have the advent of what can only be called '21st century fascism' in this country, and it's starting to develop in Europe as well.

A major driving force in this fascist movement is the pressure of millions of people migrating from their home countries up north. It's racism as well, but it is a function of not having a global perspective in hand and of having idiotic foreign policy like regime change and the war on drugs that don't accomplish anything other than make things worse.

We are the Organic Consumers Association, but we also try to work with groups across the activist rainbow. We try to connect the dots between all of the issues, and we finally have to get back to where we were in the late 1960's and early 1970's where we had a global youth movement movement who knew that we had to work on a global scale.



We knew back in the late 1960's that the Russian people were not our enemy. The Chinese people are not our enemy. The Iranian people are not our enemy. The young people we met from those countries knew that American people were not their enemy. The German people are not our enemy. It's the governments and the transnational corporations that keep us divided.

We need to talk about that. I mean, you can't be a food activist and sit back and say, "Oh, yeah. The US just passed a \$700 billion military budget," and think that that doesn't matter. I mean, we are scrambling for nickels and dimes to help small farmers and ranchers go organic. Meanwhile, billions and trillions of dollars are wasted on war and armaments, and the Democrats – because every single Congressional district in the United States has a Military-Industrial component to their economy that creates lots of jobs and so on and so forth – are all complicit in that. They are all complicit when we come down to regime change. Typically there are very few people in Congress who stand up and speak up against these wars.

It has got to change. We all have to be peace activists, and we all need to be food and climate activists as well or we aren't going to get to where we want to go.

Blazer: You're my kind of guy. I just had to ask one question, and you took care of a lot of the other questions that I was going to ask you.

I want to clarify this point. Please tell me if I'm correct. If I'm a consumer, I get a USDA certified organic product. It's not going to be grown from a GMO seed, correct?



Cummins: Right.

Blazer: It's not going to have been irradiated, correct?

Cummins: Right.

Blazer: It won't have been grown using sludge like sewage sludge. Is that correct?

Cummins: Yes.

Blazer: It will not have been grown using synthetic fertilizers or pesticides. Is that correct?

Cummins: That is right, and the animals would not have received drugs, antibiotics, or steroids or hormones to make them grow faster. Also, the animals are – in theory – supposed to have free access to the outdoors and be able to practice their natural behavior.

Blazer: And also the animals will not have been fed GMOs.

Cummins: That's right.

Blazer: But the products are grown with chemicals, but these are chemicals – and there is quite a list of them – that have been approved under the organic standards. Is this correct?



Cummins: Yes. There are naturally-occurring substances that are allowed in organic, and then there are about 100 synthetic ingredients that have to be looked at one by one that are allowed to be used in ‘organic’ if they can be shown to be relatively benign, and if there is no commercially-available natural or organic alternative on the market.

This system worked pretty well from 2002 until a few years ago, but then the big corporations got involved in this so-called ‘national list’ and they have made it much easier to add new synthetic substances to the approved list. They’ve also made it more difficult for the National Organic Standards Board that is supposed to be representing the organic community, not just the industry, to take things off of the list.

Again, a lot of us are really frustrated. Would it be the same if Bernie Sanders were in the White House today and both houses of Congress were controlled by Democrats where a certain percentage of the Democrats were actually pretty radical? I think that we would be going in the right direction, but we are not. We don’t have that situation.

We don’t want to tell consumers that organic doesn’t matter anymore, and for them to, “Go ahead and buy factory farm stuff and cheap food and eat at fast food restaurants,” because that is not true, and it’s not good for you and it’s not good for the planet. But we do need to get out the point to get out there and try to find local producers for your organic food. Get to know the farmers. Get to know the producers.

It actually makes a hell of a lot of difference whether you buy your food in a consumer food co-op, which is where I’ve always shopped since the late 1960’s for my food if I’m in a city.



It makes a lot of difference if you are shopping at a food co-op or an organic farmers market than if you are asking someone at Walmart or Costco, “Is this really organic?” or, “Where does this come from? It says ‘organic’ on the label, but is this from China, or is it USA made?”

Where you buy your food, whether or not you can actually talk to producers, we’ve all got access to the internet nowadays. Frankly, it’s not overwhelmingly difficult to find true organic or even regenerative foods if you do your homework. I know it’s easier said than done.

Blazer: If we want to talk about some failings of the organic movement, they’ve lost the focus on soil health. Would you agree with that?

Cummins: Yes. Some are getting it back. It was in the law, but it wasn’t being enforced that you have to improve the soil on a continuous basis every year. That’s what the standards say, but if you ask an organic certifier, are you really checking soil samples to see if a farmer has more soil organic matter in the soil this year than they had last year? Are you checking the food with a Brix meter for nutrition and so on? No.

