

Green Mission News

October 2013 Green Mission News

What's in the News...

Opinion: 'Chemical brain drain' endangers generations of children

“Centuries ago, citizens of the Roman Empire and Japan's Samurai regime suffered severe lead poisoning. The brains of their children were seriously damaged, and some scholars say this could have contributed to the downfall of these mighty empires...” ([article](#))



It's Time to Stand Up With Family Farmers

“There are good folks in Congress who are fighting for a family farm food system that benefits family farmers and all Americans. But they're blocked by a majority that lets corporate power, partisan politics and big money get in the way of progress.” ([article](#))

External Article Links:

- It's Time to Stand Up With Family Farmers

by [Willie Nelson](#) (with 6 minute video)

www.commondreams.org/view/2013/09/23-0

- Crop pests and pathogens move polewards in a warming world

<http://www.nature.com/nclimate/journal/vaop/ncurrent/full/nclimate1990.html>

- Environmental Hazards of Plastic-Coated Paper Products in Compost

http://ecocycle.org/files/pdfs/microplastics_in_compost_summary.pdf

- APR Issues Updated Guidelines for Product Designers

www.plasticsrecycling.org/images/stories/doc/dfr-2012-september.pdf

- 'Fort McMurray is a wasteland': Neil Young slams oil patch, Keystone plans

www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/fort-mcmurray-is-a-wasteland-neil-young-slams-oil-patch-keystone-plans/article14214514/

- When recycling equates with quality raw materials (Youris.com)

[http://www.youris.com/Environment/Recycling/When Recycling Equates With Quality Raw Material s.kl#axzz2gcWbhVzx](http://www.youris.com/Environment/Recycling/When_Recycling_Equates_With_Quality_Raw_Materials.kl#axzz2gcWbhVzx)

Twenty five years ago, the German chemist Michael Braungart developed a new approach to recycling, now called "Cradle to Cradle" or "C2C" after the book, Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things, which he and the American architect William ...

- Zero waste is not zero waste emissions (3BL Media press release)

<http://3blmedia.com/News/CSR/Zero-waste-not-zero-waste-emissions>
<http://3blmedia.com/News/CSR/Zero-waste-not-zero-waste-emissions>

Second, it's going to take a while to get to zero waste. Waste reduction and diversion programs are still largely in a development and implementation phase in most parts of the U.S. They will require extensive education and behavioral changes at a mass ...

- Learning to make a difference. (The Natural Step)

<http://www.naturalstep.ca/learning-to-make-a-difference>

We're all about making a difference for the better. Environmentally, socially, personally. Whatever you want to do, your impact will be greater if you're informed, ...

- Can Public Health Unite the Good Food Movement? (Huffington Post)

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-r-dimock/food-movement-public-health_b_3896310.html?utm_hp_ref=green&ir=Green

Food Fight, Dan Imhoff's excellent book on the Farm Bill, reveals this history of crisis management. Born in the 1930s, the first Farm Bill was a response ...

- Bio-plastic polylactic acid: What's new? (Engineering Materials)

<http://www.materialsforengineering.co.uk/engineering-materials-features/bio-plastic-polylactic-acid-whats-new/56200/>

The corn derived bio-plastic polylactic acid (PLA) has largely stood in the shadows of oil-derived plastics since its discovery some eighty years ago.

- Opinion: 'Chemical brain drain' endangers generations of children

www.environmentalhealthnews.org/ehs/news/2013/opinion-chemical-brain-drain

- Zero Waste: Beyond Reusing and Recycling - Yahoo Voices

<http://voices.yahoo.com/zero-waste-beyond-reusing-recycling-12303708.html>

Zero waste is a philosophy in which no product ends up in a landfill or an incinerator. It goes beyond recycling to target the problem at its source: the designers ...

- Burning Question: Is it OK to Heat Food in Plastic?

The following link to an article in the Wall Street Journal is the type of information that concerns a lot of our consumers. I know this is referring to rigid containers but I think

people that are familiar with this type of information will want to know about our plastic packaging that is meant to be heated.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324493704578433290465517564.html>

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Full Length Article Below:

- Your exfoliating cream is destroying the environment
- Resource resilient UK
- The USDA's Reckless Plan
- Food and National Security: The Shuanghui-Smithfield Merger Revisited

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Tuesday, Sep 3, 2013 05:20 AM PDT

by [Susan Freinkel](#)

Your exfoliating cream is destroying the environment

Microbeads, found in many cosmetics, are the latest addition to the marine plastics problem

In the summer of 2012, when they set out to measure levels of plastic pollution in the Great Lakes, a team of researchers expected to find lots of bottles, six-pack rings, and plastic bags. They expected, too, to discover plenty of microplastics: those minuscule pieces of free-floating plastic that typically result from the degradation of much larger pieces.