The spirit of the law needs to be put into practice.

Blazer: Tell me if I’m correct: Another failing would be that we’ve moved away from treating animals as humanely as was originally intended. Would you agree with that?



Cummins: Yes. If you look at reports by the Cornucopia Institute, for example, what you will find is that most organic dairies are doing things the right way. Most organic poultry and egg producers or broiler people are doing things the right way. People raising sheep and goats and so on – that is the number of farmers who are organic.

The problem is that the big players, for example in the poultry sector, that does big operations that produce big USDA-labeled organic eggs, there are not organic; these are organic in name only. It's the same thing for the largest organic milk producers, with the exception of Organic Valley. People like Aurora who supply Walmart and Costco and the big supermarket stores, and a lot of Horizon organic milk is organic in name only. These are factory farms that feed the animals organic grain.

We had a tremendous scandal a couple of years ago about fake organic grains being imported into the US, especially soybeans, which were the feed for these giant factory farm organic operations. There was such an uproar in that that this year, in 2018 so far, there has been a lot less importing of foreign organic soybeans and a lot less fraud. But there is no guarantee that this situation won't continue.

We need to produce as much organic food locally and regionally as we can. If you can't find something locally or regionally, the next priority is at least USA-made.

Blazer: Let me also say that perhaps another failing was that the original intention was to have a robust group of smaller farmers who really cared about what they were doing instead of an industry that became more and more factory farms and very large monoculture farms and so on. Would you agree that that has been a bit of a failing?



Cummins: I mean, I'm glad. When I first started doing organic organizing back in 1992, the entire market for certified organic in the US was \$1 billion. Today certified organic is \$50 billion in the US. It's grown 50-fold, and then there is a heck of a lot of grass-fed food that is actually organic but isn't certified. So we have grown the alternative food system and farming system considerably. Unfortunately, just like every sector of the economy in the United States, big corporations rule. We have to get these big corporations and cut them down to size and get consumers to stop buying their products and put your money where the people deserve it.

Blazer: But isn't it true, Ronnie, that these large corporations control over 95% of the organic production in this country now?

Cummins: No, it's not that high. Some of the companies have bought out brands that are actually still doing things the same way, like General Mills for example. I wish Annie's had stayed independent, but they were bought out by General Mills. General Mills has been smart enough to let them continue to operate more or less in the same fashion that they did before.

Just because a big company owns an organic brand doesn't necessarily mean that they change. I don't like to buy Honest Tea anymore because it has been purchased by Coca-Cola, but Honest Tea's tea is still grown the same way that it used to be.

Blazer: I believe that it's at least 90% of the grocery items that you would find.



Cummins: Grocery items, yes. The processed foods and so on and so forth are under the control of the big brand.

There is a chart called ‘Who Owns Organic’ by the Cornucopia Institute. They have the chart up on their website, and it’s pretty alarming to look at that.

When I’m in the US, I live part of the time in the Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota area, and part of the time way north up here in Finland, Minnesota. I do all of my food shopping that I don’t grow myself or that I don’t buy at the organic farmers market, I buy at the co-ops. I don’t have to buy hardly any corporate organic because instead of Horizon milk they have available Super Kalona, which is from Amish farmers in Iowa who are not only organic, but are grass-fed.

Again, you have to do your homework. Look beyond the brand. Look at who owns it. Look on the internet. We’ve got to keep the pressure up.

An even bigger problem than degrading organic standards is the confusion among consumers in the United States that ‘natural’ means the same thing as ‘organic’. The majority of consumers actually believe that ‘all natural’ means better than ‘organic’.

When you look out in the marketplace, the majority of meat and animal products – meat, dairy, and poultry – are marketed as ‘natural’ and as ‘hormone-free’ or ‘antibiotic-free’ or whatever. They market it as nutritious and healthy, and consumers are continuing to buy massive amounts. Organic is only 5-7% of the market. It’s more in the produce market, with 15-16% of the fruits and vegetables.



The problem is that we let corporations lie on their labels in their marketing, and consumers who are stressed economically, if they see an organic product and right next to it is a product that says ‘all natural’ with a pretty barn on the label and it’s \$2 cheaper, we have to educate consumers better. We have to teach them that there is a difference, and we have to educate them to purchase them, but there are other major factors like people who have got to stop eating out at restaurants so much, and get back to eating at home and learning how to cook.

If you cook from scratch and you eat healthy, organic foods are actually cheaper than the junk foods that people are wolfing down every day. Again, I know it is easier said than done. If you don’t know how to cook and you don’t feel comfortable in the kitchen, you have to try.

The one nice thing about the internet nowadays is if you want to know how to cook something, you can just look it up on the internet. It will tell you exactly what to do. But don’t just keep passing up that kale and the chard in the grocery store that is organic or at the farmers market just because you don’t know how to cook it. If you learn how to cook it, you will have really good food, you will have really good health, and you will actually spend less money.

If you go out and buy a bunch of processed ‘organic’ foods at Whole Foods or Trader Joe’s, you are going to spend a fortune.



Blazer: In the time we have left, I would like to cover just a couple more things. Going back to labeling, ‘all natural’ basically is a meaningless term to me, but it supposedly refers to ‘minimally processed’ which can mean lots of things. Also, ‘grass-fed’ by itself can be played with a lot. It has to be 100% grass-fed, and also ‘grass finished’.

People are using this term ‘grass-fed’ if the animal is on pasture a certain amount of time, and then it may be fed GMO grains another part of the time. So I always ask, “In your grass-fed beef, is it 100% grass-fed, and is it grass finished? In the winter time, what do you feed it?”

If they feed it corn silage with hay, then likely they are being fed GMOs. So you have to be very careful, even about that.

Cummins: It’s got to be 100% grass-fed. Again, when you have aware consumers and you have a block of producers like Minneapolis-St. Paul, we have 120 restaurants right now in Minneapolis-St. Paul where you can get 100% grass-fed beef. It’s on the menu. You can ask the waiters, “Where does this come from?”

They will answer, “Oh, this is ‘Thousand Hills,’” or, “This is from this producer.” But why is it like this in Minneapolis-St. Paul? It’s because we’ve got the biggest network of retail cooperatives – organic and natural food cooperatives – in the country, we have a very active, vocal movement, and we have a lot of organic farmers in the upper Midwest, and we’ve got a consciousness.



The reason why you want to eat 100% grass-fed beef if you are a carnivore is because it's good for you. Factory farm beef is not good for you. You should stop eating it 100%.

Blazer: It's also good for the earth, and it's an amazing machine; it turns grass into meat.

I want to stress this point, too, that I always ask these people who say, "It's 100% grass-fed, and the cattle are being raised in the north," I say, "What do you feed it during the winter?"

Cummins: And why aren't you certified by the American Grassfed Association like 1,000 other ranchers across the country? It's not that difficult to get certified if you really are grass-fed. That is what we are telling people.

Blazer: What does the American Grassfed Association say that you have to feed the animals during the winter?

Cummins: It has to be 100% grass. All you can feed them in the winter is forage or hay that you've cut and that is grass. You cannot feed them any grains because any grains leaves it wide open, and the end product is not good. There have been studies that show that just feeding animals all grass the last five days of their life drastically reduces the amount of E. coli 0157 h, a virulent pathogen. It makes herbivores sick to feed them grain, and that's all there is to it.

Stop eating meat and dairy products from cows that are not grass-fed. We are lucky in the Midwest because I go to the co-op, and I buy raw milk in an underground distribution system off of 100% grass-fed dairy.



In between times or if I'm in the city, I can go into a co-op and I can find not only organic milk, but Grassmilk (which is what Organic Valley calls their 100% grass-fed dairy) or other brands like Maple Hill or Super Kalona and so on.

We need to move USDA organic standards for beef and dairy. They are not good enough. But there are standards like American Grassfed Association that are good. We have to start doing that.

Again, if you are buying from a farmer locally that you know – like I know the guy up the highway 61 who has the dairy that produces the raw milk. I have visited his farm, and I know him. This place has been grass-fed for 100 years and several generations. The dairy industry tried to close this guy down for many years because he sells higher quality raw milk.

Pasteurized milk is basically not good for you. Pasteurized and homogenized milk, even if it's organic, or ultra-pasteurized is not that good for you. That is why if you are lucky enough to live in a state like Maine or California or some of the other states where you can buy raw milk and dairy legally, by all means do so. If you are in a state where they call you a criminal because you don't want pasteurized milk, then you have to work for it.

We have bills in the Congress, and we are trying to change some of this, but it's a huge industry. The dairy lobby is huge. Organic Valley has not been good on the raw milk issue; they won't let their farmers in their co-op sell raw milk, even though they will all tell you, "I drink the raw milk from my cows, but the government would come down on us and crash the billion-dollar cooperative if we took a strong stand on raw milk."



I can partly understand that, but I don't understand pretending that you don't know that raw milk is far superior to pasteurized milk, and homogenization is a nightmare. No milk should be homogenized.