But these researchers were unprepared for just how much micro-size trash they would discover. Some of the samples they collected from Lakes Huron, Superior, and Erie indicated the presence of as many as 450,000 bits per square kilometer—twice as many as had ever been recorded. And the scientists were mystified by the form that so many of these microplastics took: multicolored, perfectly spherical balls a fraction of a millimeter in diameter.

Further investigation solved the riddle. The tiny balls were plastic microbeads, of the kind found in many popular exfoliating facial scrubs. “It was like someone had taken an entire bottle of facial cleanser and poured it into our sample container,” says Sherri Mason, an environmental chemist at the State University of New York at Fredonia, who

conducted the study with scientists from the University of Wisconsin–Superior and the 5 Gyres Institute, a nonprofit research and advocacy group.

While microbeads may be less visible than plastic bags, they are no less environmentally problematic. For one thing, they “look just like fish eggs, and thus like food” to a variety of aquatic organisms, says Mason. All marine micro-plastics are troublesome, given their tendency to absorb and concentrate persistent organic pollutants that can potentially accumulate in the fatty tissues of anything that eats them. Moreover, when plankton, lugworms, mussels, or fish fill up on toxic junk food, they may well lose their appetite for healthier fare. Dutch scientists who fed mussels tiny nano-particles of polystyrene found that the shellfish subsequently ate less and grew less.

It’s bad enough that microbeads are contributing to our ongoing microplastics problem. But unlike most other microplastics, which result from plastic litter that has broken down over time, microbeads are actually designed to go down our drains and through our pipes. Once they do, they’re small enough to pass through the filters in wastewater-treatment systems—and right into lakes, rivers, and oceans.

Microbeads have been detected in more than 200 different consumer products; most fall under the category of facial cleansers, but the beads also make their way into soaps, sunscreens, even toothpaste. Manufacturers like them because they’re smoother than many natural exfoliants like salt, apricot pits, or walnut husks. And American consumers like them enough to buy cosmetics containing more than 573,000 pounds of them each year.

Now, however, a campaign is afoot to scrub out the scrubbers. Responding to pressure from groups like 5 Gyres, a number of cosmetics companies—including Unilever, Johnson & Johnson, Procter & Gamble, and the Body Shop—have pledged to remove microbeads from their products. Eventually. Unfortunately, they say, it will take a few years to find safe and effective natural alternatives. “We’re not happy that P&G is taking three and a half years to phase this stuff out,” says 5 Gyres spokesman Stiv Wilson, citing just one of the protracted timelines.

While he and others wait, the anti-microbead movement looks toward other consumer markets, including Asia. In the meantime, America: how about just using some soap and a washcloth?

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From: www.green-alliance.org.uk/grea_p.aspx?id=7179

Resource resilient UK

Resource security concerns have increased significantly over the past five years, reflecting risks affecting the availability and the price of materials essential to industry.

The root causes of resource insecurity lie substantially in environmental problems.

Water scarcity, rising extraction costs for fossil fuels and limitations on land availability increasingly constrain supply at a time when demand is growing. Greater visibility of globalised supply chains, alongside rising public concern about environmental damage, is compounding these pressures.

To mitigate resource constraints on business, the Circular Economy Task Force has identified how reuse, remanufacturing and secondary material supplies can address the root causes of resource insecurity. Secondary supplies have much lower exposure to environmental risks, but these resources are currently lost because products aren't designed for recovery and business sectors aren't incentivised to share common approaches. To address this problem, the Task Force proposes a new focus for the government's industrial strategy: it needs to de-risk collaboration, set agreed sector-wide goals for recovery and stimulate businesses to adopt new, resource efficient business models. In addition, government should consider intervening directly in design to make products and materials easier to recover.

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By [Jill Richardson](http://otherwords.org/usdas-reckless-plan/) <http://otherwords.org/usdas-reckless-plan/>

The USDA's Reckless Plan

The government intends to spread a failed pilot program that decreased food safety to every hog plant in the nation.

My friend Jim, a farmer, jokes about bringing a bowl of manure and a spoon to the farmers' markets where he sells his beef. "My beef has no manure in it, but you can add some," he'd like to tell his customers.

I'm sure you'd pass on manure as a condiment. But unless you're a vegetarian or you slaughter your own meat, you may have eaten it. And if the USDA moves forward with its plan to make a pilot program for meat inspection more widespread, this problem can only get worse.

Manure isn't supposed to wind up on your dinner table. It's a major risk factor for E. coli and other foodborne pathogens. And, when the animals are alive, meat and poop don't come in contact. It's only in the processing plant where the contamination can take place.