Basically people are eating too much beef and animal products in general. If you read a newsletter like *Mercola*, you will see that even if you are eating the healthiest grass-fed meat and dairy, eat it in moderation. Our diet should be mainly plants and mainly food cooked from scratch, and with a certain amount of protein, of course. Don't overdo it. It would be better for your health, the environment, and so on.

Blazer: We have just a couple of minutes left. Let me ask this very important question. I was at a conference where I asked this of a lady who is quite well-known who is on the organic standards board. I said, "So we know that to be organic certified you can't be using GMO seed, you can't be feeding the animals GMO, and you can't be using glyphosate on your crops, and you can't be using it as a desiccant post-harvest. What is the standard for how much GMO and how much glyphosate is allowed in a product that is on the shelf that claims to be organic?"

Cummins: What you are supposed to do is, let's say that you are an organic certified farmer. If you think that there is a possible problem with GMO residues or herbicide residues or pesticide residues on a farm because there is a GMO farmer next door, for example, or for any other reason, you are supposed to require testing of that product.

The problem with the way that our system of certification is set up is that the certifiers in our country —



– unlike in certain European countries where they are paid by the government or by the industry to be certifiers so that there is a third party objective – you have to tell your customer, “You know what, I’m afraid that you might have some residues. I’m going to make you test that.”

What is your customer going to do? They are going to switch to another certifier. So we have an inherent problem with certifiers wanting to do a good job, and yet if you do too good of a job, you might lose your livelihood.

So we have regulations that are supposed to call for lab testing, but it’s very infrequent that a certifier forces a farmer or a rancher to submit the lab tests. They should do it, but they are not doing it. It’s because their livelihood depends on getting paid by the people who they are certifying.

Blazer: Which brings me to this non-GMO label – this organization that is more and more prolific – which is also appearing even on organic products which are supposed to be non-GMO.

I think that they even allow a certain percentage of GMO, like 0.9% and on some products even up to 3% of GMO residue in the products that they are certifying as non-GMO.

Cummins: There is a level of inadvertent contamination going on out there. The European Union allows 0.9 of 1% if you can show that you weren’t deliberately contaminating the non-GMO product.



The Non-GMO Project tried to get me on the board when they first started. They originally said, “We are going to make people who claim to be natural or all natural test and make sure that they are non-GMO, and we are going to root out inadvertent GMO contamination in the organic supply line.”

That sounded pretty good, but in practice what they turned out to be was a greenwashing service for companies that aren’t organic. They created a situation where the label is so popular that even certified organic companies put both the organic and non-GMO labels on their products.

We have tried to tell companies, “Don’t do that because you confuse people.”

Now if you do a poll, a lot of consumers think that non-GMO means that it’s organic or that it’s just as good as organic. If you do residue testing on many non-GMO certified products, you will find a lot of pesticides.

I do not buy a product that says non-GMO unless it is also organic. The non-GMO label is now a \$35 billion industry, and it’s everywhere. What we have to point out to consumers is that USDA organic is better in most instances than non-GMO, but there is even a new more advanced stage of organic that you need to be looking for, and those are things like biodynamic certified organic, Demeter, and things like 100% American Grassfed Association, and pay attention to local and regional. Get to know your farmer and do your homework.



Labels are only useful to a certain extent, and we've got to turn that around.

Blazer: One of the best places to get your education is at the Organic Consumers Association website. It's www.OrganicConsumers.org.

Ronnie Cummins is an exceptional person. He has been working very hard to help people understand more about their food, the integrity of their food, and helping to keep organic standards real. He is the International Director and Founder of the Organic Consumers Association, and it is a very, very rich website.

I want to ask one thing. There is a link on your website, www.OrganicConsumers.org/organlink. I don't know where that is on the menu, but that is a very, very rich section of your website. How do I get to that from your heading? Is that under 'Topics' or 'Campaigns' or 'Projects'?

Cummins: It may be under 'Topics', and scroll down to 'All about Organics'.

Also scroll through all of the campaigns, and look at the description of those. There are several hundred thousand articles archived on the site over the last 20 years, and it's hard to make them all visible in the same way. You can look at the Daily Newsfeeds. Those are under the 'Campaigns' sections.

If you are interested in the regenerative organic, the next stage of organic, right on our home page there is an international organization that we helped found called Regeneration International. You can go to that site as well.



Blazer: Ronnie, thank you so much for spending time with us. I really appreciate your efforts. I will continue to support you. I urge the Solari subscribers to do the same. You have created a wonderful resource for us at www.OrganicConsumers.org.

Thank you so much.

MODIFICATION

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