Since the days of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* — a 1906 novel that brought the abysmal conditions in slaughterhouses to light — some things haven't changed in the meatpacking industry. Companies increase profits by speeding up their operations. Once the animals enter, each worker performs one step in the process of turning the creatures into various cuts of meat, packaging them, and shipping them out. The faster this happens, the more animals the workers process, the more money the company

makes.

Unfortunately, the faster the workers go, the more mistakes they make. They work quickly, often with sharp knives or next to dangerous machines. One terrible mistake can result in a lost finger or limb. More often, workers suffer from injuries related to repeating the same motions, over and over. Severe tendinitis is common.

Breakneck line speeds can result in inadvertent animal cruelty as well. A dozen years ago, The Washington Post described the problems once in an article tellingly titled, They Die Piece by Piece.

As slaughterhouse workers do their best to fly through their work, one animal after another, their mistakes sometimes result in “fecal contamination.” In simple language, that means poop gets in the meat. This can happen when manure on an animal’s hide gets into the meat, or when the animal is gutted and the contents of its intestines make a mess.

USDA regulations and inspectors are supposed to prevent this problem. The government limits line speeds so that plants can’t push for more profits at the expense of worker and food safety. And it stations inspectors in slaughterhouses to make sure sick animals don’t become part of the food supply.

That might change. Under the pilot program used in five hog processing plants for over a decade, the government reduced the number of USDA inspectors. The companies hired some of its own inspectors to replace the USDA ones. And line speeds increased by 20 percent.

The result? The company’s own inspectors were more reluctant or slower to stop the lines when they spotted problems, The Washington Post observed in a new report. That means more poop in the meat. Three of the five plants using this system are among the top 10 worst in the nation for health and safety violations.

This lousy system results in increased profits for companies, decreased costs for the USDA (since it employs fewer inspectors), and less food safety for American consumers.

So what’s our government going to do about this?

Despite the poor track record, the small number of plants involved, and concerns expressed by inspectors and the government’s General Accountability Office, the USDA’s on the verge of expanding that same failed pilot program to every pork plant in the nation. It’s also scaling up a similarly flawed poultry inspection pilot program.

It doesn’t take a genius to figure out that this plan stinks. We have enough problems with foodborne illness already without making it worse.

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Published on Sunday, September 15, 2013 by [Think Forward blog/ IATP](#)

Food and National Security: The Shuanghui-Smithfield Merger Revisited

by [Shefali Sharma](#)

Last week, the U.S. treasury [approved the largest takeover by an international firm of a U.S. food company](#). It paved the way for China's largest pork processor, Shuanghui, to merge with Smithfield, the U.S.'s largest pork processor. The fact that it was a Chinese company stirred up so much controversy that the Senate Agriculture Committee held a hearing July 10 entitled, "[Smithfield and Beyond: Examining Foreign Purchases of American Food Companies.](#)" A major concern was foreign ownership of the U.S. food supply and whether the U.S. review process of foreign takeovers addresses food safety and "protection of American technologies." There was little doubt that this merger would be approved by Treasury's Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS): Shuanghui is willing to absorb over \$2 billion of Smithfield's debt; U.S. hog exports to China are expected to increase; and private equity firms on both sides of the Pacific will profit from a much stronger global hog processing company in two of the largest pork markets in the world (See IATP's blogs [Two Converging Rivers: Understanding Shuanghui's acquisition of Smithfield](#) and [Shuanghui acquires Smithfield: The view from China](#) and IATP's webinar [China, Smithfield and the Global Meat Industry](#))

This was a rare time when the U.S. Senate agriculture committee tackled the question of how developments in the food industry affect national security and whether this deal sets a bad precedent. Their analysis of course was limited to whether China would steal U.S. technology on pork genetics, feed and slaughtering, whether the deal would weaken U.S. food safety, result in job losses and hurt U.S. hog exporters. What the hearing could and should have addressed is how this deal will exacerbate the extreme corporate concentration of the U.S. (and global) meat industry, the resulting impact on hog farmers and rural communities, working conditions in processing plants and the continued offloading of environmental and public health costs generated by global companies like Smithfield and Shuanghui onto the American (and Chinese) public.

Rather than curbing corporate concentration, the House of Representatives has gone one step further in its version of the Farm Bill to limit USDA's authority to protect against unfair practices in the livestock and poultry sectors. A letter sent September 9 by over a 140 U.S. organizations (including IATP) to the Senate and House agriculture committees called for a rejection of such a provision in the House version of the 2013 Farm Bill. The [letter](#) states:

During the 2008 Farm Bill process, Congress heard extensively from livestock and poultry producers, farmer organizations, and consumer groups about anti competitive and unfair business practices that unfortunately have become commonplace in the livestock and poultry sectors of our agricultural economy. As a result, the final 2008

Farm Bill included provisions to require USDA to write regulations to address the most egregious of these practices and to define certain terms in the statute. Section 11102 of the House version of the 2013 Farm Bill would repeal the 2008 Farm Bill provision that addressed these concerns and place a broad limitation on USDA's authority to enforce many aspects of the Packers and Stockyards Act of 1921.

The critical issue here is the concentrated power of the livestock industry. And we are heading in the wrong direction. The Shuanghui-Smithfield deal fundamentally highlights the global nature of this industry and its trend towards further concentration. The CFIUS approval shows U.S. administration support for that trend as does the House version of the Farm Bill. Isn't the corporate takeover of the U.S. food supply a national security issue?

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Justice and the Department of Agriculture held [five public hearings](#) on the role of antitrust in U.S. agriculture—the livestock industry was a critical part of that discussion. Sadly, there was little follow up after the rigorous examination of the industry. Over [15,000 comments](#) were submitted by farmers, consumers, researchers, industry and elected officials.

The Global Development and Environment Institute (GDAE) submitted a paper titled, [Buyer Power in the U.S. Hog Markets: A Critical Review of the Literature](#). They found that the U.S. pork industry has gone through rapid concentration in just 25 years—with four packers controlling two-thirds of the market. Smithfield controlled 31 percent of that market, being the only buyer in the U.S. Southeast. The share of hogs sold in the open market dramatically dropped from 62 percent to just 8 percent in 15 years (1995-2010). This is the oppressive effect of the meatpacking industry on small and independent livestock producers. And it has left producers with little choice and little power, forcing low spot prices for hogs in the market (below the cost of production) and “unusually large variation in prices.”^[1] Trade union representatives of workers in meat packing plants also complain of the concentrated power of the food retail industry in further pushing down the supply chain and forcing poor worker conditions. According to GDAE, the top four U.S. food retailers went from 19 percent control of the market to nearly 60 percent in a period of 12 years (1997–2009). Farmers, workers and the public all lose in such a scenario. And it makes our food system beholden to corporate greed.

In a [letter](#) submitted to the U.S. Administration on the Smithfield deal, a group of organizations raised several objections about the Shuanghui-Smithfield merger. They also underlined problems with Smithfield:

While Smithfield's safety record is better than Shuanghui's, the company is not without blemishes. In 2013, Smithfield recalled 38,000 pounds of sausage over concerns that the products might contain plastic fragments. In 2012, Smithfield's packing plants in Poland recalled 13,600 pounds of meat products for microbial or labeling issues. In 2011, Smithfield recalled 216,000 pounds of flavored pork loins that may have contained unlabeled dairy ingredients that could pose an allergy risk to consumers.

There have been many complaints against the company for environmental issues as well, particularly in North Carolina, home of much of the company's production. The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition reports that 600 residents in Wake County,

North Carolina have filed complaints against Smithfield that the company's hog waste lagoons and manure applications are causing problems for them.[\[2\]](#)

China's farmers, consumers and environment are also confronting similar problems with commercial and specialized hog production (see IATP's [Feeding China's Pigs](#)). The critical issue here is not the nationality of the industrial livestock company, but its size, practices and market power. It's the ability of a few companies to change the entire system of producing livestock in a globalized world where people, the environment and public health come out as losing entities. Our government has a responsibility to rectify this injustice—reversing corporate concentration of this industry is the first step in that direction.

CDC Report on Antibiotic Resistance in the U.S. Should Be a "Wake-Up Call" on Factory Farms

Statement by Wenonah Hauter, executive director of Food & Water Watch

WASHINGTON - September 16 - "We welcome the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) recommendations regarding antibiotics in factory farms released today in its report. The link between sub-therapeutic use in food animals and antibiotic-resistance in humans is clear, and we must follow through on the Center's recommendations to stop the misuse of antibiotics in farm animals.

"Right now, 80 percent of the antibiotics used in the U.S. are used for industrial agriculture, and most of these drugs are routinely fed to animals to make them grow faster and compensate for filthy conditions. This is done to help the meat industry execute on its highly consolidated business model for profit. And the American public pays through antibiotic-resistant infections.

"This CDC report should be a wake-up call for our decision makers. For decades, the Food & Drug Administration has failed to regulate this industry's use of antibiotics. That's why Congress [must now pass legislation](#) (the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act in the House and the Prevention of Antibiotic Resistance Act in the Senate) that would stop the abuse of medically important antibiotics on factory farms."

For more information:

["Regulation of animal antibiotics needed,"](#) Food & Water Watch op-ed in Des Moines Register, September 15, 2013

Report: [Antibiotic Resistance 101: How Antibiotic Misuse on Factory Farms Can Make You Sick](#)